AFRICAN WOMEN AND RELIGIOUS CHANGE

A STUDY OF THE WESTERN IGBO OF NIGERIA

With a special focus on Asaba town

Victoria Oluomachukwu Ibewuike
Abstract


This study focuses on a small ethnic group in the western part of Igboland called Asaba. It describes how the religious and socio-political role of women has changed, due to colonialism, modernisation, Western education and Christianity, which were brought by the groups of Europeans and Americans, who penetrated Africa in the nineteenth century. One of the major points of the thesis is that the freeborn women in the traditional “dual-sex” society of the Igbo lost their previous power to speak for themselves when the Igbo were Christianised. However, the women of slave origin happily adopted the new, more egalitarian faith.

The dissertation is divided into three parts. The first part is the traditional aspect, which highlights the role of women in Igbo traditional society. The second is a theoretical and historical part. This part deals with the socio-economic and political changes, which took place between 1830 to 1910 in Asaba society, due to colonialism, modernisation, Western education and Christianity, and the impact of these forces of change on Asaba women. The third part deals with the role of women in the Catholic Church in Asaba. It analyses the various women's organisations in the Catholic Church in Asaba and the roles, which they play in the church.

The major conclusion arising from the present analysis is that with the coming of forces of change, such as colonialism, modernization, Western education and Christianity, the religious and socio-political roles of women changed in Asaba society.

Keywords: Asaba, women, traditional religion, Catholic Church, Africa

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To my parents
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## Abbreviations

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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Church Missionary Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMA</td>
<td>Society of African Missions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLA</td>
<td>Our Lady of Apostles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNC</td>
<td>Royal Niger Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YC</td>
<td>Yearly Contributions</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWO</td>
<td>Catholic Women's Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCCW</td>
<td>National Council of Catholic Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRS</td>
<td>Holy Rosary Sisters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHM</td>
<td>Immaculate Heart Congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDL</td>
<td>Daughters of Divine Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHCJ</td>
<td>Society of the Holy Child Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAI</td>
<td>National Archives Ibadan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCM</td>
<td>Roman Catholic Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADO</td>
<td>Assistant District Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLCN</td>
<td>The Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBCN</td>
<td>The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORDOC</td>
<td>Women Resource and Documentation Centre</td>
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Victoria Olumachukwu Ibewuike
Uppsala University January 2006.
Figure 1. Map of Africa showing the geographical location of Nigeria.
CHAPTER 1
Introduction

1.1 The main focus

This book is about African women and religious change. It focuses on the small ethnic group in the Western part of Igboland called Asaba. This group is part of the Igbo people, who occupy the eastern part of Nigeria, that is, the area that was formerly called Biafra. This area has had Christian churches for more than hundred years, and my aim is to show the changes that have been introduced by the Catholic Church in this area, particularly the changes affecting the women.

My interest in this study was motivated by several factors. First, in earlier studies of this kind, little has been written on Asaba women. Secondly, growing up in the countryside, I was part of the women groups in Asaba. I felt it would be important for me to document what I had heard and observed during my childhood and youth as a girl who grew up in Asaba, among the women concerning the roles they played in the traditional society as compared with those they now play in the Christian church in general and in the Catholic Church in Asaba in particular.

Thirdly, I was also motivated by what I saw among certain members of the younger female generation in Asaba, whom I had met. They seem to be ignorant about the role of women in traditional Asaba society. I felt that it is an urgent matter to document the importance and meaning of the rites and ceremonies performed by the women and also to analyse the changes, which have taken place as a result of colonialism, modernisation, Western education and Christianity. Many of these young women live modern lives in the cities, and find it natural to be “modern” and “Christian”, but in the rural areas, the tradition is still alive. There, the women have important functions, which the urban girls don’t know about. I hope to be able to make them aware of the traditional legacy of Igbo women.

Fourthly, as a researcher, I find it important to give academic attention to Asaba women's changing roles. I was also motivated by the idea that this research would add another dimension to feminist research.
My aim in this research is not only to present new data but also to look at the data that have been presented before from a new perspective, and to throw new light on the old data.

In this research I will examine problems such as how the religious and socio-political roles of Igbo women changed with the advent of colonialism, modernisation, Western education and Christianity in particular. I will concentrate on the changing roles of Igbo women in the Catholic Church, and show how this change corresponded to a change of women’s socio-political roles in the society outside the Church.

I argue that this change is one of diminishing the influence of the Igbo women, who were granted certain well-defined functions in the traditional society. That is to say that most of the freeborn women had important functions in the traditional society, and a certain amount of power, whereas the women of slave origin had no such power or important functions. These functions of the freeborn women did not only consist of informal power behind the male scene. The women had a say in economic, political and religious matters as well, and this was something guaranteed by customary law. However, when colonialism and mission introduced new ideas in such matters, the Igbo women lost some of this previous strength, in economic, political and religious matters as well.

In order to approach this problem I will first present the ethnographic data concerning Igbo women’s roles in traditional society. In this report I will partly rely on ethnographic sources from the early colonial period, and partly on my interviews with people in Asaba, who have provided information about their own, rural society today.

In the second part, I will describe how Christianity was introduced in the Igbo society. Also, I will describe how colonialism introduced new rules in the Igbo society. In this context I will particularly dwell on the new political organisation, and on the role of the warrant chiefs. I will also show how certain new economic rules clashed with the old rules, which resulted in the so-called Aba riots in 1929.

In the third part, I will particularly dwell on the religious development within the Catholic Church in Asaba. In doing so I will describe the Church organisation and the role that Igbo women play in the Church. I will show that the organised rural models in the Church were different from the religious organisation in traditional Igbo society, since the organisational models in the Church were imported from societies with a different ideology about women’s participation in social and religious life. This means that the Christian development did not imply a development of women’s influence.

The issue of the role of women in the process of development is currently receiving accelerated attention, particularly in the developing nations. “In the past, attention has been paid primarily to women in the modernised nations. Increasing since the late 1950s, through the efforts of the United Nations in conjunction with organised women’s groups all over the world, the spotlight
has focused on women’s changing roles in developing countries.”¹ This is true of Nigeria, as well as of Igboland, where the activities of women have been in a continuous succession of changes.

Throughout Nigeria, women as a force are asserting their rights more today by calling for the recognition of the importance of the roles they have played traditionally toward the moral, religious, social, economic and political development of the nation.

In the past, women played a significant role in the socio-political, religious and economic institutions in Nigeria. “It is noticeable that exploits performed by women are a preponderant feature in African legends and historical traditions.”² In the Bachama area of northern Nigeria, the town of Njmoso was always governed by a woman because of her role as responsible for the maintenance of the cult of the local tutelary deity.³

In the Chad, Hausa and Niger territories, women led migrations, founded cities and conquered kingdoms. During the first half of the fifteenth century, Queen Amina of Zaria was popular for her widespread conquests.⁴ “She extended her influence as far as the Nupe, built many cities, and received tribute from powerful chiefs.”⁵ She was a very powerful woman in the history of Hausaland.

At the Nupe court in Nigeria, the Fulani have retained the titles of Nimwoye and Sagi, which were former titles to the king’s mother, daughter, sister or paternal aunt. These women were between the ages of 40 to 50 years, and they played a very important role in the king’s council.⁶ Also, in a neighbouring kingdom in the southern part of Zaria, there was another woman known as Bazao-Turunku. She was the head of a group of warriors in the town during her period.⁷

In southern Nigeria, most especially among the Yoruba, women in commerce and agriculture have formed powerful organisations. An example of this kind of group was the Egbe Iyolode, and the leader of this group was called Iyalode of Ibadan. She was in charge of the market activities in the town.⁸ According to Lebeuf, “an Iyalode is often an important figure. The Iyalode of Ibadan, for instance, was a member of the Council of States down to 1914.”⁹ Among the Yoruba as well, there was a female heroine known as Moremi of Ile-Ife. She played a very significant role in the Yoruba kingdom, since she saved her people from the Igbo invasion. In remembrance of her, at the beginning of the dry season each year, people of Ile-Ife go in a seven-day

¹ Green 1980, 1.
² Lebeuf 1963, 94.
³ Ibid., 110.
⁴ Ibid., 95.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid., 105.
⁷ Ibid. 95
⁸ Lebeuf 1963, 113.
⁹ Ibid.
bash, a festival of songs, for Moremi.\textsuperscript{10} Also in Yorubaland, in the old Oyo Empire, women played important roles in the political organisation. Among these women were “the ladies of the palace,” as they were known, who helped the alafin (the king) in the smooth running of the government.\textsuperscript{11}

In the Edo area of Nigeria, associations like the Nimm of the Ekoii, or the Akejuju of the Bini, gave women some powers, which were in some ways greater than those of the men.\textsuperscript{12} Also among the Benin people, there was a female chief known as Emotan of Benin. She played an important role in the sustenance of the tradition of the Benin oba heirship. This today places her in a significant position in the crowning of each Benin king, for all chieftaincy processions are expected to pass by her grave and to pay homage to her spirit.\textsuperscript{13}

In Benue state, the Mala was one of the most significant persons among the Chamba of Donga. She was the paternal aunt, or daughter of the paternal aunt, or elder sister, of the Gara or king. She was in charge of all the women and her duties were the same as those of the Angwu Tsi of the Jukun.\textsuperscript{14} She had the same judicial functions as the king, and interceded with the king for those who had displeased him. “She also exercises important religious functions, being in charge of the strictly female cult, the Vonkima, while in addition, she takes part along with the king in ancestral cult.”\textsuperscript{15}

Apart from Nigeria, in other African countries such as Cameroon, Ghana, Congo and Sierra Leone, women were important figures in the political system. For instance, in the southern part of Cameroon, among the Bamileke, the mother of the Fong, the Mafo, was seen by the people to be equal to the chief. She took part in his divine nature, and when she died, she was given the same rites as those that were given to chief.\textsuperscript{16} She had her residence and estates which were not under the control of her son and she controlled all feminine activities in the town. “She presides over all the women’s secret societies and belongs to those of the men unless they are of a military nature.”\textsuperscript{17} Also in the northern part of Cameroon, it was always “a woman who chose the site of a city, held the insignia of power, or governed a district.”\textsuperscript{18}

Further, in Ghana, among the Ashanti, the head of every village had a senior woman known as obaa panin by his side. She was chosen by the elders and the king to direct the affairs of the community.\textsuperscript{19} She settled quarrels among the women and took care of anything in the interest of the women.

\textsuperscript{10} Abiri 1970, 70.
\textsuperscript{11} Oppong 1983, 214.
\textsuperscript{12} Lebeuf 1963, 112.
\textsuperscript{13} Salami 2001, 7.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 100.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 101.
\textsuperscript{16} Lebeuf 1963, 100.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 95.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. 108.
She took part with the men in certain fishing expeditions in the community.\textsuperscript{20} Also among the Ashanti and other Akan-speaking peoples of Ghana, women founded small states like Mampong and Juaben. Because of this, these groups are seen as having matrilineal descent.\textsuperscript{21}

In addition to this, among the Mboshi of Congo and the Mend of Sierra Leone, and other groups, people are said to have a woman as the hereditary chief.\textsuperscript{22} “Apparently the explanation of this institution, as given by the groups concerned, is, that the spirit of a female ancestor is believed to reside in the place where the woman is chief.”\textsuperscript{23}

1.2 Definition of terms and spellings

Dual-sex: The traditional system of organisation into two kinds of single-sex associations, one for men and one for women. Dual-sex thus means single-sex or separate associations for men and for women.

Church: When I write Church with a big initial, I refer to a body of Christian believers and specific ecclesiastical institutions. Church is also spelled with a capital “C” when the Catholic Church in the abstract is referred to. However, when any concrete church building is referred to, a small “c” will be used. Church in the institutional sense has been used in the following ways:

- The Roman Catholic Church, its hierarchy, and the Roman Catholic Missions, especially in Igboland.
- The Church Missionary Society (CMS) and their leadership, both indigenous and foreign.
- The Anglican Church, of which the CMS is part, Protestant Churches, Methodist Churches, etc.
- African independent Churches and their leadership.

Titles: When a title is followed by a name, I have used a capital letter for the title as well, e.g. “Pope Ignatius,” but when a title is not followed by a name, a lower-case letter has been used, e.g. the “pope.”

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 96.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 110.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
1.3 Sources

1.3.1 Fieldwork

This book is primarily based on material gathered in detailed interviews conducted during my fieldwork in Nigeria. I visited Nigeria four times for fieldwork, in periods of three to five months. The first part of the book relies mainly on informants at the grassroot level. About fifty local women in the villages in Asaba were interviewed – the Otu Omu cabinet, the Umuada, the Inyemedi and some individual old women, who have played significant roles in Asaba traditional society. Also, some important chiefs were interviewed: The Asagba of Asaba, the Odogwe, the Oniha, the Iyase, the Oturaza group, and the Eze and Alo titleholders. Women in both dual-sex and mixed organisations in the Catholic Church and CMS, that is the Anglican Church in Asaba, were also interviewed.

1.3.2 Archives

By relying on historical descriptions for the second part, this study draws to some extent on sources from the Ibadan and Benin national archives in Nigeria, where several visits were made for the use of archival materials. The archive centres in Ibadan and Benin contain important collections of documents that are valuable as primary sources. Of greater use to this work were the documents that have been classified as the Handing over Reports and the Annual Reports. These were written by the then senior administrative officers, in their capacity as heads of provincial administration and also as heads of district administration. These documents were written with the view that the incoming officers would make use of them and at the same time also add their own observations; they would thus each contribute to the continuity of the administration. Generally, these documents contain valuable information that deals with the socio-economic and political organisation, so they are of great interest to this study. Other important documents that have been consulted include: (a) Intelligence Report on Asaba clans, (b) Intelligence Report on the Illah village group, (c) Intelligence Report on the Ibusa and Okpanam clans, and (d) Intelligence Report on the Ute-Okpu clan of the Agbor district. As the titles of these documents attest, they contain district information that deals with the various colonial government development projects in the Asaba district. Of greater use to this work were the Church Missionary Society (CMS), materials and microfilms in the Ibadan National archive in Nigeria. They contain useful materials on the CMS activities in Eastern Nigeria, especially in the Asaba district. Most of these microfilms were very useful to this study.
1.4 Review of previous literature

Review of secondary materials also provides background information and basic data for this study. In particular, this method retrieved valuable information concerning the various resistance movements of Igbo women during the colonial period. It also helped to point out the impact of the colonial administration on Igbo women. From the Uppsala University library and the Centre for Feminist Research, records and documents dealing with women have been put at my disposal. Of great importance to this work was also the material collected from the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies at Uppsala and the Swedish Institute of Missionary Research. During my 1994 field trip to Nigeria, official records dealing with women's programmes were also used to elicit information.

1.4.1 Previous Literature on Igbo Women of Nigeria

Before the colonial era, little research was done on the roles of Igbo women in Nigeria. It was only during the colonial period that the British administration began to encourage research about Igbo women, especially after the Aba Women's Riot in 1929. Thus, almost exclusively Westerners, mainly the British administrative officers and missionaries, produced the earliest written works about the Igbo women. As a result of this, the earliest historical and anthropological studies on Igbo Women were recorded in written form in 1938.

Sylvia Leith-Ross, indeed, was the first scholar in the field. She produced a classical work on Igbo Women, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (1938), which is a study of the daily life of the Igbo women of the Owerri province of Eastern Nigeria. In this book, the author brings out the significant roles which were played by Igbo women in traditional village life, where most of the women were engaged in farming and trading and child-bearing, and also in urban settings, where women would work outside the homes, as civil servants, teachers, lawyers, nurses etc. V. C. Uchendu's book, *The Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria* (1965), is also a significant study of the Igbo, as it provides an intellectually satisfying analysis of the Igbo of Nigeria. In this book, the author describes the Igbo culture and ways of life, and the roles of women in Igbo society.

Another pioneer work on the Igbo women of Nigeria was the work of Margaret M. Green, *Ibo Village Affairs* (1947). This work is a study of the social organisation of the Igbo of Umueke Agbaja in Eastern Nigeria and their women. Although it is based on a particular village group, this work is closer to my research, because it analyses the Igbo social system. The two books by Leith-Ross and Green were written as a result of the Aba Women's Riots of 1929-30, and have been very helpful in emphasizing how the Igbo women in traditional life enjoyed a great deal of political and economic
autonomy and the ways they dealt with their own affairs. These books also point to the lack of recognition by the colonial administration of Igbo institutions and women groups during the colonial period in Nigeria.

Other authors have also discussed the history and culture of the Igbo people. R. Henderson's book, *The King in Every Man: Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha Ibo Society and Culture* (1972), gave a detailed, comprehensive ethnographical account of the traditional Onitsha history and institutions. This book is important for its theoretical and sociological approach. Henderson's account of the Onitsha people was a result of the work of the well-known pioneer anthropological scholar known as W. Thomas Northcote, who wrote *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria. Part IV. Law and Custom of the Ibo of the Asaba District, Southern Nigeria* (1914), and the classical work of G. Basden, who wrote *Niger Ibos* (1938). These two books are, in my view, the most comprehensive, genuine and reliable earlier reports and the best source materials on western Igbo.

D. Forde and G. I. Jones also presented an ethnographic study of Igbo culture in *The Ibo and The Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria* (1950). In this work, these two scholars looked at the status of women in Igbo society and the political, social, religious and economic life of the Igbo people. Another author, Ikenna Nzimiro, published his work, *Studies in Ibo Political Systems: Chieftaincy and Politics in Four Niger States*, in 1975. He focused on the political and social system of four Niger Ibo communities, Onitsha, Abo, Oguta and Osomari.

The Igbo political system has also been studied by Kamene Okonjo (1976), and Anyanwu and Aguwa (1993). Okonjo has published part of her doctoral dissertation as “The Dual-Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Midwestern Nigeria.” In this work, she discusses the traditional Igbo political institutions. She also describes in detail the nature of the “dual-sex” system, and compares and contrasts the Igbo system with the “single-sex” system in the Western countries, where the men make decisions. She emphasizes that “In the single-sex system, women can achieve distinction and recognition only by taking on the roles of men in public life, and performing them well.” She also argues for the creation of a modern version of the traditional Igbo “dual-sex” political system, and notes that with the imposition of colonial rule, women's active participation in political life has diminished. In their book, *The Igbo and the Tradition of Politics* (1993), Anyanwu and Aguwa stress Okonjo's description and analysis of the “Dual-Sex political system” among the Igbo people. They point out that the principles and values, which were characteristic of the traditional Igbo political system, are still useful in present-day Nigeria.

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24 Okonjo 1976, 45-58.
25 Ibid., 45.
Various authors have also analysed the effect of colonization on the Igbo society in general, and Igbo women in particular. A British civil servant, Kenneth Little, who wrote *African Women in Towns* (1973), also contributed to the study of Igbo women. In this book, he examines what the movement to the city could mean to African women. He claimed to have conducted this study because of his observation that African women's relationships with men were gradually undergoing a radical change and he felt that a structural change of such great importance had consequences for African social change. This scholar is also the first person who attempted to study women as a group in an urban setting. Previous studies on Igbo women, for instance M. M. Green, mentioned above, described women in their village setting, not urban. This book also shows that urbanisation as a social process causes women to be interested in material things. He points out that urbanisation aggravates alienation in relation to the roles and values that characterise traditional social life. The main fault of this book is that it focuses too much on prostitutes, which is just one type of women found in the urban setting, and leaves out the most productive educated women and businesswomen.

In 1963, Ikenna Nzimiro published *Family and Kinship in Iboland: A Study in Acculturation Process*, in which he, by using two eastern Ibo communities, analysed what aspects of Ibo family life and kinship structure were affected by Western acculturation. His main emphasis was on the Igbo kinship structure. Another scholar who wrote on the role of Igbo women is Harry Gailey's. His main work is *The Road to Aba: A Study of British Administrative Policy in Eastern Nigeria* (1970). In this study, the author looks at three aspects in his analysis: The establishment of British rule, the imposition of European government on the people, and the rejection of this system by the people. He looks at these aspects in order to analyse how men's opposition to the warrant chief system affected British colonial policies, and became the immediate cause of the Aba Women's War. He concludes by saying that it was the Igbo women who defied the British colonial policy to tax women. He goes further to say that "it is doubtful whether even the leaders of the women knew what impelled them toward revolt. The answers that they gave to the commissions of inquiry indicated that they were motivated by short-range goals and impelled largely by emotion."26

Elizabeth Isichei, in a series of works, has written extensively on the history of the Igbo before and during the colonial period, with a special focus on Asaba. In her first article, "Historical Change in an Ibo Polity: Asaba to 1885,",27 she discusses the arrival of Europeans to Asaba, and the Asaba social, political and economic structure. In *A History of the Igbo People* (1976), she analyses the history of the Igbo people before and during the colonial era in Nigeria, while her book *A History of Nigeria* (1983) discusses

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the Igbo and other Nigerian tribes like the Yoruba, and the Hausa, and the position of women in Nigeria during the pre-colonial period. In her last article, “Myth, Gender and Society in Pre-Colonial Asaba” (1991), she analyses the political, social and religious structure of Asaba society.

The impact of colonialism is also the theme of Nina Emma Mba’s book, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women’s Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965* (1982). She deals with the position of women in southern Nigeria after 1900, and analyses the effects of colonialism, especially among the Igbo. She also discusses the various mass protest movements in eastern Nigeria, like the Aba Women's Riot of 1929, the various protests by Igbo women between 1932 and 1965, as well as the political actions by women in Western Nigeria like the Abeokuta women, and the role which was played by women in Lagos politics, 1900-1965.

Judith Van Allen’s work “Aba Riots” or Igbo “Women's War? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women” in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, edited by Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (1976), and her article “Sitting on a Man: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women,” in *The Canadian Journal of African Studies* (1972), are very significant contributions concerning Igbo women. In these articles, the author deals with the injustices done by the colonial administrators to Igbo women and the loss of their political rights during the colonial era in Igboland. She also questions the justification of the name “Aba Riots,” which was given to the demonstration by the British administrators, since none of the colonialists were killed or injured as compared with the fifty Igbo women who were shot and killed. She argues that colonialism brought about the demise of the Igbo women's political activities. She also argues that the Igbo women used the traditional method of “sitting on a man” to prevent the British colonial government from imposing taxes on women. She finally concludes by saying that the British not only undermined the power of Igbo women, but also abolished the traditional institutions that enabled Igbo women to enforce laws.

In addition to other literature on Igbo women, Sudarkasa Niara, in *The Black Women Cross-Culturally* (1981), analyses the relationship between women's families and economic roles among West African people. She also looks at the relationship between the economic roles of women in West Africa and their position in the kinship and village groupings. She rejects the division between the private and public spheres, which she believes to be inclusive of one another, and then questions the African women's capacity to combine their domestic roles with their other roles. In reference to Igbo women, she argues that in pre-colonial non-state societies such as the Igbo,

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29 Van Allen 1976, 81.
the “domestic sphere” was an integral part of the “public sphere” and that there was a sort of overlap between them.\textsuperscript{30}

Asaba has also been the focus of several studies. For instance, Chude Akus in his book \textit{Asaba: The Quintessence of Nigerian History} (1994), effectively applies a socio-historical perspective when he analyses Asaba history before and after the colonial period. He focuses on the history of Asaba, and the traditional institutions that existed in Asaba before and after the colonial era.

The role of Igbo women in politics has been discussed by P. K. Uchendu who, in \textit{The Role of Nigerian Women in Politics} (1993), focused on the role of women in Nigerian pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial politics. He also treats the roles of the \textit{Omu} and the \textit{Umuada}, in the Igbo pre-colonial society.\textsuperscript{31} Another book, which deals with the role of Igbo women, is \textit{Nigerian Women in Politics 1986-1993}, by Clara Osinulu and Nina Mba (eds.) (1996). In chapter four of this book, Margaret Vogt discusses the riverine Igbo people of Onitsha, Asaba, Osommari and Illah. She also refers to the argument of scholars like Mba, who argues that the activity of women in the pre-colonial setting was always made known through “informal mechanisms.”\textsuperscript{32}

Finally, a recent publication on the issue of the role of Igbo women is Joseph Therese Agbasiere’s book, \textit{Women in Igbo Life and Thought} (2000). In this study, she focuses on the Igbo women’s socio-political and religious status, the kinship relations and the position of women, the traditional marriage rites, married life, moral relations and widowhood in Igbo society. This is a very important book for this thesis, because it deals with some of the issues that are discussed in this work, such as the role of the \textit{Umuada} in their natal lineages and the role of Igbo women in life cycle rituals like birth.

In distinction to other works, I have noted the differences between this work and previous works. The earlier scholars who wrote on Igbo women generalised as if all the women in the traditional Igbo society were the same. However, this work makes a clear distinction between the freeborn and the slave women in the traditional Igbo society. Discussions about Igbo women in previous studies generally refer to the freeborn women. For instance, only the freeborn women were involved in the Aba women’s riot of 1929, as the slave women had no say in the society at that period.

However, this work differs particularly from the work of other authors, such as Sylvia Leith-Ross, because she studied the daily life of women of the Owerri province of eastern Nigeria, while this work focuses on the Asaba women of the western Igboland. This makes this work different from the

\textsuperscript{30} Steady (ed.) 1981, 52.
\textsuperscript{31} Uchendu 1993, 22-30, 32-49, and 63-73.
\textsuperscript{32} Osinulu and Mba (eds.) 1996, 65.
contributions of previous scholars, because women in Asaba have not been previously studied.

1.5 Structure of Presentation

This work is divided into three main parts. Part one deals with the traditional Igbo society. As we know, the term “traditional” is controversial, since it may refer to “invented traditional” (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Yet I use this term in order to contrast the kind of Igbo society that is ruled by custom and customary law, rather than by rules and principles of modern Western society, colonial law and Christianity. However, this does not mean that “tradition” refers to a status quo condition. Tradition in Igbo society has changed over the centuries. In this thesis, I use the term “traditional” to refer to Igbo customs during the time period between 1870 and 1930. In certain contexts, however, we may find a “traditional” society side by side with the modernised, westernised society, even today. When that is the case, I use the term “traditional” to refer to customary rules practised outside the westernized or “modernised” society, which is marked by industrialisation, Christianity, and codified law.

I do not want to use a term like “pre-colonial,” since, in the case of Nigeria, this would refer to a time period so far back that there are virtually no sources to describe it. Nigeria was colonised in the mid 19th century (1850’s), which may be compared with Zimbabwe, which was colonised only in the 1890’s.

In chapter one of that part thus chapter 2, I give a geographical background of Igbo society. In chapter three, I discuss their system of kinship and duality. In chapter four, I look at their political organisation; here I discuss the men’s political organisation as well as the women’s political organisation in Igbo society and also their kinship system, locality and diversity, and the political roles of the women in the society. In chapter five, I discuss the economic organisation of the Igbo people; here I focus on their system of cultivation, the marketing and selling of goods in traditional Igbo society, the various female economic clubs and the system of inheritance. In chapter six, I look at the women’s place in the religious organisation of the Igbo, such as their belief system, the male and female religious associations, and in chapter seven, I discuss the women’s role in life cycle rituals.

The second part is historical, in the sense that it is based on written sources. Here I deal with the socio-economic and political changes, which took place in Igboland with the coming of Christianity, colonialism, modernisation and Western education. In chapter eight of this part, I discuss the end of the slave trade and its aftermath, the beginnings of European interest in the Niger area, the coming of Christianity to Asaba and the historical changes which took place between 1830 and 1888, the establishment of the
Royal Niger Company in Asaba and the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries, the Society of Africa Missions. In chapter nine, I discuss the establishing of colonial rule to Igboland between 1880 and 1910. Here I try to examine the colonial impact on Nigerian women in general and the Igbo women in particular, and its socio-political effects on Igbo women. I finally conclude this chapter by discussing the Ekumeku resistance, which took place in Asaba during the colonial era. In chapter ten, I focus on the combined effects of colonialism and mission on Igbo women, the indirect rule and women's political exclusion, the Aba women's riot of 1929, and its effects on the colonial rule and Igbo women. I also look at education and mission schools, the continued impact of Western education, women and the churches, modernisation, migration and urbanisation, and the impact of World War II on women. In chapter eleven I discuss the growth of nationalism in Nigeria, Igbo women and their roles in the Nigerian political parties 1951-1965, the role of Igbo women in the Biafra war, the effects of the Nigerian civil war on Igbo women, the Churches and the relief work in Biafra and the Church and the state after independence. In chapter twelve, I focus on the reconstruction and reconciliation that took place after the Nigerian civil war in 1970, the creation of the new states and local government areas, the economic prosperity and decline that took place after the civil war, the nationalisation of schools and the educational system by the government in Nigeria in 1979 and the development of churches in Nigeria since 1970.

The third part deals with women’s changed role in the Catholic Church in Asaba. In this part, I relate my data from parts I and II to a new group of data, which deals with contemporary Catholic organisations. In chapter thirteen of this part, I start by presenting more established women organisations within the Catholic Church in Asaba, like the Catholic Women's Organisation (CWO), the Christian Mothers, and the St. Theresa Women's Society. In chapter fourteen, I discuss the mixed organisations in the Catholic Church in Asaba, such as the Catholic Laity Council, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal etc. In chapter fifteen, I discuss the Missionary strategy in Igbo society. I also make a comparison between the traditional and the modern organisations that were introduced by the missionaries in the Church. In this chapter I also try to identify the reasons for the change of the role of Igbo women in the traditional society. In chapter sixteen, I discuss the significant roles played by Igbo women in life-cycle rituals, such as birth, marriage and funeral rites. In doing this I try to identify the changes which have taken place in these areas as a result of the coming of Christianity and colonialism, and in what ways these changes have affected the role of the Igbo women in the traditional society. In chapter seventeen, the final chapter, I summarise my findings by showing how the previously quite independent position of the women has changed, due to the European influences via colonialism and Christian mission. Here I try to argue that the traditional “dual sex” organisation (the “parallel” organisation of men and women in separate associations)
was one where women could make their voices heard, and that this separate (but parallel) organisation has been abandoned. I try to show how the missionaries introduced a different kind of organisational structure within the Catholic Church, which was different from the one in the traditional society. I also point out that conversion to Christianity in Igbo society has been a product of a long-term process of change resulting from the pressures of external forces, and that this change has diminished the influence of the Igbo women, who were granted certain well-defined functions in the traditional society. I also argue that these functions did not only consist of informal power behind the male scene but that the women also had a say in public, especially in religious and economic matters, and that this was something guaranteed by customary law. But when colonialism and mission introduced new ideals in such matters, the majority of the Igbo women lost some of their former strength in religious and economic matters, which affected their previous role in the traditional society. I also describe how Christianity was introduced in Igbo society, and how colonialism introduced new rules. In this context, I focus on the new political organisation which was introduced in Igboland in 1928, and on the role of the warrant chiefs. I also show how certain new economic rules clashed with the old rules, which resulted in the so-called Aba riots in 1929. I also argue, that in traditional society the Igbo women used to have significant roles at life cycle ceremonies, but in the church today, such roles have been taken over by men. I also point out that the significant roles at life cycle rituals in the traditional society were roles played by freeborn women, and not by slaves. I also argue, that the Church has recruited people with slave origin, both male and female persons, and that among the active people in the Church organisation today, some are of slave origin. Since the slaves were not happy with their position in traditional society, and were excluded from male title societies and from the female counterparts in the traditional dual-sex system, they did not appreciate traditional society and the way it was organised. I also argue that this may have been one of the reasons why many women seem to be so happy with the female organisations in the Church.

Further, regarding the freeborn and the slave women in traditional society, I will point out that two kinds of changes for the women were brought about by the Church. One of these changes was a change for the worse, concerning the freeborn women, who lost their former power. The other change was a change for the better. This change concerned the slave women, who felt that they were well treated in the more egalitarian\textsuperscript{33} culture of the Church, while their former position in the hierarchically organised, traditional society was not one of equality.

\textsuperscript{33} The term egalitarian in this book refers to the belief that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities in the society.
Throughout this book I argue that the main change that has been brought about by the Church is the introduction of an egalitarian ideology, instead of the hierarchical ideology that used to dominate Igbo society, and that instead of ranks and titles as criteria for the value of a human being, the Church has introduced an egalitarian ideology, which considers each single individual as a human being. But due to the former ideology of hierarchy, there are new hierarchies appearing in the Church. Those who can read and write and speak for themselves are rising to power. Many of them would have had a much lower position in traditional society as slaves.

Thus, we can see that a new hierarchy has succeeded to an old hierarchy. We can also see that it is the old hierarchy that has lost ground, and thereby also the freeborn women in the traditional society. A significant percentage of those in power today are mainly the former slaves, because they belong to the Church.

Figure 2. Map of Ibo territory. Source: Metuh and Ejizu, 1985, XIII.

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34 The word hierarchy in this work refers to a system in which people are ranked one above the other according to status or authority.
PART ONE:
TRADITIONAL IGBO SOCIETY
CHAPTER 2
General Background

2.1 Geographical background

2.1.1 Settlement

Igboland is located in the north of the Delta Swamplands, east of the Niger River and west of the Cross River. It covers an area of 15,800 square miles. The Imo and Kwa Ibo rivers cut it into three unequal parts in the south. In the north, it extends to the Awgu-Udi-Nsukka hills. In the northwest it is bounded by the Anambra river – the most important tributary of the lower Niger. The Cross River, whose general basin covers the Nigeria-Cameroon border, bounds it in the east and southeast.

The Igbo are about fifteen million in population and comprise one of the largest ethnic populations in the country. Those living west of the Niger are about half a million in number. Throughout Igboland, there are no mountain barriers or deserts. The area is covered by thick rain forest. High forest, or a kind of secondary growth, which would result in a thick forest when left unchecked, covers the area around the Owerri Province and the Igbo area west of the Niger. Areas around the Onitsha and Ogoja Provinces are mainly grassland and savannah. There is thick forest along the Anambra river and the other rivers. In the secondary forest, oil palms grow spontaneously, and also around settlements, but not in the savannah, high forest, or grassland. The thick forest is made up of valuable mahoganies and other kinds of wood that is used for furniture. Along the Niger and its tributaries, the forest is constituted of swamps. The same is the case for the areas between the river Niger and the Anambra river. Fishing is one of the occupations of people living in this area.

The rain falls in most parts of Igboland between the months of March and November, with a dry spell in August. The rainfall is evenly and well distributed in some parts, and falls in sufficient quantities for productive agriculture. However, it varies, from 105 inches in the southern part, to 60

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35 Ifemesia 1979, 15.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Forde and Jones 1950, 12.
inches in the north. The fertile soils make Igboland an agricultural area with great potential.

The typical Igbo settlement pattern is constituted of loose clusters of homesteads, which are irregularly scattered along cleared paths radiating from a central meeting place in the village. Every village has shrines and groves of the major spirit of the most important lineage, and of the earth deity, and also a market place. Larger communities are usually made up of two or more of this kind of unit, each with its own meeting place and radiating paths. Most local communities are within the ranges of 40 to 8,000 people, with an average of about 4,500. The cluster of homesteads of about 5,000 people might extend over an area of one to three square miles. A wall made of mud, and usually demarcated from its neighbours by gardens and undergrowth, always surrounds the homestead, which consists of the home of a man, his wives, and some of his sons and patrilineal cousins. Each wife in the household has her own room, storeroom and kitchen. The small children and the girls live with their mothers.

In densely populated areas, this pattern of settlement has been broken down, since the belts of bush in between the previous centres have been cleared and occupied. What is left presently is a continuous spread of homesteads, most of which are connected by the meeting places and a network of paths.

The internal organisation of the Igbo was based on patrilineal clans and lineages. Each group had its own government and was totally independent from the others. In most areas in Igboland, hostility and small-scale warfare was common among neighbouring groups. Large political groupings were lacking, and there were no states to unite the various groups to give them an over-all unity of social structure.

The Igbo do not have the same traditions of origin or migration. The traditions of origin differ from one group to the other. They also have various linguistic differences; between neighbouring towns and villages, there are a lot of differences in dialects. For instance, the dialects among the western Igbo are quite different from those of the northern and southern Igbo, despite the fact that they all speak Igbo.

Presently, most of the Igbo live in the Enugu, Abia, Anambra, Imo and Ebonyi states of Nigeria, and also in the Ahoada area of the River states. The Asaba, Ika, Ukuwuani (kwale) and Abo areas of the Delta state are inhabited by Igbo as well. The Igbo living west of the Niger in the Asaba, Ika and Abo

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 17.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ottenberg 1959, 130.
46 Forde and Jones 1950, 11.
areas are separated from the Igbo in the east by the river Niger. Asaba, which is part of western Igboland, and the main focus of this research, is currently the headquarters of the Delta state of Nigeria.

2.2 Achievement orientation

In most African societies, there is no conception of chi, that is, the spiritual double. Chi is most common among the Igbo and is used in different forms in Igbo communities. The chi may be seen as an expression of the individualistic spirit of the Igbo people. The chi is also seen as a guardian angel, which determines one’s destiny, or fate, in life.

The Igbo are known as individualistic, achievement-oriented and achievement-conscious. In Igbo society, people accord more respect to achieved than inherited status. The Igbo are highly assimilative, and are ready to adopt any new ways of life, provided they see it as an opportunity to achieve wealth and high status. Because of this, most of them have migrated to other parts of Nigeria. Many Igbo migrated to urban centres such as Kano and Zaria in the northern part of Nigeria, Calabar in the southeast, and Lagos in the southwest. Cities, which did not exist in Igboland before the European contact, have developed rapidly, mainly because of good transportation, trade and administrative headquarters. Many people in Igboland have moved to such centres as Umuahia, Aba, Onitsha, Enugu and Port Harcourt.

The individualistic spirit of the Igbo has been shown by Levine (1966), who writes:

> Another factor of indeterminate significance in the Ibo awakening was certain characteristic personality and behavioural traits attributed to this group. Some observers have sought to relate such traits to distinctive patterns of Ibo culture. M.M. Green points out that “it is the ‘go getter’ who is admired, the man who has wives and children and bestirs himself and makes money…. A man who just sits quiet is not respected”. Life in some traditional Ibo societies tends to be highly competitive, and great stress is placed upon achieved status.

This individualistic spirit, and reliance on one’s own capacity, distinguishes the Igbo people from other Nigerians and other African peoples. The belief in the individual destiny spirit called chi may be seen as an expression of the individualistic spirit of the Igbo. Talbot, for instance, wrote as follows about this connection:

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47 Ottenberg 1959, 130.
48 Ibid.
49 Levine 1966, 9.
The good chi, it is said, always assists his “child” by giving him prosperity. If he puts a tiny piece of yam in the ground, it will prove fruitful. If he is a trader, he always makes profits. The “child” on the other hand, of a bad chi may put a big yam in the ground, but it will not do well and, however kind he is, he always receives ingratitude or ill deeds, not thanks.50

This could also been seen in Achebe's novel, Things Fall Apart:

His life has been ruled by a great passion to become one of the Lords of the clan. That had been his life spring. And he had all but achieved it. Then everything had been broken. He had been cast out of his clan like a fish on to a dry, sandy beach, panting. Clearly his personal god or chi was not made for great things. A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his chi. The saying of the elders was not true that if a man said yea his chi also affirmed. Here was a man whose chi said nay despite his own affirmation.51

Achebe is a popular Nigerian novelist from the eastern part of Igboland, whose works are set in traditional Igbo society, and who is widely recognized as having vividly captured the essential elements of that society. In his novels Things Fall Apart, and No Longer at Ease, he described what happened to the Igbo people in traditional Igbo society when the Europeans came. He illustrated that the Igbo culture fell apart because they lost their traditional ways of living, and that things were no longer the same. He also showed in his novels, that this happened because it was the way that their chi wanted it, as it could not have happened if their chi was in opposition to it. He explained that the saying of the elders that if you say ‘yes’ your chi will also say ‘yes,’ was not accurate. Thus, sometimes you could say ‘yes’ to something and your chi would be against it, and that was exactly what happened to the Igbo people in Igbo traditional society who said “No” to the coming of the Europeans, but their chi refused to agree with this “No.”

Many people in Igboland therefore believe that everybody on earth has a spiritual double called chi which guards him right from birth. Abilities, faults, good or bad fortune, destiny, which God has made, are entrusted to chi. Accordingly, after birth or marriage, a person establishes a cult for his or her chi, as well as a shrine, where sacrifices are offered. According to Forde and Jones, the major emphasis of this cult is on fertility. Married women in Igboland were allowed to bring their chi to their husband's house after marriage;55 and they were believed to protect them. The Igbo believe that a man cannot choose his chi: “God puts one's fate into parcels – and one's lot depends upon what parcels a chi picks up. Any bad things are due to the chi's mistake.”53 The chi is also said to protect, look after, help and take care of its

50 Talbot 1969, 290.
51 Achebe 1958, 92.
52 Talbot 1969, 286.
53 Ibid., 288.
“child,” and is responsible for any bad thing done, since it has the power to control its “child.”

In different parts of Igboland, the symbol of chi differs. In some parts it could be represented by a small clay pot on a mound, with four little pieces of Abuba wood, which were placed inside the house, while in other parts it could be a pot containing chalk, yellow wood, palm-wine and certain roots, and it could also be a small round clay mound, with a hole in the middle, etc. The Igbo believe that if somebody offends his own chi by breaking his rules, committing a crime, or neglecting him, the chi may send sickness as a warning to that person. Everybody in Igboland loves and trusts his chi and never fears him, except when one has committed a sin. People pray to their chi spirits when sick or in trouble. It is believed that when a man dies he goes back to his chi and that “it is Obassi (God) and the chi together who ordain the time of man’s death and birth.”

Thus, we can see the strong belief of the Igbo in their personal god, chi, who they believe guards and determines their fate in life. This can also be seen in connection with their individualistic mentality, which implies that they believe that everything in life, whether success or failure, is due to the wishes of their chi.

2.3 Societies and clubs

In Igboland there are different kinds of societies and clubs. Some of these societies and clubs are for men, while some are for women. In most Igbo communities, the number of societies or clubs to which a man belongs and the position that he holds in these societies mainly measures a man’s social position in the society. The membership fees to most of these societies are generally paid in instalments of cash, or sometimes through the provision of drinks and foodstuffs, and sometimes in both ways. These payments depend upon the wealth of the people concerned and their social status in the community. They could range from several hundred pounds to a few shillings.

Some of these societies are regarded as secret societies. They are often ruled by significant instruments of discipline and government, and they provide socialisation and recreation. The degree of secrecy attached to a society in Igboland differs greatly:

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54 Ibid., 288-290.
55 Ibid., 291.
56 Talbot 1969, 290.
57 Ibid., 291.
58 Ibid., 291-292.
59 Ibid., 294.
60 Talbot 1969, 756-757.
61 Ifemesia 1979, 76.
There are those in which the rites are regarded as so sacred that any unlawful witness or intruder would be at once killed, while others are public save that none members are not allowed to take part in the performances or be present at some of the meetings.62

The former group is made up of those societies in which ancestor worship plays a significant role, while the latter are mainly political or social institutions.63

The two main kinds of Igbo secret societies were those that were semi-secret, mainly because they were not open to children and women, and those which were even more secret, because they were not open to all adult males. Some of these societies were so secret that the members of the societies were believed to have occult powers.64 The first kind of society was open to those young and adolescent males who had paid the fee for entrance and fulfilled the main requirements.65

In the northern part of Igboland and in some other parts, the mmo, mmanwu (spirit-mask) societies were common. The initiation consisted of two main stages, usually for young boys between the ages of nine and ten, and for those in their teens.66 The first stage of the initiation ceremony was called the ine ori (stepping over). This stage was intended to test the courage of the candidates, their discipline and endurance. After a successful completion of these rites, the initiates were allowed to join other members of spirit-mask clubs on public occasions; however, they were not yet told all the secrets, and not allowed to go into the clubhouse of the society. Between the ages of fourteen and fifteen, the full rites for this ceremony were performed. At this age the candidates were seen as having reached the age of discretion (inwe ako-na-uche), and could be entrusted with the secrets of the community.67

As already mentioned, some of these societies, such as the mmo (maw) society, were believed to have originated from ancestor worship and also from the frustration of witchcraft.68 In those days, mmo was said to have had power over life and death.69 According to Ifemesia:

Offences against Mmo were not private matters but public issues, which provided one of those rare occasions on which an assembly of the whole village or village group and beyond was convened; and the consequences could be dreadful for the offender. Mmo contributed immensely to the maintenance of discipline in Igbo communities in former times. As an instance, Mmo Afia

62 Ibid.
63 Talbot 1969, 757.
64 Ifemesia 1979, 77.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Talbot 1969, 754.
69 Basden 1938, 367; Ifemesia 1979, 78.
would expel an adulteress from her husband’s kindred, order a person charged with witchcraft to undergo trial by ordeal, and those convicted of crime to be banished or killed. *Mmo Ulaga*, in addition to entertaining the community, would punish those who committed a nuisance in a public square or highway.\(^7\)

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\(^7\) Ifemesia 1979, 78.

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Figure 3. Map of western Igboland. Source: Ohadike, 1991: 20.
An example of *mmoafia* or *mawafia* is the *egwugwu* society,\(^{71}\) which is found in some parts of Igboland, especially in some of the western Igbo towns such as Asaba, Illah and Ebu. The *egwugwu* society is a secret spirit cult, which is said to have come from Igala (Igarra) via Illah, one of the towns west of Asaba.\(^{72}\) It is believed to consist of the ghosts of dead people who come back to earth to tell their families about their safe arrival and happiness in the spirit-land,\(^{73}\) and they are also seen as ancestral spirits. The leaders of this cult are called the *ishokwuta*. No woman is allowed to be a member of this secret cult\(^ {74}\) and, because of this, it was regarded by women with the utmost dread.\(^ {75}\)

These ancestral spirits are impersonated by a number of masked men in the *mmo* society or the *egwugwu* society. Such a spirit may "come out" during the celebration of funeral rites,\(^ {76}\) to represent the dead man and state his wishes to his family. The spirits are said to show themselves during this

\(^{71}\) Basden 1938, 367.
\(^{72}\) Isichei 1991, 520; Talbot 1969, 767.
\(^{73}\) Talbot 1969, 767.
\(^{74}\) Talbot 1969, 767; Achebe 1958, 63.
\(^{75}\) Talbot 1969, 767.
\(^{76}\) Forde and Jones 1950, 26; Basden 1938, 294.
ceremony, and to visit all the relatives and friends of the deceased, collect money and gifts. They also come out during festivals.\textsuperscript{77} The rites of this society are not known or seen by women. The \textit{egwugwu} performs certain judicial functions as mentioned above, such as expelling an adulteress from the home of the husband, and it can also ask someone who is suspected of witchcraft to go through trial by ordeal.\textsuperscript{78}

In some towns, a small amount of money or goods is paid for the entrance into this cult, i.e. a small sum of money, some kola-nuts, one goat and some palm-wine. But in some places, such as Illah and Ebu, where this cult is very powerful, a larger amount of money is paid for admission into the cult.\textsuperscript{79} As observed by Talbot, the images of any spirits of this cult are said to cover totally the medium's body:

\begin{quote}
Covered by voluminous clothes, the upper part often composed of some knitted material. Occasionally a sort of kilt is worn, but the legs are always hidden by cloth or knitted trousers. A wooden mask is used, which is at times placed on the top of the man's head so as to give him increased height, while he himself looks out through narrow slits below.\textsuperscript{80}
\end{quote}

It is forbidden for women in the community to come close to such a spirit. No woman must ever see the inside of the hut of the \textit{egwugwu}.\textsuperscript{81} “If they imagined what was inside, they kept their imagination to themselves. No woman ever asked questions about the most powerful and the most secret cult in the clan.”\textsuperscript{82} It is believed in Asaba that anybody whipped by this spirit might develop leprosy, and that if it points a finger at anyone, that person would be blind in a few days. Members of this society are said to be very powerful, and are feared and respected in the community.

Most of these secret societies conduct their initiatory ceremonies in the bush not so far from the town. This ceremony usually takes place in a winding path, and with palm-leaves hung. In certain cases, the members of the secret societies stay at the entrance of these paths with whips to flog the pedestrians. The more significant the societies, the more difficult are the initiation rites into these societies. For this reason, the aspirants are supposed to pay a high price to join the societies. In some of the most powerful societies, the period of initiation is very long and complicated, and regular training systems are conducted for the revelation of mysteries.\textsuperscript{83}

Apart from the \textit{mmo} society, the most powerful societies are those that demand manslaughter, and to which admission is based on the requirement

\textsuperscript{77} Forde and Jones 1950, 26.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Talbot 1969, 767.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 768.
\textsuperscript{81} Achebe 1958, 63; Basden 1938, 366.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} Talbot 1969, 757.
of a human skull, which should be that of the person killed in a fight by the man who applies for membership. Most of the high levels of the political associations are always open to such warriors.84

Most of these politico-religious societies are, as seen above, not only a means by which the rulers and the members of the upper class carried out the administration of the communities, but they provide a sort of check on the power of the rulers in the communities, and also constitute – on a certain level – a bond between the most diverse and hostile tribes in the communities.85 However, we can see that male aggression is highly valued among the Igbo. One of the signs of this is the fact that the high levels of the political associations are always open to men who have shown aggressiveness in a fight and killed their antagonist, whose skull must be presented before admission.

In addition to these politico-religious societies, there were some societies and clubs which were mainly for socialisation. This is because of the Igbo people's love for company, which should be regarded as one of the main reasons for the existence of innumerable societies and clubs in Igbo communities. Some of these societies were formed in order to counteract the strong feeling of antagonism among the sexes in the community.86 Some of them were mainly minor social clubs, the activities of which were confined mainly to theatre, plays and dances.87

Members of these societies and clubs meet at various occasions for socialisation and discussions of all kinds. They also assist each other at important occasions, such as weddings, child naming ceremonies and burials. Sometimes, money is donated to members in these situations. An example of such clubs in Igbo communities is the People's club of Nigeria. This club is traditional in the sense that it is a continuation of the old system of clubs in the traditional Igbo society. Members of this club help each other during such ceremonies as burials in the community. The club has branches in different towns and is very popular among the people.

In addition to these societies and clubs, there are some societies that operate more like co-operative societies. Some of these societies are trade guilds to protect the interests of their members. Societies of this kind are common among the women. In these societies, women discuss economic issues and ways to help their fellow women who are engaged in business. In these kinds of societies, individuals donate money, and this money is given to certain members of the societies to assist them in their trade. This money should be paid back with some amount of interest after some time, at least if the recipient is a member of the society concerned.

84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
Apart from the secret societies and societies for socialisation and economic co-operation, there were also title societies. In Igbo society, respect and recognition in the political system are accorded on the basis of age and the acquisition of traditional titles. Someone might acquire more than six titles at the same time, and progress through these. For instance, a person may progress through the acquisition of traditional titles. These titles are very expensive and each one is more expensive than the one before it. The acquisition of these traditional titles leads to a kind of upward social mobility in the society. Age and title holding are ways of achieving respect in the society. It is also a guarantee for a position for the title owner in the policy-making bodies of his own community. But this cannot be achieved by anybody, unless he also has the combination of other qualities such as leadership, ability to talk in the community, and a logical way of reasoning. These attributes are very significant, because anyone who possesses them receives attention in the society at large and is likely to be followed by others.

The social status of men, and to some extent women, in Igbo society is expressed by the number of titles they have, and by the length of time that they have been titleholders. The important qualifications for obtaining these titles are free birth, ability to make the necessary payments required for the titles, and good behaviour. Titles are a way of expressing wealth and also a means of showing the power they confer.

Generally, there is a respect for seniority. A man is not allowed to take a title that is equal to or higher than that of his father, as long as his father is still alive. The range of titles and the amount of money paid for entrance into these societies differs from place to place. Some titles, which are regarded as inferior, can be inherited, while the more significant ones become vacant when the holder dies. As noted by Forde and Jones (1950):

> Titled men (Ndi Nzi) in the past, virtually monopolised authority in their village group. The making of major political decisions and the administration of criminal justice were carried out at public meetings, at which all the adult males of the community had a right to express their opinions, and the decision agreed upon were ratified and ritually imposed by the lineage heads. In fact, the initiative, including the formulation of policy and the debate in the public meetings, was controlled by the leading members of the title society, who discussed affairs at their society meetings and secured the support of other titleholders.

Some of these associations are not only political associations which control the communities, but also a sort of mutual benefit clubs, in which the mem-

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88 Forde and Jones 1950, 19.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
bers invest their money in the form of a share; a certain amount of interest is
gained from the investment through the capital paid by other later entrants.91

Among the western Igbo, the influence of the Benin kingdom could be
noted in connection with the title system. As can be seen from figure 4,
western Igboland, which Asaba belongs to, is contiguous with the old Benin
kingdom, which was ruled by a powerful monarch called the Oba. In the
past, some of the western Igbo communities were conquered by the Benin
people, and were once under the Benin administration and influence. It was
from there that the Asaba people got most of their titles, which are quite
different from some of the titles seen in other parts of Igboland, i.e. in the
Owerri, Umuahia and Okigwe provinces. This is because they are not hon-
ours, or marks of rank and authority conferred on people by rulers, nor are
they hereditary or the privilege of particular descent groups. They have to be
obtained through payment of fees to the community or an existing organisation
of title-holders. As a result of admission payments, members of the
association can profit from a substantial amount of income from the fees paid
later by new entrants.92

For instance, the most significant title in the chieftaincy system in Asaba
is the Asagba (Obi, Eze, or Igwe) title. This is an acquired title, open to any
male agnate of a royal lineage who is of good behaviour and who can pay
the required expense of the installation ceremonies. The holders of this title
wear a red cap. The minor chiefs in the town were usually appointed by the
Asagba with the approval of his council of chiefs, the Oturaza, and the town
people. Next in rank to the Asagba title is the Onoi and Oloto. The holders of
this title assist the Asagba in the political administration of the community.
Below the Onoi and Oloto were the Iyase and Odogwe. These titles represent
the highest military rank conferred on anybody in the community. The hold-
ers of these titles are believed to be brave and courageous and must have
contributed in past wars fought in the community. They are well respected in
the town. Thus we can see how highly male courage and bravery are valued
in Asaba in particular and Igbo society in general.

Another important title was the Olinzele. This title was conferred on any
male member of the town who had contributed to the progress and develop-
ment of the community. Members of this group were part of the political
system. They advised the Asagba on issues concerning the political admini-
stration of the community. They also represented the community at state
level. These groups of men were made up of the Ihama, Olodi, Ojiba, Odafe,
Obuma, Osowa, Obodi, Oza, Ide, Izoma, Akwue, Ojibe, Imagwe, Ihonor, and
Uwollo.93 Other significant titles that may be taken in Asaba are the Alo,
Oghu and Mkpisi titles. The Alo (AIlaw) title is more of a prestige title. Any

91 Ibid., 756.
92 Ibid., 20.
93 Akus 1994, 88.
male member of the community who has the means could take the title. The holders of this title carry an elephant's tusk horn and are well respected in the community. About the Ogbu and Mkpisi titles, Talbot writes: “the members of these later wear white cloths round the head and are entitled to carry an elephant's tusk horn, but not so large as that allowed to the Ndi-Allaw.”

The most important title conferred on a woman is the Omu title. The holders of this title are responsible for the women's interests and also important figures in the market affairs in the community. Another title taken by women is the Odu title. This title is given to women who have made great achievements toward the development of the community. A few of the women holding this title in Asaba today are Obi Mrs E. Osadebay, Chief Mrs S. Chidi, the assistant managing director of Peugeot automobile, Kaduna, and Chief O. Oba, a well-known businesswoman in Lagos.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the ways in which the traditional Igbo society was patterned, the geographical background, the settlement patterns, the so-called individualistic and achievement-oriented spirit, and people's belief in their personal god, chi, which is the main expression of their individualistic and achievement-oriented spirit and self-reliance in life. We have also seen the Igbo interest in collective societies and clubs, title societies, etc., which were used as an important instrument of discipline and government in traditional Igbo society, as well as a means of socialisation and recreation. The club system was also a way for the rulers to carry out their political administration, and also a check on the power of the rulers in the communities. But, above everything, we may regard the system of clubs with ranks and titles as an expression of the famous Igbo achievement mentality.

However, we should note that there is a special criterion for male title holding. One of the highest titles in Asaba (and other parts of Igboland as well) is conferred to men who have shown aggressiveness and “courage” in wars. This is a sign that aggressiveness is a highly valued characteristic in men. For women, however, no such criterion exists for eligibility to clubs or title societies. Rather, women should show themselves cooperative, economically capable, and well-spoken, in order to be honoured. Freeborn men and women thus used to live in two separate worlds, and there were different kinds of values attached to them. Men were highly valued if aggressive, whereas women were highly valued if cooperative. But for both sexes, the rule was that one had to be a capable speaker in front of representatives of

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94 Talbot 1969, 773.
one’s own gender. This is a main reason why women may be much more capable of speaking up when there are only women listening to them, and this, in turn, is a reason why Church organisations that are based on one single sex have attracted a larger following than those that are “mixed.”

Figure 5. Chief Mrs S. Chidi, Odu title holder. The pads around her legs are made of beads, and are regarded as a sign of the Odu title. Photo: Victoria Ibewuike.
CHAPTER 3
Kinship and Duality

3.1 Patriliny

The social organisation of the Igbo is generally referred to in terms of patrilineal descent. This means in principle that the individual is considered to belong to the descent group of his father, father's father, and so on, and that he has access to secular power and economic rights and to religious affiliation in his patriline via male links only (that is via father, father's father, and so on).

In the same way, every woman is assumed to gain social membership and belonging through the patriline, even if she normally has no particular rights to economic resources or political power via her patrilineage. Nor is she considered to have any access to power through the male partner she is married to, and who belongs to another patrilineage.

This is the usual image of men's and women's rights in a patrilineal society. In principle, the patrilineal affiliation does not mean anything else but that one receives one's rights (political, economic, and religious rights) via men. Generally, in such a society, the woman has no political or economic rights by virtue of her sex, but she generally has access to land for cultivation via her husband, or via her own patriline, if she lives with her patrilineal descent group. The woman also has access to participation in religious ceremonies, which celebrate the patrilineal ancestors of either the woman's own patriline or those of her husband's patriline.

As a general rule, patrilineal descent is thus defined in terms of a principle, by which political and economic rights are handed down from one generation of men to the next, at the same time as both women and men, who are born into this patriline, are considered to get their social identity and religious affiliation via their father, father's father, and so on.

As we will see further on, this general image of patrilineal descent does not entirely fit the Igbo situation, even if Igbo society is usually referred to as “patrilineal.” However, before we define the traditional social system of the Igbo – especially the western Igbo – we shall also pay attention to an alternative definition of the social organisation of the Igbo.

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96 Nsugbe 1974, 119.
3.2 Double descent

Many writers referring to the western part of Igboland have paid attention to the system of double descent, which is present in some parts of Igboland. The most well known description is that of Daryll Forde, who in 1950 described the double descent system of the Yakö, who are generally regarded as closely related to the Igbo.

Forde's ethnographic account of the Yakö of southeastern Nigeria gave the first detailed analysis of what he called a 'double unilateral' organisation. After some years, scholars such as Nadel found the existence of double descent among the Nyaro and Tullushi in the Nuba Hills and also among the Kunama of Eritrea. After a short period, the anthropologist G. P. Murdock called attention to the increase in the number of double descent systems; he included in the list of these societies the Nankanse of Ghana, the Venda, Manus, Ontong Java, and Pukapuka. According to Fortes (1953),

One of the most developed systems of this type (double unilineal) is that of the Yakö; and Forde's excellent analysis of how this works shows that it is much more than a device for classifying kin. It is a principle of social organisation that enters into all social relations and is expressed in all important institutions. There is the division of property, for instance, into the kind that is tied to the patrilineal lineage and the kind that passes to matrilineal kin. The division is between fixed and, in theory, perpetual productive resources, in this case farm land, with which goes residence rights, on the one hand, and on the other, movable and consumable property like livestock and cash.

Fortes also explained that there is a 'similar polarity' in religious cult, in which the matrilineal group is 'ritually stronger.' When comparing the mother's brother – sister's son relationship among the LoWiili and the LoDa-gaba, which is a patrilineal society with complementary descent groups and a real double descent system, he discovered that the main variable seems to be the relation to property. As a result of this, he came to see the division of property not as an expression of a principle of social organisation on the same basis as the division in ritual cults, but rather as the main feature around which other distinctions, for instance, nuclear kinship relations, revolve.

The main factor in a double descent system is thus the division of property among the two sets of groups. The phrase 'double descent system' is therefore used for societies in which both patriclans and matriclans are corporate groups in the sense that property is inherited within them.

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97 See Goody 1969, 98.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., 110.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid. 112.
According to the classical definition of double descent (see especially Goody 1961, 1969), descent via two lines is implied. Any individual thus belongs to his father's patriline and to his mother's matriline. Although double descent is supposed to be typical of eastern Nigeria and Igboland, I will show that this definition of double descent does not correspond to the Igbo conception of descent in Asaba society and elsewhere in western Igboland. This is because double descent is seen as a “system in which a person is at once a member both of a patrilineal and matrilineal descent group.”

In this study, I would argue that in Igbo society the system of descent is patrilineal, but, at the same time, there is a division of rights of men and women, which calls for a new term. Rather than referring to the Igbo system as one of double descent, I would like to call it a “dual sex” system. It is seen more as a kind of political system, in which the major interest groups are defined and represented by sex. Within them, “each sex generally managed its own affairs.” Each sex had its own kingship institutions, age grades, secret societies and title societies.

The difference between the right to affiliation in the double descent system (as described by Daryll Forde among the Yakö people east of the Igboland), and the right to religious affiliation in western Igboland was that in the east the right to affiliation goes via women (via the female line), whereas access to political power goes via men (via the patriline). In the western part of Igboland the situation is different. There the right to religious affiliation does not go via the women (freeborn women), but it is the women themselves, as a collective, who by virtue of their female sex have access to religious cults. This could be seen in Forde's work of 1950, where he wrote:

> Every matriclan is associated with a fertility spirit yose (pl. ase). This is embodied in a miscellaneous set of cult objects, including decorated skulls, figurines, helices, and penannular rings of brass and copper and various pots, which are kept on an altar in a miniature house in the compound of the priest and arranged on an adjacent open air altar at public rituals. The successive invocation of the fertility spirits at these shrines constitutes the central act of the village rituals at various stages in the farming year, and the ase, not the ye pundet, spirits of the patriclans, are in native belief the spirits primarily active in maintaining the well-being of the village.

103 Ibid.  
104 See Okonjo 1976, 45-46. This term was first used by Kamene Okonjo, in his paper “the Dual-Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Midwestern Nigeria”. In this paper he made reference to Midwestern Nigeria, which Asaba used to belong to before the creation of new states in Nigeria. But presently, part of the former Midwestern Nigeria, is what made up the current Delta state of Nigeria of which Asaba is the headquarter. So when Okonjo used this term he was referring to the same group of people as I am doing in this thesis. The only difference is that he did not focus on only Asaba town but on all the towns in the western part of Igboland.  
105 Ibid., 47.  
106 Ibid.  
But it should be noted, that in certain matters in Igbo traditional society, men were very important, and, as far as the ancestral cult is concerned, the men were in control because of their patrilineal relationship. However, as far as other aspects of the religion are concerned, the Igbo women were very important because of their link with religious cults.

3.3 Dual-sex organisation in Igbo society

The Asaba Igbo, who will feature as the main subject of research in this dissertation, do not apply double descent. They should rather be regarded as patrilineal, although the classical criteria for patrilineal descent do not fit the Asaba Igbo. Instead, they apply a system of social organisation that Okonjo referred to as a “dual-sex system.”

As can be gathered from this expression the two sexes do not serve as links in one or two chains for access to this or that kind of rights. Rather, the men and the women are granted certain equal rights by virtue of their respective sex. Especially, this means the right to economic decisions, but also political and religious decisions. In all these areas (economy, politics and religion), women and men have their own institutions, where they can make decisions concerning particular economic, political and religious issues. We may call this organisation a “parallel organisation.” By this expression I refer to the fact that women can make their voices heard in their own clubs, title societies, cult societies, and so on, just as the men can discuss corresponding issues in their own associations. The entire society is thus constructed as an organisation of parallel gender institutions.

This implies that the women do not have any men (fathers, brothers or husbands) as their representatives in, for instance, matters of political, economic, or religious importance. The women have their own institutions to settle a number of important issues within these realms. Yet, in terms of descent both women and men reckon their blood relationship via male links only. That is, they apply the patrilineal principle for defining descent from a common ancestor along the patriline. This is also the channel through which the men acquire land to settle on, and to cultivate together with their wives. But in other matters of “economic rights” we have to be more careful in distinguishing between different kinds of economic rights, since some of these are the rights of women, in their capacity as women.

As will be shown in the chapter on economics, the women's authority in economic matters concerns the market and marketing decisions of all sorts. These functions were traditionally organised through a system of “clubs” and female associations, which to a large extent may be regarded as a parallel to the men's organisations.

108 Okonjo 1976, 45-46.
Concerning the rights that Europeans would call “judicial,” these were generally handled within other domains, and regarded as economic rights, religious rights, and so on. Thus, in most cases, such “judicial” rights were part of the business of the male or the female organisations. As such these organisations will be treated in the next chapter. However, some of these “judicial” rights were part of the marriage contract, and thus handled by the representatives of the respective patrilineages, who were regarded as the parties to the marriage agreement.

However, through many of the female associations, the women also had the opportunity to make decisions in moral and political matters. This concerned the moral order and welfare of the local community in particular. But it should be noted that the freeborn women and not the slaves made most of these decisions. Slaves were not allowed to play any important role in the dual-sex system, despite the fact that they themselves were members of these organisations. This is because the slaves were not seen to be part of the descendance of the ancestors of their masters, who felt it was an abomination to include them in important issues concerning the community since they had no link with their ancestors. Nor did slaves have any lineage of their own. They were regarded as commodities of their freeborn ancestors. Hence, slave women were not allowed to play any important role in these organisations.

This is a very important aspect of the social organisation of the Igbo. None of the previous scholars, who have discussed the dual-sex organisation of the western Igbo, have ever mentioned anything about the slave women in the society. They all presented the dual-sex society as if it would have been a system for all groups of the society. However, the dual-sex system with the title organisation was not available for slaves. The full rights implied in the membership in title societies were only available to freeborn members of society.

Even in the religious sphere, the freeborn women had their own societies, but their functions in connection with the life-cycle rituals were of another kind. Such functions were never organised according to the formal pattern of particular clubs or associations, but rather according to women’s roles as mothers, wives, and other family roles.

Nevertheless, we may have a difference between the prominent functions of women in traditional life-cycle rituals, on the one hand, and their diminishing importance in connection with Christian life-cycle rituals, on the other hand.

However, the main difference between women's importance in traditional society, and the role they play in the Christianised society, should be noted in connection with the dual-sex system formed as the base of the parallel organisation in traditional society. It is when the Christianized society is compared with traditional society and its parallel organisation that the women's changing roles come to the forefront.
3.4 Conclusion

The traditional “economic organisation” of the Igbo will be outlined in the fifth chapter, but already we have to conclude that neither of the anthropological labels of “patrilineal descent” or “double descent” would give justice to the women's important roles in social, political, economic and religious matters in traditional Igbo society. In all these realms, women have their own decision-making associations, which parallel those of the men. It is this “parallel organisation” that Okonjo referred to as “dual-sex organisation.”

But it should be noted, that despite the fact that scholars such as Okonjo had treated the dual-sex organisation of the western Igbo, he presented this organisation as if it was for all groups of the society. However, the dual-sex organisation did not afford slave women the same rights as freeborn women. Even if slave women could become members of women’s economic clubs, they could not achieve any titles, or any other respected positions in these associations. The same applied to male slaves. Since neither slave men nor slave women were counted as members of any patrilineage, they were excluded from the possibility to achieve higher ranks.

109 Ibid.
CHAPTER 4
Political Organisation

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I shall explore further the dual-sex dimension of the political and administrative structure of traditional Asaba society. I shall examine the socio-political role of the male organisation and its female counterpart.

In Igbo-land, there are two types of political systems practised by the Igbo on both sides of the Niger. The first is the democratic village republic type of government found among the Igbo living east of the Niger, and the second is the constitutional village monarchy, which is practised by the Igbo west of the Niger and by the riverine Igbo of Onitsha and Ossomali. As mentioned earlier, this system of administration was derived from Benin, from where most of the titles come. Many of these villages have two ruling monarchs – one male and one female. The affairs of both sexes are kept separate; the men manage their own affairs and the women theirs. The Obi or the Asagba, the male monarch, is seen as the father of the whole community, and the Omu, his female political parallel, is seen as the mother of the community. Both types of political systems are characterised by a wide dispersal of political authority among the sexes, lineages and kinship institutions, age grades, secret societies and title societies. Oracles and diviners and other professional groups were traditional instruments of government, although their role differed from place to place.110 These two systems of government lacked a clear demarcation between the judicial, legislative and executive functions, and also between the religious and the political, in the governmental process.111

4.2 Men's political organisation

In many parts of Igbo-land, the political organisation is structured on the village level.112 At the town and village levels, the accepted system of government is direct democracy, and each village is autonomous in matters that

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110 Uchendu 1965, 39.
111 Afigbo 1972, 13-36.
112 Ifemesia 1979, 39.
affect it. In Asaba, as in other parts of Igboland, the town is divided into villages (ogbo or ebo), which are sub-divided into extended families. The families are sometimes further sub-divided into several smaller groups of descendants of the same paternal lineage. In the family structure, each of the family units has its own administrative organisation with a lineage head. Each lineage is divided into a number of sub-lineages. Each of these lineages forms a group of kin-based units known as umunna. This umunna is constituted of children of the same father but different mothers. The umunna consists of various compounds with economically independent households with a man as the householder.

The entire group of the lineage and its dependants recognises the authority of the compound head and will not take any political decision without consulting him. As the head of the compound, he has numerous ritual, moral and legal duties and obligations. He makes sacrifices for the welfare of the people in his compound and helps to settle disputes such as matrimonial problems in the lineage. He also holds the lineage ofo, a staff symbolising the authority of the ancestors, since he is seen as the intermediary between the living descendants of the lineage and the ancestors. Meetings are sometimes held in the compound under the authority of this man. An Igbo proverb describes him as the “eye of his compound members as they are his ears.” He represents his compound members in external dealings with other social groups. Any evil done to members of his compound without his knowledge is seen as a personal attack on him, and he might make reprisals if need be. These compounds are the main seats of traditional authority.

At the lineage level, each lineage no matter the size is subjected to the authority of the okpara of the lineage. All the wives of lineage members and their co-residents are also subjected to his authority. He is the head of the family and the oldest man in the oldest living generation of the family. He holds the ofo (the staff symbolising the authority of the ancestors) of the lineage, which is very significant in the Igbo political system.

Although in Igbo society every male head of every sub-lineage is called okpara, the most significant person in this context is the lineage head. His authority derives from the fact that he is seen as the intermediary between

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113 See Osuchukwu 1995, 25-45, for more information on Igbo family structure.
114 Uchendu 1965, 39-40.
115 Ibid., 40.
116 Forde and Jones 1950, 15.
117 Uchendu 1965, 40.
118 Ibid.
119 Okpara means the same as the Diokpa. He is the oldest man among the oldest living generation in a family.
120 Forde and Jones 1950, 15.
121 Uchendu 1965, 40.
122 Isichei 1969, 422-423; Uchendu 1965, 40.
123 Uchendu 1965, 40.
the ancestors and his lineage. His staff of office, known as the *ofo*, is a branch from a tree called *Detarium elastica.*\(^{124}\) This staff of office is quite different from those of medicine men and priests. The staffs of medicine men and priests are symbols of priesthood, while that of the compound head is a symbol of political authority.\(^ {125}\)

The priestly work of the *okpara* involves the making of sacrifices to the earth goddess (*ala*) for the members of his lineage. The *okpara's* political power is limited and of a presidential nature.\(^ {126}\) He presides over meetings where disputes are settled in his lineage. “He does not normally initiate political actions, but is always aware of what action is planned, for he must give his opinion on the conflict, according to custom and tradition.”\(^ {127}\) An *okpara* is not supposed to interfere in the internal affairs of other lineages. He has the right to punish members of his lineage when they do wrong, but this is limited to sanction, “curing people on his *ofo* – a sanction often threatened but very seldom invoked.”\(^ {128}\) It is his responsibility to take care of the extended family. He also represents his lineage members at the village level.\(^ {129}\)

The succession to the *okpara's* office is applied according to the adelphic principle, where power is passed from the elder brother to the next brother, not to the son. But even then it is not automatic; certain things need to be considered, such as the character of the person in question. Somebody with questionable character will never be chosen, even if qualified by the age-order principle. This is because the personality of the person holding this office determines the effectiveness of the office.\(^ {130}\)

Beyond the family are the village elders. Each village has its own assembly or council, whose members are the family heads or holders of *ofo*. This council of old men, *okpara*, has a very great influence in the village. Since the government at the village level is a pure democracy (that is a democracy for the freeborn, who constitute the majority of the people), all the lineages are involved in the political administration with all the male, freeborn members participating. Each village is autonomous in dealing with its own affairs, and does not tolerate any interference or dictation from other groups.\(^ {131}\) This village assembly or council, known as the council of elders, is responsible for the normal administration of the villages, maintaining law and order, and settling disputes among members of the village. It is also concerned with the deliberative and legislative functions, as well as judicial, adminis-
tative, and executive matters. Their head, the *okparaebó*, represents the village at the community level.

Hence, those rights and responsibilities that in Europe are called “jural,” or “legal,” are subsumed under several other headings, such as economic, religious, or political rights and responsibilities. Many of these rights and duties are, firstly, the responsibility of the *okpara* (local lineage head), and, secondly, that of the village council.

However, since many of the participants in this village council are male elders, who are also title-holders, one might say that male title-holders had the main authority in the traditional legislation – even in issues pertaining to the women. A big exception to this rule was, however, the sphere of trade, which was actively in the hands of women. It should also be mentioned that in many of the so-called judicial matters, various female organisations had an important role to play – even when the marriage agreement was at stake (see further under 4.3). Hence, even in judicial matters, the Igbo used to have a fully parallel organisation.

The village council or elders meet on an *ad hoc* basis in the village hall known as the *ogwa*, in order to discuss various matters ranging from the control and regulation of economic affairs in the village to questions of war, peace and defence. At such meetings, matters are thrown open for discussion. Elders who want to contribute to the discussion are given hearing. At this point, various people within the gathering give their own views. At the end, elders from each lineage in the village go aside for consultation (*izuzu*). The right to participate in this consultation is something which is greatly cherished and respected among the elders. The people chosen are believed to be men of wisdom, prestige and good standing, that is, those who have the ability to understand various schools of thought and who can reach an agreement that will be acceptable to other members. At the end of such a meeting, agreement is reached.

At the town level, as mentioned earlier, the *Asagba* is the highest official and male head of the community. The royal lineages in Asaba supply the *Asagba*. All town officials are appointed by him, and receive the insignia of their office from him. He is seen as a symbol of unity between the villages. The holders of this title are well respected in the community and this title is normally held for life. No two persons can hold the same title, and an *Asagba* cannot revoke a title and confer it on another person. The *Asagba* appoints the members of his cabinet on his own initiative, though he may consult the members of the *Oturaza*. The title of *Asagba* is not hereditary, but is rotated from one lineage to the other.

The *Asagba* is not in any way related to his female political parallel, the *Omu*, nor is he married to her. Both of them are from different parts of the community and they function at different levels.

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132 Akus 1994, 84.
Before the emergence of the *Asagba* title, *Eze* titleholders ruled the community, but with the increase in the number of *Eze*, their prestige declined, and from the nineteenth century, the *Asagba* title was introduced in the community. The holders of this title are elected through vote. Those who consider themselves eligible for this office through seniority in age compete for the title, and the male members eventually choose among them the right person for the post. The *Asagba* has his own cabinet, which is known as the *Asagba’s* cabinet.

![Figure 6. Obi Joseph Chike Edozien. The Asagba of Asaba. Photo: Victoria Ibewuikе](image)

Apart from his cabinet, the *Asagba* also works with another group of titled men called the Asaba traditional council of chiefs or Asagba-in-council. The Asagba-in-council consists of two groups: The *Oturaza* and the *Ichi-okwa*. The *Oturaza* is the governing age group of the town. This group of men assists the *Asagba* in the political, religious, social and administrative procedures and in the maintenance of law and order in the community. These
men are seen as kingmakers because they assist the Asagba in the nomination of traditional chiefs. The men are usually above 60 years of age, and most of them are Alo and Eze titleholders. The Ichio kwa is the previous governing age group who is now retired. They are usually consulted by the Oturaza for advice on serious issues affecting the community. They also act as advisers to the Asagba-in-council.

The Asagba has certain functions in the community; he makes decisions concerning town affairs with the Oturaza council of chiefs and represents the people at the community level. In the judiciary section, the Asagba's palace was the highest court of appeal before the creation of the Asaba native court in 1900, and the system practised then was that of public trial. Before any case was filed, the plaintiff brought kola nuts, tobacco and gin to the leaders of the Oturaza, who then requested the town crier to summon the meeting of the Oturaza at the Asagba's palace. On the day of the trial, the plaintiff, the defendant and their witnesses were expected to be present at the gathering, while the Asagba sat on his throne known as the ukpo-eze, with the rest of the titled men and the audience. The hearings began, and where there were conflicting statements, witnesses were called to testify. When an Asagba wishes to invite the members of his cabinet, the Asaba traditional council of chiefs and the Otu Omu, to his palace, he sends the town crier out to go around the town, indicating that the Asagba wants to see them.

As indicated earlier, the Asagba is aided by the Onoi and the Oloto, who are the Oturaza's chairman and spokesman respectively; they help with the smooth running of the Asagba's government. The Onoi also holds the ofo of the town, which is the symbol of truth, authority and honesty, and also makes sacrifices to the Asagba's deities (alose), and fines anyone who breaks the law of the town. Among the Oturaza are the Iyase and the Odogwe, who are the warlords. They are regarded in the community as high-ranking military officers and commanders-in-chief of the armed forces. They lead the people in the community when there is war with other neighbouring communities. Apart from this, the Iyase is also regarded as the chief justice of the town. He settles disputes with the other members of the Oturaza, both within and outside the community. As noted by Thomas, in 1914, “he was the mouthpiece of the town both in judicial cases and in communications with other towns; together with the Oturaza he had semi-judicial and semi-administrative powers of dealing with law-breakers.”

Four different groups in the community also assisted the Oturaza: the Ochokoloma, Okwulagwe, Anomno, and Nziza ezi. The Ochokoloma and Okwulagwe are men who have been trained for future civic responsibility in

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134 Thomas 1914, 47.
135 The same individuals who play the roles of the Odogwe and Ezeugbo.
136 Thomas 1914, 40.
the community. They serve as couriers for the *Ichiokwa* and *Oturaza* for a period of ten years, after which they are promoted to *Oturaza*. The *Anomno* is regarded as a junior *Ochokoloma* group, and the *Nźiza-ezi* is the youngest male group in the political administration of the town. They both assist the *Oturaza* and the *Ichiokwa* in their administration of the community.

In addition to the *Oturaza* and *Ichiokwa*, who assist the *Asagba* in the administration of the community, there are often groups of people who contribute in other ways to uphold the political system, such as the *Kandum*. The *Kandum* is a group of retired *Ichiokwa*; these are men over 80 years of age. They are regarded as men who “sit tight expecting death.” These men no longer take part in the activities of the town but can offer useful advice to the *Ichiokwa* and the *Oturaza* in matters of importance, because of their wisdom.

This all-male political organisation in the community decides issues such as the political administration of the town, and makes sure that all laws affecting the town are kept. In this organisation, slave men have no say in the administration of the community, and women are not allowed to be members. However, the freeborn men, who are members of the organisation, can decide the fate of members these groups.

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137 Men who “sit tight expecting death” in the Asaba expression are simply very old men, who will soon die.
4.3 Women's political organisation

4.3.1 The *Otu Omu*

The Asaba women have their own organisation, which is different from that of the men. The *Omu*, as mentioned above, is the head of the women in the community. She is also an important female official, who is responsible for the market affairs and takes part in the socio-political administration of the community.

The *Omu* has been presented by various anthropologists, sociologists and historians (Thomas Northcote, Henderson, Basden), as the queen of the village or village group, since her political role in the community is parallel to that of the king. But it should be noted that the *Omu* is not a queen in the Western sense. Nor is she the wife of the king or the daughter of a king who died without a male heir. She does not owe her position to any relationship
to the king. She is a woman who has passed childbearing age, and is distinguished by her wealth, intellect and character in the society. She and the Asagba are monarchs with recognised, separate but cognate, functions and duties in the community. The Omu possesses a separate cabinet for government, which answers to her and helps her in her administrative duties. Each time a new Omu is chosen, she must represent a different lineage and part of the village than the previous Omu.

Figure 8. Ogbueshi A. Chizea. The Omu of Asaba. Photo. Victoria Ibomega.

As the female monarch, the Omu's duties are centered on the female side of the community. She has her own cabinet, the Otu Omu, which assists

her in decisions on female affairs. Together with her cabinet, she makes rules which govern the activities of the women in the community. She acts as judge of a law court for all cases involving women, and punishes infractions of traditional laws and customs. But her main role centers on the community market, since trading was a major social and economic function of Igbo women in traditional society. She “starts” the market for the day's transactions and fixes the prices of foodstuffs in the market.

In addition to the *Otu Omu*, the *Otu Umuada* also aids the *Omu*, the daughters of the lineage. This group consists of women born in the same lineage, who, based on their common birthplace, form an organisation known as *Otu Umuada*. They also assist the *Omu* and her cabinet in political and social matters concerning women in the community. Another group of women are the *Otu Inyemedi*. This is the association of all the wives married into a lineage from different villages. This group of women also takes part in the administration of the town. Their head, the most senior wife (by duration of marriage into the lineage), known as the *anasi*, also assists the *Omu* and her cabinet in the political administration of the community. However, in those days slave women were not allowed to be present at the meetings held by the women’s associations. They had no right to important female positions in the community. Nowadays, slave descendants are allowed to be members of such organisations as the *Umuada* and the *Inyemedi*. However, they are still not allowed to take certain positions in these associations, like that of the *Ada-isi*, although they are allowed to vote for new members during elections. Slave women were rather looked down upon by freeborn women. Today, this attitude can still be found among many women who are members of lineages, although slavery was officially abolished many years ago (1833).

### 4.3.2 Social, economic and political functions of the *Omu* and her cabinet

As already mentioned, the *Omu* and her cabinet administered the politics of trade and commerce. They acted as overseers for the community market, and determined the rules and regulations under which the market functioned. They arranged the market in such a way that the traders were grouped according to their commodities. Such an arrangement made buying easier and saved a lot of time for the customers. The *Omu* and her cabinet members fixed the prices of goods. The latter acted as market inspectors and policewomen. Anyone caught selling above the stipulated price was charged and tried by the *Omu* and her cabinet, and punishment was imposed according to the degree of the offence.\(^{140}\) The members of *Omu*'s cabinet directed and supervised all women's affairs, including settling of minor disputes among

\(^{140}\) See Thomas 1914, 187-190; Henderson 1972, 312-313; Okonjo 1976, 48-49.
the market women. Furthermore, the Omu had the main responsibility for making and implementing the rules of the market, and as a result of this, she had a judicial function and interceded for people who had broken the market rules. If the sales of products in the market were slow, the Omu, with the help of her cabinet, performed rituals that were believed to appeal to the ancestors for help. It was also her duty to appoint female titled officials, who worked in the town.

The Omu and her cabinet ensured that market taboos and prohibitions were kept. For instance, women were not allowed to carry things in both hands at the same time, and widows in mourning were not allowed to come to the market or take part in market transactions. Further, it was a taboo to fight in the market when the market was in session, roosters must not crow in the market place, sand must not be collected from the market while the market was on, and the basin must not be covered in the market. Disregard of those taboos was believed by the people to bring about undesirable consequences such as poor attendance at the market, death and epidemics, and unfriendliness from the neighbouring communities. The Omu and her cabinet judged and implemented disciplinary actions against violations of these laws. Punishment such as the payment of fines or being barred from going to the market was imposed on the victim of such circumstances for a period of time. Moreover, the Omu provided important services that affected women as well as other members of the community. But the slave women in the community were not allowed to be members of this cabinet, only the freeborn, still today.

If there was drought and sickness and people were dying, the Omu and her cabinet would walk naked in the night with live brands to curse whoever brought the disease. If there was sickness in a nearby town, they would ensure that the sickness would not enter their town. The Omu and her cabinet made medicines, which they placed at the entrance to the town. These actions had direct links with traditional Asaba beliefs in medicine and magic.

The Omu and her cabinet decided on matters concerning theft, adultery and other types of violation of traditional laws and customs in the market. In cases of complicated marital conflicts in the community, the Omu's assistance was always needed. These days the slave women also seek assistance from the Omu in time of needs, just like the freeborn women in the community.

141 Ibid.  
142 Henderson 1972, 312; Thomas 1914, 187.  
143 Nzimiro 1972, 55.  
144 Okonjo 1976, 49; Thomas 1914, 189.  
145 Okonjo 1976, 49.  
146 Ibid., 50.  
As mentioned above, the transaction of the market in the community could not start until the *Omu* had come and declared it open or sent her messenger. Everybody must wait for the *Omu* to come and place her calabash, take her seat and start the trading, before the market could begin. If anyone in the market sat down before her, she could seize that woman’s calabash or fine her.\(^{149}\) The *Omu* could punish women in the community for non-attendance at the market, and for going to other markets in other towns.\(^{150}\) She and her cabinet also settled political matters that concerned women in the community.

It was the *Omu* and her cabinet who saw to it that the traditional religion was maintained through public enlightenment campaigns. In certain matters the *Omu* and her cabinet were called upon to assist in advising the community. They made sure that all taboos surrounding the *Onishe* such as the selling and eating of *Ogbono* seeds were kept.\(^ {151}\)

It was also the duty of the *Omu* and her cabinet to call the *Umuada* and *Inyemedi* to order if there was any problem between them. They also performed the function of spies of the town, especially in the area of security.\(^ {152}\)

### 4.3.3 The *Otu Umuada*

As mentioned above, in addition to the *Omu* and her cabinet, who represent the whole women’s constituency, there are other political institutions made up of women in the Igbo traditional system that work on a smaller base. Among them are the *Umuada* and the *Inyemedi*, which function on the village or lineage level.\(^ {153}\) Each married Igbo woman has two homes, not just in theory but also in practice. Thus “Women, as a result of the Ibo rules of exogamy, have affiliations of two kinds. They belong as married women to the village of their husband, and, as daughters to the village where they were born.”\(^ {154}\) As a result of this, an Igbo woman will always remain a stranger to the husband’s home, no matter how long she has lived there. These women therefore form a major group as wives in their husbands’ village. This group is known as the *Inyemedi*. Conversely, women stemming from the same village form a group known as the *Umuada*. This applies only to the women who are freeborn, and thus belong to patrilineages in their own home village. The *Umuada* consists of freeborn women who have been scattered because of their marriages, but form a group in their natal village on the basis of their common birthplace. This group convenes from time to time to discuss their

\(^{149}\) Thomas 1914, 187-189; Okonjo 1976, 50; Akus 1994, 215.

\(^{150}\) Thomas 1914, 187, 190.

\(^{151}\) Interview with Obi Michael Nwaodigwe Ofulue, Asaba, July 15, 1994.

\(^{152}\) Interview with Mrs C. O. Okonkwo, Asaba, June 30, 1994.

\(^{153}\) Okonjo 1976, 51.

\(^{154}\) Green 1947, 178.
affairs.\textsuperscript{155} In both these groups, the women formed an \textit{otu}, that is an organisation, giving rise to \textit{Otu Umuada} and \textit{Otu Inyemedi}.\textsuperscript{156}

The \textit{Otu Umuada} is thus a group based on place of birth.\textsuperscript{157} This group is very powerful, and they are feared and respected in the communities.\textsuperscript{158} They control several activities affecting their natal home and ensure the well-being of other daughters of their village. Still today, the women in these associations function as political pressure groups in their natal villages to reach their objectives.\textsuperscript{159} They normally intervene at any point when the constitution of their natal village is violated and they give sanctions to the offenders. Even the elderly people in the community try as much as possible not to have any problems with them.\textsuperscript{160} The formal head of this women's organisation is referred to as the senior \textit{Ada} or the \textit{Ada-ebo}.\textsuperscript{161} She is not appointed by election. The eldest woman in the village automatically becomes the senior \textit{Ada} or \textit{Ada-isi}. Various other officials are appointed among the women and rules are drawn up to govern the conduct of the members at meetings. Members are fined if they are late to a meeting.

The women who are “the daughters of the village” have a higher social position than the \textit{Inyemedi}. They address the \textit{Inyemedi} as “their wives”, which indicates a lower status. The \textit{Otu Umuada} has the right to demand homage or duties from the \textit{Inyemedi}, who then must obey. Between these two groups a spirit of goodwill and sweet rivalry exists.\textsuperscript{162} The slave women in the old days were not allowed to be members of the \textit{Umuada}. In modern

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{155} See Green 1947, 178; Van Allen 1976, 68.
  \item \textsuperscript{156} Okonjo 1976, 51-52; Van Allen 1976, 68.
  \item \textsuperscript{157} Being an organisation of women based on place of birth, the \textit{Otu Umuada} exercises social control among women in Asaba and are seen as the watch-dogs of the community, because they spy on other women. They do not tolerate a nagging, quarrelsome wife. They also preside over the \textit{isa-ifi} ceremony. Their leader is known as the \textit{Ada-isi}.
  \item \textsuperscript{158} Elechukwu and Nnadibuagha 1974, 123; Olisa 1971, 24.
  \item \textsuperscript{159} Okonjo 1976, 52.
  \item \textsuperscript{160} Uchendu 1993, 24.
  \item \textsuperscript{161} Thomas 1914, 49; Okonjo 1976, 52.
  \item \textsuperscript{162} See Okonjo 1976, 52; Isichei 1991, 521.
\end{itemize}
times they are allowed to join the *Umuada*, but they are very few in number compared to the freeborn, who are in majority.

“Meetings,” or in the Igbo rendering “*mikiri*,” were a marked feature of Igbo social life. Thus the *Umuada* meet from time to time to discuss issues concerning their natal village. The *Umuada* women pay membership dues, which are used for various unanticipated events that arise in the village.

The freeborn women also play significant religious roles in the community. They take part in the funeral rites in their natal lineage. During the mourning period for a deceased person they stay with the family of the deceased day and night. They wash the body before laying it in state. They decide how a widow should mourn her husband in their village. They also deal with women who had committed offences against their husbands before death. Although at marriage a woman in Igbo society moves to her husband’s village, at death she must be brought back to her natal home and buried there. Before the arrival of the body, the *Otú Umuada* makes all the necessary preparations and performs the final rites of passage for the deceased. As Van Allen (1976) puts it “the *Umuada*’s most important ritual function was at funerals of lineage members, since no one could have a proper funeral without their voluntary ritual participation…. a fact that gave women a significant measure of power.” This organisation has always provided the Igbo women with solid political power, which was applied in the community. The *Umuada* system functions still today.

Apart from this, the *Umuada* settle intra-lineage disputes between their “brothers” as well as disputes between their natal and marital lineages. As mentioned above, they have the power to discipline disobedient wives in the community. According to Isichei “they are the watchdogs of the community and they, rather than the men, spy on the activities of people, especially their fellow women. They do not tolerate a bad wife in the village and they deal severely with a quarrelsome wife.”

Before a man can take a traditional title in Asaba, the *Umuada* perform purification rites in order to ward off evil spirits. The women assist the *Diokpa* in keeping sanctity in the village. They also feature during social events such as marriage ceremonies. The *Umuada* and the *Inyemedi* usually co-operate with the men on the village level to ensure peace and progress in the community.

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163 Green 1947, 217.
164 Green 1947, 165.
165 Van Allen 1976, 68.
166 See Agbasiere 2000, 40-45, Van Allen 1976, 68; Olisa 1971, 24. Although Agbasiere has not included Asaba in her survey map on p. 11 of her book *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, I used this book because Asaba is within the boundaries of Igboland and Asaba people are from a culturally and linguistic point of view regarded as Igbo, even though they might belong to western Nigeria in terms of ecclesiastical division.
168 Interview with Mrs N. Uraih, Asaba, August 18, 1992.
In the organisation of the *Umuada*, it is the duty of their leader, the senior *Ada* or *Ada-isi*, to convene the meetings of the *Umuada* in the village, and to look into any crucial matter. The senior *Ada* at the village level also interacts with the senior wife in the village in terms of marriage (*anasi*), who is the head of the *Inyemedi*. The two of them meet from time to time to discuss issues concerning the married women in the village.\(^{169}\)

In case of any important message from the members of the *Umuada* to the *Inyemedi*, the head of the *Inyemedi* will convey it to her members. When a member of the *Inyemedi* is misbehaving in the village, their head reports this to the senior *Ada*.\(^{170}\)

The *Umuada* also play a complementary role, in that they support the *Omu* at the town level and serve as helping hands to the *Diokpa* at the village level. They observe and investigate matters arising from the conduct of the *Inyemedi* or *Ikpolo Ogbe*.\(^{171}\) The leader of the *Umuada*, the senior *Ada*, represents the women of her natal village in the *Omu*’s palace.

The *Omu* invites the *Umuada* to represent the women in the village on any important occasion in the community. The *Omu* and the *Umuada* discuss matters of public importance that concern them. They also discuss affairs concerning the women in the town.\(^{172}\)

In addition to their social activities, the *Umuada* also try cases concerning their members. If the case is a serious one they transfer it to the *Omu*. The *Omu* also acts as an intermediary between the *Umuada* and the men in the community.

In case of any serious problem between a wife and her husband or his family, the woman might return home to seek emotional support from her natal home, or express her problems to her fellow *Umuada*. If it is a case that they cannot settle, they usually refer such a person to the *Omu* for help.

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170 Interview with Mrs G. N. Osaji, Asaba, August 2, 1994.
171 The expressions *Inyemedi* and *Ikpolo Ogbe* mean the same and may be used interchangeably in reference to the wives.
172 Interview with Mrs A. Nwaji, Asaba, July 17, 1991.
4.3.4 The *Otu Inyemedi*

The *Otu Inyemedi* is thus the group based on the place of marriage.\(^\text{173}\) It is an association that represents the married women in the village. In Igbo society a woman moves to her husband's village or compound upon marriage, so this group consists of the wives of the localised patrilineage of their husbands.\(^\text{174}\) Consequently, unlike the *Umuada*, membership in this group was based on common residence rather than a common birthplace. Although women in this group maintained close links with their natal villages, they usually participated in this group for their social activities in their husband's home. This group of women were there as wives, and as wives they formed a group within their husbands' village. The group called *Inyemedi* helped to strengthen cohesion and co-operation between the married women, who were a collection of individuals born elsewhere. Some of them were interrelated, having come from the same natal village or extended family. At marriage, an Igbo woman looked forward to becoming a member of the *Otu Inyemedi*, because this provided her with much support while she would be far away from her natal village. This body of married women in a village formed a group for common action in a number of different spheres – in religious and judicial matters and in any matter affecting the interests of them all. They were active participants in the political affairs of the community, although not as active as the *Otu Umuada* association. They ensured the wellbeing of the married women in the community. At their gatherings, the *Otu Inyemedi* took decisions on ways to help other freeborn married women in the village in times of stress or illness, and on ways to keep the markets and the streams in the village clean.\(^\text{175}\) They also held regular meetings to address day-to-day concerns of the married women in the village.

The *Inyemedi* made sacrifices at the shrine of the wife of the founder of the lineage, and during the women's annual religious rites they made sacrifices

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\(^{173}\) *Inyemedi* was a women's association that represented the married women in the village. It organised the wives in a village. Those wives were another instrument of social control in traditional society, but they focused their attention on the other married women around them. They, like the *Umuada*, settled disputes between quarrelling housewives. If any two women became quarrelsome, the *Inyemedi* would seize their cooking utensils until they were called to state the cause of their constant disagreement. After the dispute had been settled, the women were given back their property and the one found guilty was fined. At times, both parties were fined and asked to redeem their property financially, depending on the gravity of the offence. The interesting thing about the seizure of belongings was that by this act, it was reaffirmed that the parties concerned were powerless to obstruct the action of the married women. It was also a warning to the quarrelling women that the time had come for them to stop disturbing the peace of the community. In Asaba, seniority as regards married women is measured by how long a woman has been married. The practise is still current to this day.

\(^{174}\) Van Allen 1976, 68.

\(^{175}\) Okonjo 1976, 53.
at the shrine of the river goddess *Onishe* for the success of their annual religious rites.\(^{176}\) According to Agbasiere,

> Women play a major role in most ritual ceremonies. In virtually every sacrifice of public concern, women – especially as wives (*ndinyom*) – provide most of the items, including eggs, chicken and cooked food, for the ceremonies. Hence they bear most of the expenses involved in ritual ceremonies. Apart from providing the items for sacrifice, women usually take custody of the effigies of female divinities and are responsible for carrying them in procession to the respective shrines during public celebrations. Women are also responsible for cleaning and maintaining public shrines, and for the staging of dances.\(^{177}\)

In some Igbo communities such as the Owerri province, the *Otú Inyemedi*, also called *Otú Atularadi*, had great influence, especially among their fellow members. They tried other women for stealing, for committing adultery, for telling men issues concerning childbirth and for listening to conversations between a man and one of his other wives at night.\(^{178}\) In the community these women had the power to convict, and to levy fines on other women. They normally persisted in their decisions when they were convinced they were right, and might go very far to make sure that their decision, on punishment, was implemented.

The *Inyemedi* also performed purification rituals in the village when a member died, and settled petty disputes among themselves. Cases which could not be handled by them were transferred to the *Omu*.\(^{179}\) Like the *Umuada*, they could punish lazy, recalcitrant, or adulterous husbands. They settled cases relating to adultery and breaches of marriage laws in the village, and offenders were sentenced to punishments to deter from further delinquencies.\(^{180}\) The *Inyemedi* also provided entertainment when a new wife was married and helped with the cooking during festivals in the community. Further, they assisted bereaved family members during periods of mourning.

In some judicial matters the *Omu* would meet with the head of the *Inyemedi* to decide the case. When a member of the *Inyemedi* committed a theft, her fellow members reported the case to the *Omu* and her cabinet, who then imposed a fine on her through the head of the *Inyemedi*. If she refused to pay, the other women in the village would start ignoring her in their common activities. If there was a dispute between the *Otú Umuada* and the *Otú Inyemedi*, the case was transferred to the *Omu* and her cabinet to be settled.

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\(^{176}\) Interview with Mrs N. Okolo, Asaba, June 2, 1991.

\(^{177}\) Agbasiere 2000, 42-43.

\(^{178}\) Meek 1937, 201.

\(^{179}\) Interview with Mrs C. S. Allanah, of Umuaji quarters, Asaba, February 19, 1990.

\(^{180}\) Okonjo 1976, 53.
there. The *Omu* and her cabinet also acted as an intermediary between the *Inyemedi* and the men in the community.181

Before a member of the *Otu Inyemedi* would take a women's title, their leader would inform the *Omu* and her cabinet for their approval.182 At the beginning of the dry season, when the women had their annual religious rites, the *Inyemedi* in all the villages danced to the *Omu's* palace to pay homage to her. All members of this group in the community also attended meetings convened by the *Omu*.

Thus, we can see that the women in traditional Igbo society had their own socio-political organisation, which was parallel to that of the men in the community. There was also a sexual division of labour in the political organisation in traditional society, which was different from the Church life. In traditional society both the men and the women in the political organisations took care of their own affairs separately; decisions in these organisations were made by these groups, but in the organisations in the Church for both men and women, it is the men who make most of the decisions concerning the groups. There were traditionally different societies, where women had their own power, and these societies gave women a say in the political and religious organisations. All this was due to the dual-sex organisation, or the “parallel organisation.”

We can also see that just as the men had their particular clubs and associations for political decisions, the women also had theirs. When it came to political matters, the women were more outspoken than in the mixed organisations of the Church. Yet, in traditional society, the concern for individual achievement is apparent from the fact that it is important for any ambitious individual to achieve higher titles and values, no matter if this individual is a man or a woman.

However, the achievement of higher titles was more important for men than for women, who didn't have such a wide-ranging supply of prestigious titles as the men did. The women's associations had the function of arranging for social order and moral (and economic) support, rather than that of providing personal prestige.

4.4 Slaves and the slave-born: *ohu*

In the social structure of Asaba, slaves and the slave-born, *ohu,*183 were people who were captured in war or purchased. In traditional Asaba society, their kinsmen saw people who committed crimes as an abomination, *alu.* Such people were sold out of the community. This group of people, *ohu,*

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183 See Horton 1954, 311-335, for further information on slaves, *ohu,* in Igbo society.
constituted a large number in Asaba. Traditionally in Asaba society, it was a sign of wealth to purchase a slave, and individual wealth was measured in terms of the number of slaves that a person had purchased. In different villages in Asaba the status and rights of slaves would differ, and also the discrimination against them.

In traditional Asaba society, slaves were used for the burial of titled men, such as Eze. During that period, the economic life of Asaba rested on slave labour. The slaves were used in farms and at home for domestic work. This institution of slavery continued in Asaba even after the abolition of the slave trade. It was not until the missionaries came with the help of the Royal Niger Company that slavery was finally abolished. As indicated above, the freeborn were not allowed to marry slaves – this was strictly forbidden. Any freeborn male or female in traditional Asaba society who violated this rule of social order would be forced to leave their family and settle separately. Traditionally, the slaves were not allowed to hold any important post in the community or represent the community in any important event. According to one of my informants, the slave women suffered more than the men in the sense that, in any social or political gathering, which related directly to tradition, they could hardly make a contribution, unlike the men, who sometimes contributed. The women were always silent for fear of being disgraced.

The differences between the freeborn and the slaves in the community were retained by caste endogamy; slaves were only allowed to marry slaves. During the colonial era in Asaba, even though slaves took part in the new organisations formed by the educated elites in the town, and held high offices in them, they were still not allowed to hold offices in the traditional political system of the town, or to take titles associated with these offices.

In regard to the Umuada and the Inyemedi, the relationship between the freeborn and the slaves was such that any freeborn woman in the community was eligible to be the Ada-isi of the village ogbo, while a woman from the slave class was not eligible. This was because of the ritual roles that the Ada-isi performed in a lineage. But the slave woman might be allowed to take part in all the social activities, which involved the women in the village, and also be a member of the clubs in the community. The office of Ada-isi of the village was also given only to a freeborn of that village, and the same was applicable to the office of Omu. A woman from the slave class could never be selected by the oracles to be the Omu of Asaba. Again this was because of the ritual roles and sacrifices, which the Omu performed in the community. A woman who was a slave, or slave-born, could not perform such a role in the community. Still today, the descendants of slaves do not have the rights to be leaders of any of the traditional associations or clubs.

184 Ibid. 317-319.
Among the *Inyemedi* there were also freeborn and slaves, although the slaves were few. This was because there were few people of slave descent in the population, and also because they were not allowed to marry freeborn men in the community. In recent times, people in the young generation of Asaba have started to intermarry, but still, a woman from the slave class was not allowed to be the leader of the *Inyemedi*, nor *Ada-isi* or *Omu*. To a certain extent, this depends upon the ritual roles that she performed in the village, and also upon the popular belief that a leader of such an important group must be chosen among the freeborn.

In Asaba traditional society, both the freeborn and the slave women were engaged in economic activities; both parties were involved in the cultivation of land and in the marketing of goods in the market. Apart from this, both the freeborn and the slave women were allowed membership of some clubs.
in the community. But the right to speak up in the society was only for the freeborn women; the slave women were not allowed to raise their voices in the community because of their social status.

Further, only the freeborn women were allowed to take titles in the community. Slaves were not allowed to take any significant title because of the ritual ceremonies involved in these titles. In accordance with the system of hierarchy in traditional Asaba society, the slaves were seen as the lowest in the society. They had no significant position in the community and, since they felt humiliated in a society where rank was so important, most of them were not happy with the way they were treated.
5.1 Cultivation

The Igbo are mainly subsistence farmers. Even people whose major occupation is seen as trading, own and cultivate land. In areas of densely populated and scarce land, subsistence crops, such as cassava and yams, are grown as the main staple food.\(^ {185}\) Yams are grown in the months of March, April or November, in 1-3 feet mounds, which are 3-5 feet across. The tubers of the yams are harvested without distribution, in order to get a secondary growth of small tubers, which are usually used for the next planting season. Generally, the crops are kept on wooden racks, away from the heat of the sun, in yam barns, known as *oba*.\(^ {186}\) In most of the overpopulated areas, cassava is grown as the staple food because it grows continuously and survives in poorer soils. Other, subsidiary crops that are planted, and which are of significance, are beans, maize, cocoyams, gourds, okra and peppers.\(^ {187}\)

Shifting cultivation was practised after a growing period of one to two years with three to four years of fallow. But in some parts of Igboland east of the Niger (in places like Okigwi and Umueke), the period of cultivation is farming of one year, and two of bush fallow, because of lack of enough land for cultivation due to overpopulation.\(^ {188}\) Both men and women carry out cultivation. The men clear and make the land ready for cultivation. They plant yams, cut the stakes and take care of the yam vines and the barns. The men also do the tying of the harvest. Women also plant different kinds of yam, weed and carry yams from the farm.\(^ {189}\) In some parts of Igboland, the men harvest the palm fruit, tap and sell palm wine and palm oil produced by the women, while the women keep and sell the kernels from the palm.\(^ {190}\)

Despite the fact that both sexes are engaged in farming work, the men are responsible for the most difficult tasks such as burning the ground for new farms, and fencing, while the women are engaged in preparing the soil for planting, hoeing and digging. The women also market the farm products.

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\(^ {185}\) Forde and Jones 1950, 13.
\(^ {186}\) Ibid.
\(^ {187}\) Ibid.
\(^ {188}\) Forde and Scott 1946, 71-72.
\(^ {189}\) Forde and Jones 1950, 13.
\(^ {190}\) Ibid.
The division of labour between the sexes varies, depending on the significance of other activities. The old men and women are engaged in agricultural work, while the young ones travel to the cities to secure work in the big trading firms. Old women are also engaged in certain decision-making concerning production in the household. Slaves were also used previously as labour force in the farms.

The clan jointly owned the land, although presided over by the oldest man in the clan, the Okpala Ebo. In distinction to other African cultivators, who apply a system of long fallows, the Igbo cultivate the land on a more permanent basis. This means that while other African cultivators had to leave their plots for many years before they could return to them, the Igbo cultivator was able to stay and cultivate the same plot year after year, decade after decade. This was possible on account of the fertile soil in the Niger Delta. This in turn may have contributed to the weakened influence of collective control of the land and of personhood. Or, as James writes about a similar development on the slopes of Kilimanjaro in Tanzania: What was “ours” becomes “mine.”

Each wife in the family has her plot of land, where she cultivates food for herself, her children and her husband. The family head also has his own plot of land, which he cultivates jointly with his wives. The products from this farm are distributed among the wives, while the women sell the remaining crops.

The society is highly patriarchal, in the sense that (a) males are more appreciated as children (b) men decide over women, who keep quiet in the presence of men, and the most respected farmer is a polygynist. In the polygynous family, each wife has the right to live in a separate house, provided by the husband, and to have personal property such as food supplies and domestic equipment. Each wife in the family brings up her own children, and all the wives have equal rights and obligations in the family. Each of the wives prepares food for her husband in turns. The length of the time and the period he stays with her varies.

During the period of cultivation, the head of the house and all his wives are engaged in farm work. Each of the wives has her own rights and duties in the cultivation of the plot, and one wife cannot control the farm labour of the others. Each of the wives has equal rights with regards to her husband. In the farm, it is the man who tells the wives what he wants them to do.

Having many children is valued, especially sons, as sons replace fathers and perpetuate the lineage. Apart from the prestige that goes with “a large

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191 Ibid.
193 James 1971, 63.
195 Ibid.
compound,” having many wives and many children also makes it easier for the Igbo man to work in the farm and assures a bigger harvest.

Just like the men, the women also grow maize and various kinds of beans. They raise a large number of vegetable foods. These make up the principal family diet all year round. Women also collect semi-wild food-plant products and cultivate small groves of banana and plantain in their village gardens, which are close to the household compounds. They prepare and store products from all these plants for future household use and for trade. During the period of heavy agricultural work, a larger work force can be summoned. Women from other extended families are invited to take part in the cultivation and planting, as well as in the harvesting of the crops. This is done in order to quicken the agricultural process. At such occasions, food is cooked for the invited guests, and drinks are served.

Igbo women also keep domestic animals, and make money by selling the offspring of these animals. Some women work for other, richer families, and get paid in cash or in kind. In many cases, it is the women who bear the support burden of the family.

In certain parts of Igboland, such as Asaba, the rural economy is upheld by both males and females, but as already mentioned, the market is mainly a female affair, which is controlled by the head of the women of the town, the Omu.

“The manufacture of pottery and its sale were nearly always in the hands of women” according to Forde and Jones. In the south, women also do most of the petty trading, like men from the northern part of Igboland, such as Ikwo and Ezza in the Abakaliki area of Ogoja Province and Isu. Other types of industries managed by women, especially in the Asaba area, were cloth weaving and native pomade, ude aku. In the case of cloth weaving, this was done by women on hand looms. The cloth produced from the hand looms was called aguba, the traditional cloth worn on ceremonial occasions. It has a white background with decorated borders and patterns all over. It is similar to the akwete woven in some parts of Igboland. Up till today, the industry is still very much alive as before, and the act of weaving is still the occupation of women.

5.2 Marketing and selling

In the past, the business of buying and selling goods in Igboland took place in the open. There was no shop or room allocated permanently for the sale of commodities. But nowadays, there are various shops and stalls in the markets. They are now popular and the people are responding to this new fashion of attractions and advantages. As noted by Basden:

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196 Forde and Jones 1950, 14.
It has led, among other innovations, to great numbers of young men “setting up in trade” for themselves, where, before, they had no interest in buying or selling. Now, they proudly advertise the fact that they are “traders” by profession. Seldom, in the old days, did men concern themselves with market affairs; they were regarded as pertaining to women rather than men. The goods offered for sale were mostly connected with the domestic side of the household, and the wives were chiefly responsible for this.\textsuperscript{197}

In Igboland, even the smallest village has a market place called \textit{afia}, while big towns have many. In places where there are different quarters, each quarter has its market place. Each of those quarters holds its own market at a particular day; according to the four Igbo market days’ \textit{Ekke}, \textit{Oye} or \textit{Otile}, \textit{Afo}, and \textit{Nkwo}. In some places, instead of having the market every fourth day, the market day is held every eighth day.\textsuperscript{198} The local market is always for the buying and selling of goods by the inhabitants of the village, while the central markets are meeting-grounds for people from different towns around. In most cases, this market is situated on a highway that links many towns. The attendance at this market is usually higher than at the local ones.

As women are the ones who do most of the market transactions, they are always at the forefront when discussions about market affairs are conducted, and the market is under their control. They normally exert that control when there is a dispute among the people or when there is a failure to observe certain rules relating to the market. Women dominate the situation to such an extent that it could be said with a fair measure of truth that “trade” in the Ibo country is in the hands of the women.\textsuperscript{199}

In most parts of Igboland, women spend part of the day in the market. A woman goes to the market daily, whether she wants to sell or buy. This is because the market place is regarded as a place of entertainment in the life of the village. In the market she meets her friends, she can hear the latest news of the day and gossip with her friends. To be deprived of this right has always been seen as a hardship in Igbo communities.\textsuperscript{200} Going to the market also gives the women an opportunity to escape temporarily from their daily household and family routine.

In some places, certain women prefer to go to markets that are far away from their own village, for their own private reasons. In such cases, the women may walk to and from the market for hours, while spending only one or two hours on their market transactions. In small villages, the market does not open for transactions until sunset.

The government of these markets is controlled by certain privileged women, who dictate to the other women the rules and regulations to be applied in the market. All questions that come up are taken to the trade com-

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{197} Basden 1938, 334.
\item\textsuperscript{198} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 335.
\item\textsuperscript{200} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
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mittee. One of the members of this committee is chosen as president of the council and she is known as the Omu (queen), as indicated earlier.  

As already mentioned, this council used to deal with all the offences committed in the market, such as theft or assault; it fixed prices and fined anybody in the market who broke the rules. According to Basden, the council:

... prescribes the rate of cowries exchange, what markets shall be associated with them and it exercises its authority in other directions as demands arise. Also, it decrees what articles are forbidden entrance to the market under tabu law, if any. A prohibition of this nature is largely influenced by the patron alusi of the market. This ruling is not often brought into operation, but the council has the right to act when they feel justified.

So all the rules and regulations, which were observed in the market, were made by this council of women.

Small articles, such as soap bars, cloth, reels of cotton, and matches, are sold in the market. In larger markets, certain plots are given to special merchants; for instance those who sell yams, meat, palm oil, cloth, and some other goods or commodities have their own separate areas. This section is known as *odu*. This kind of arrangement makes it more convenient for both the dealers and the buyers in their transactions. The grouping of sellers of the same item also enables the buyer to choose the best commodities, and the presence of so many dealers, all anxious to sell the same item, makes for equality of price. For the traders, it becomes difficult for one dealer to undercut the prices of her goods in outstanding ways that will be resented by others dealing with similar commodities. For a seller from one *odu* to leave her place in order to occupy another was a very serious offence in the market. In the smaller markets these kinds of arrangement do not exist, and there is no order. The normal practice is that those who come early will take any place they like and display their commodities. The latecomers will try to squeeze themselves in wherever they can find some space. In this kind of setting, there is not much space left for the buyers to move around. The crowds in the market move around slowly, looking at the things that are displayed. Some of these things are put in shallow baskets, while some are placed on banana leaves.

In most Igbo markets, there are no standard prices. Both the buyer and seller usually haggle until they agree on a price. The commodities are left without advertisement; the women will sit and wait for the customers to make the advance. It is after this that the women start bargaining and, in the
end, a satisfying conclusion is reached by the buyer and the seller.\textsuperscript{205} In previous times, the difference between the price first suggested for an article and its sale price might have been as much as three hundred percent. Today, there is still a difference. Both the seller and the buyer are still very skilful in the act of price-cutting. Most women are very good at this. One important rule, which all traders observe, is that while a buyer stops before one dealer, no matter how long she bargains with the first trader, rival traders must not make any attempt to invite the customer to their stalls. A trader is free to extract any price, however high, from a customer, as long as the customer agrees to it; if the seller and buyer cannot come to an agreement, the next seller is also free to reduce her own price considerably below that of her rival.

In the process of their bargaining, both the seller and the buyer bring a variety of tricks and shifts into play in obtaining a price, which is considered mutually favourable. For instance, advice jokes might be exchanged, and sometimes prescriptions are given for ailments. But a gesture indicating that the buyer is to leave used to be a demarcation on the part of the seller that the lowest acceptable price to her has been passed because of her confidence and trust in the buyer. These are also techniques that play a significant role in deciding the final price of an item. The skill of the customer in bargaining may sometimes influence the seller to go below her stated minimum price. Sometimes superstitious beliefs, such as, if a woman misses the first buyer for the day, she will continue to miss other customers for the rest of the day, or the belief that by selling at a lower price to the first buyer one would attract more customers, and so on, may influence the seller to go below her minimum price for the item in question.

Previously, most of the buying in the market was done with local currency, such as cowries, manilas and brass rods, depending on the area where the market was located.\textsuperscript{206}

As we can see, in the past, women did most of the trading in Igbo communities.\textsuperscript{207} Most of the women sold their own products, apart from those of their husbands. The women kept most of the income received by the selling of these commodities. They had the right to keep their own cash separately from that of their husbands, and this made most women in the traditional Igbo societies economically independent from their husbands. This, in turn, gave them the power to act independently from the wishes of their husbands. This was one of the factors that gave Igbo women the power to act on their own, when rioting against the imposition of taxation by the colonial administration in 1929. This is what happened at the well-known Aba women's riot, which we are going to see later on in this book.

\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{206} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{207} Forde and Jones 1950, 14.
5.3 Women's economic clubs

In Igboland as well as in other parts of Nigeria, businesswomen in the old days always got together in unions in order to control the supply and price of the goods they sold. These unions provided guidelines to all the women in the same trade and enabled them to control the prices of their commodities. In traditional Igbo society, women engaging in the same trade helped each other to develop a good economic standing by means of what was called *osusu,* or contribution club. At certain occasions, the members of such a club would pay money in order to contribute to some member's business development. Before the contribution started, all the women in the club would agree on the amount of money to be contributed, and the ways in which the payment should be made, and all the members would note this. The members of the contribution “club” would benefit in turns from this economic assistance. This kind of economic club is important in building a group solidarity and friendship among the members.

Furthermore, various women trading in the same goods would organise themselves in guilds. In such a case, each guild had its own officers, and new members of the guild were always welcome, provided they paid their monthly or annual dues. The executive members of the guild regulated the prices and settled all disputes affecting members of the guild, and also those between sellers and customers. Each member of a guild worked hard to better its line of trade and to assist the fellow members.

In addition to the guilds, there were also economic clubs functioning as co-operatives. In this kind of club, the members might have the opportunity to borrow money from the club. After a certain period of time, this money must be paid back to the co-operative with a certain amount of interest. One of these co-operatives was known as Association of Indigenous Business women.

Apart from these co-operative societies, there were also some economic clubs that assisted women who were about to start trading, and who wanted to learn the techniques of a certain kind of trade from some more experienced women. After a certain period of time, the apprentice would be given economic assistance so as to start her own trade. These economic clubs still exist today.

5.4 Inheritance and authority after the father's death

The custom of inheritance in Asaba community was the same as that found in other parts of Igboland. The eldest son in the family was heir to the property, but where there was more than one wife, the first sons of the other wives might get bigger or smaller shares, which in some cases might be part
of the bride wealth paid for the marriages of their own blood sisters. It is important to note that the first-born son in a family might not necessarily be the son of the head wife or first wife (anase). He might be the son of the third wife of a man but the eldest by birth.

The eldest son in a family took the position of his father. His younger brothers sought his advice and asked him for permission to marry. His daughters, if mature, would bring their fiancés to him. In cases where the children of the deceased father were young, they lived with their big half brother, thus the heir, in his own house, and he provided for them. When the boys got big enough to marry, he would pay bride wealth for them. If the father had left too many small children behind, the heir might send them to their mother's relatives.

Like in other parts of Igboland, the heritable property in Asaba were of two major types: (i) “land, fruit-trees, and dwellings, all of which can be referred to as immovable property; (ii) personal effects, clothes and ornaments, and other forms of goods such as utensils, furniture, and livestock, all of which can be described as movable property.”

In Asaba, as in other parts of Igboland, residence was virilocal. Young people grew up with their father’s kin group, and, if male, would reside permanently in its territory. As a result of this, the first land right which mature male members of an Asaba patrilineage had was the right to the land in their village dwellings. This land was the land used for building. This piece of land was commonly owned by the whole patrilineage but under the control of the okpara, the eldest man in the lineage. Any mature male member of the lineage had the right to build on the patrilineage land and to reside there permanently. As Nsugbe observes:

If he dies without a son, any male member of his patrilineage a brother, a brother's son, a half-sibling, or half-sibling's son, or a close patrikin member, can take over the hut if it is still standing, or he can build a house there, on the vacant space. Where there are sons, the right passes to the eldest. This is the theory. In practice the occupation of a dead man's hut is never immediate; a period of time may elapse before permanent reoccupation can be effected. This is particularly true where ritual observances in the honour of the deceased are waiting to be fulfilled. Sometimes, the hut is neglected and allowed to fall apart, particularly where the deceased left no heir, but later on any other male member of the patrilineage can build on the spot.

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208 Thomas 1914, 127.
209 Ibid.
210 Forde and Jones 1950, 21; Thomas 1914, 127.
211 Thomas 1914, 127.
212 Nsugbe 1974, 86.
213 Ibid., 86-87.
As in other Igbo communities, the rights to build on the land were patrilineally inherited in Asaba. A female child of a deceased person was never allowed to inherit the father's property, neither the immovable, nor the moveable property, not even today. However, the bereaved sons do not inherit equal shares, not even today. As already mentioned above, the largest share of the property goes to the eldest son, while the youngest son gets the smallest. Sometimes, if the son of the deceased is too young to control his father's property, the eldest brother of the deceased acts as regent, but gives the whole property back to the heir when he becomes older.

In the traditional society of old, a woman had the right to manage her own property. The Igbo custom recognised such rights both before and after marriage. For instance, the property a woman acquired before her marriage did not pass to her husband after marriage. She had full authority over her property and she could dispose of it at her own will. When she died, her children had the right to inherit her property. Her account was separate from that of her husband and both could loan money from one another with some interest. As noted by Talbot:

> In default of sons, a brother, usually the eldest, but sometimes the next junior to the deceased, heir to the estate. In either case the chief beneficiary, in assuming the headship of the house, accepts the main responsibility as regards the maintenance of all its members; he steps into the duties as well as the privileges of his predecessor. The property may be said to be left to him in trust for the family, and is rarely regarded as personal; everyone in the house has a claim on it.

Usually, the heir, who might be the eldest son of the deceased, or the brother, used to take over the property of the deceased, including his wives. He might have all of them, but, in most cases, he gave some wives to the other men in the family, who had contributed to the deceased man’s dowry. If the widows were old women, they would remain quietly as members of the new compound under the care of the owner, without being disturbed.

As Basden (1938) observes:

> The heir not only succeeds to his father's property; with it, he inherits his father's liabilities and, also, any which may have come down from his grandfather or even earlier ancestors. The settling of ancient debts, perhaps three generations old, is a very intricate business, and the new owner may find himself in an undesirable and, possibly, critical position owing to his being

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214 Forde and Jones 1950, 21; Talbot 1969, 677; Basden 1938, 267-268.
215 Talbot 1969, 677.
216 Ibid., 686.
217 Ibid.
218 Basden 1938, 268.
suddenly confronted with a debt contracted by his grandfather, the repayment of which has not become easier by lapse of time.\textsuperscript{219}

Formerly, debts were paid in kind, but at the present time, they are paid in cash.\textsuperscript{220}

Sometimes, during the distribution of the property of the deceased, there were disputes among the family members about the ways and manners in which the property should be distributed. When a dispute arose, it would be settled at the time when the second burial rites\textsuperscript{221} were performed.\textsuperscript{222}

Only the freeborn people had the right to inheritance, whereas the slaves were not allowed to inherit their master's property after his death.

\section*{5.5 Summary}

Although women did not inherit productive resources or goods, they had a considerable power of decision when it came to marketing and selling, as we have seen. This power was partly organised through economic clubs, such as the association of Indigenous Business Women.

The difference between slaves and free-born in matters of inheritance was as follows: only the children of free-born individuals inherited their parents' properties after death, while slaves had no rights to inherit the properties of their masters after their death.

The rights of slave women, who belonged to the various economic clubs of the women, were not matched by their minimal influence in these clubs. They had the right to speak for themselves, but never used this right.

Hence, if free-born, a woman used to have a considerable economic independence in relation to her husband, brothers and father in traditional society. This is still the case.

But a woman who was a slave did not have a corresponding freedom in relation to her master or any male person. Nor did she feel free to speak in the women’s clubs, even if she was a member. Hence the change brought about by the mission had different implications for free-born women and slave women.

\textsuperscript{219} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{220} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{221} Second burial rites were the rites performed in order to enable the deceased to reach his destination in time after death. This custom was motivated by the religious belief among the Igbo that when a person died, instead of making a straight journey to the spirit world, he or she wandered around the earth too long before resuming his journey to the spirit world. In some parts of Igboland this custom exists, still today.
\textsuperscript{222} Basden 1938, 268.
CHAPTER 6
Religious Organisation

6.1 Belief System

In Igboland there is a belief in a supreme God called Chukwu, who in some parts of Igbo community is also called Chineke, Osebulowa, or Obassi. The Igbo believe that Chukwu gives rain and controls all aspects of their lives, and that he is the source from which individuals get their chi or soul. Chukwu is seen as the father of Anyanwu, the sun god, Igwe, the sky god, Amadi oha, the god of lightning, and Ala, the goddess of earth and fertility. Chukwu has no shrine or cult symbols, but he is reached through the lesser gods, who are referred to as his intermediaries. People make prayers and petitions through these lesser gods to the Supreme Being Chukwu with sacrifices and offerings.

The sun god (Anyanwu) is seen as the god of fortune, wealth, and enterprises. In most homes in Igboland, the shrine of this god is found, and sacrifices are made to it.

The Igbo also believe in the existence of ancestral spirits. The ancestors (ndichie) are regarded as invisible members of the community who guard and protect everyone’s affairs. They are believed to be present with the people and to take part in their activities in the community. In traditional religion, these ancestors were seen as the closest links from human beings to the spirit world. Even though the belief in ancestral spirits is part of traditional religion, many people keep this belief even after Christianisation. Accordingly, the Igbo pay homage to the ancestral spirits.

The ancestral spirits are believed to have enhanced powers, which they use to protect the interests of their families, in which they will eventually reincarnate. They are also believed to act as intermediaries between God and members of their families and to intercede with the lesser gods between man and the Supreme Being (Chukwu). The Igbo believed that the Supreme Being could never be reached directly, except as a last resort when prayers

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223 Forde and Jones 1950, 25.
224 Ibid.
225 Ibid.
226 Ibid.
227 Uchendu 1965, 102.
228 See Meek 1937, 66; Nsugbe 1974, 102.
through the intermediary failed to get them the required favour. This could been seen clearly in Achebe's classic novel, Things fall Apart, where the white missionary Mr. Brown accused Akunna of carving wood and giving all his worship to the false gods. Mr. Akunna replied: “That is not so. We make sacrifices to the little gods, but when they fail and there is no one else to turn to we go to Chukwu. It is right to do so. We approach a great man through his servants.”

Among the Igbo, there is also a belief in the reincarnation of the deceased and that of the incarnation of evil spirits in children. These beliefs are universal among the people. It is believed in most parts that when a person dies, he reincarnates in one or more of his descendants or relatives, but that it is not the whole person who is reborn, only his characteristics and physical appearance. People believe that it is the right of all freeborn persons to be reborn, and that it is the fault of that person if the benefit is lost. This right can be forfeited as a result of bad behaviour in this world and the world beyond. There are some children who are said to reincarnate as ogbanje. These are wicked children “who, when they died, entered their mothers' wombs to be born again.” These children are said to have died at a young age without any previous illness in order to punish their parents. This has been explained by Isichei, who writes:

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Certain Igbo beliefs attempt to provide an explanation of imperfectly understood natural phenomena. An interesting example is the concept of the Ogbanje. This is a wicked spirit, which takes the form of a beautiful child. He is constantly reborn in a family, and constantly dies, tormenting the unfortunate parents.

These children are believed to be born of the same mother and to have decided beforehand themselves when they will die, especially when they do not like the family. The diviners usually detect these children. They are normally given marks after death in order to make it possible to discover if it is the same child who reincarnates again after birth. The motive behind this is to stop such children from reincarnating again, after death.

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229 Achebe 1958, 126-127.
230 Basden 1938, 286.
231 Cf Mbiti 1969, 85.
232 Basden 1938, 286.
233 See Basden 1938, 282-283; Isichei 1976, 26; Achebe 1958, 54.
234 Achebe 1958, 54.
235 Uchendu 1965, 102; Metuh 1981, 76.
236 Isichei 1976, 26.
237 Thomas 1914, 20.
6.1.1 Traditional medicine

There is also a widespread belief in traditional medicines and charms. These are called ogwu. Such medicines are used to cure the sick and to protect people in the communities. They are believed to work for those who perform the proper ceremonies of becoming the holders of these medicines and who stick to the taboos surrounding them. Some of these medicines are regarded as good, while some are believed to be bad. The good ones are those which are socially acceptable and are used for cure, while the bad ones are those that are socially unacceptable and are believed to be used to cause misfortune and injury in the community. Most of the medicines are made from herbal mixtures and some are associated with ritual formulas designed to generate powers from nature.

Furthermore, in Asaba traditional society, women (freeborn) featured prominently as “herbalists,” bonesetters, mental health therapists, and, above all, traditional birth attendants. They used vegetables, herbs, animals and mineral substances for cures. An herbalist or medicine-woman in the community was called dibia ogwu. She was seen as a physician, psychotherapist, and protector against evil forces, a spirit healer and supplier of means of realising a person’s aspirations. She was consulted in cases of illness, which were believed to be caused by supernatural forces, and also to prepare medicine for the sick, protective medicines for groups or individuals, and medicine against enemies.

In Asaba society as in other Igbo communities, medicine, ogwu, includes not only herbal mixtures but also magical objects, incantations, and rites, which have the power to cure. Igbo traditional healers or herbalists are believed to be called into the profession by the patron spirit of diviners and medicine men known as agwe. Before a freeborn man or woman can become a traditional healer or herbalist, he or she goes through a long and intensive period of training. During this period, the man or woman lives with a professional traditional healer, who teaches the person the ways to make and administer various kinds of herbal cures. Apart from this, the applicant is also taught the different kinds of rites and incantations which can be used for healing. This training continues until the professional healer feels sure that the applicant is qualified to become a traditional healer and to practise on his or her own. At this stage, the applicant is given a sort of certificate that he or she holds.

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238 Metuh 1987, 222.
239 Ibid.
240 Ibid.
241 A herbalist is a person who has a profound knowledge of herbs. A herbalist in traditional Asaba society believed that the effectiveness of the herbs depended partly on their medicinal, partly on their spiritual qualities, and used prayers to assist in the healing process.
242 See Metuh 1985, 162-163.
243 Green 1947, 55.
244 For further information on this, see Metuh 1985, 162; Green 1947, 55.
she is qualified to practise as a native doctor. This profession is usually inherited either from father to son or from mother to daughter, or from senior relatives to younger ones, but there are also a few people who are believed to have been called by spirits or ancestors into the profession.

A traditional Asaba healer or medicine woman not only treated a person's disease. She also attempted social, economic and psychological therapy. She employed the cultural, social, magical and physical environment of the patient.

Some women healers specialised in administering simple cures for childcare. The most famous women healers in the community were, and still are today, those specialising in issues relating to barrenness and birth complications.

In Asaba society, some of the women healers in the old days were elderly women who had reached the age of menopause. They were always surrounded by young girls who helped them. Not all female traditional healers practised full time, only a few consecrated ones. Both full and part time female healers were not only very knowledgeable about the pharmacopoeia of plants. They had an exact and extensive understanding of the nutritional and practical uses of plants and wild fruits. Some traditional women healers in Asaba used not only plants but also animal blood, feathers, oil, bird's beaks, dung, etc., as necessary ingredients for therapy.

As traditional birth attendants they were socially integrated in their community, from which they acquired their skills after years of apprenticeship. But while their indispensable and central role in the country's health delivery system was recognised, efforts are now made to educate them to handle surgical intervention and other complications of pregnancy.

The procedure for medical consultation under the indigenous health-care system is always determined by the nature and the seriousness of the patient's sickness. In Asaba, chronically ill and incapacitated patients, such as those affected by leprosy and mental illness, used to stay with the practitioners until recovery and, in some cases, practitioners attended to a patient in the patient's home. A traditional female healer, capable of treating complicated cases, is always a person of integrity, and her home is always large enough to allow room for patients and the relatives who need accommodation.

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245 Green 1947, 53; Mbiti 1969, 166-167; Metuh 1985, 162.
247 Interview with Mrs. B. Nwamu, of Umuonaje quarters, Asaba, May 21, 1992. She is one of the female traditional healers in Asaba.
248 This information was obtained from a group of traditional healers whom I interviewed in Asaba.
249 Interview with Mrs. G. Okonta, of Umuonaje quarters, Asaba, April 6, 1991. She is a nurse at the Asaba General Hospital.
Apart from traditional female healers, women as mothers in the old days in Igbo society were responsible for the administration of traditional medicine when their children were sick; they gave medicine to them and also took care of them.

6.1.2 Disembodied spirits and witches

Disembodied spirits are the souls of people who have died and who did not receive the proper burial rites, and are wandering around.250 These spirits are believed to be of two types, the spirits of good men who have died and been elevated, and those of evil men who have not reached the land of the spirits but hover around restlessly in between the spirit land and the visible world of men. The good spirits are believed to live on the ground, and also in the world of the dead.251 They are also believed to be above man but below God and could influence man and his welfare on earth. Man therefore propitiates them with sacrifices in order to gain favours, and ward off misfortunes.

Among the Igbo, there is also a strong belief in witchcraft, especially in the western part of Igboland, and along the southern and eastern borders, where it has spread from neighbouring groups.252 Generally, however, people do not pay much attention to it. The art of witchcraft is thought to be practised by both men and women; male wizards are known as *ugboma* while female witches are called *amusu*. The general belief of the people is that witchcraft is hereditary,253 and that all witches are bad, hence anyone suspected is made to drink a concoction that will force him or her to confess.254 It is believed that people could be struck by witchcraft through poisoned food, which contains some kind of spiritual substances,255 and that witches are responsible for all kinds of human problems such as barrenness, illness, bad harvest, death, accidents, financial losses, bad luck and disasters of all sorts.256 Animals such as nightjars, owls, bats and black cats are connected with witchcraft, and are believed to turn into witches. The favourite places for witches are said to be treetops. It is believed that witches suck human blood while the victims are asleep, and make physical marks on the bodies of the victims.

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250 Metuh 1981, 76; for further information on this, see Basden 1938, 285.
251 Cf. Mbiri 1969, 80.
252 Talbot 1969, 211; Forde and Jones 1950, 26.
253 Adegbola 1983, 317; Parrinder 1954, 123.
254 Thomas 1914, 28-29; Metuh 1987, 175.
256 Field 1960, 36; Parrinder 1954, 123.
6.1.3 Separate female and male gods

In Igbo religion, the woman's world is believed to be separate and distinct from the man's world. Both sexes have their separate gods whom they serve. The woman's world is said to be shrouded in mystery, which is a result of her menstrual cycle. Because of this, she is surrounded with taboos and prohibitions (nsọ), most of which are said to make her different from the male sex. Because of this, people seek interaction and companionship with people of their own sex, and this “separate” or “distinct” growth is seen in all aspects of life, thus in religion, and in social and political life.

In Igbo society, the gods can be male or female. One of the significant Igbo female goddesses is the Ala or Ani (the earth goddess). Ala or Ani is seen as the most important deity in Igbo society, and regarded as the queen of the underworld and the ‘owner’ of human beings, either alive or dead.²⁵⁷ The ancestors are believed to be near to the goddess. She is seen as the judge of human morality, and exerts the main ritual sanctions in disputes and offences.²⁵⁸ Some of the things that upset this goddess are stealing of farm products, kidnapping, adultery, and homicide, poisoning and giving birth to abnormal children.²⁵⁹ Oaths are sworn in the name of this goddess, and laws made. The priests of the goddess are guardians of public morality and her cult is one of the most powerful integrating forces in the society. The shrine of Ala is seen in most villages in Igboland.²⁶⁰ At different stages of the farming period, public rites are performed to the goddess and when there is misfortune, divination is performed. In some parts of Igboland, it happens that a six month old baby is introduced to the goddess. When the child has grown, the lower teeth are introduced to the shrine of the ancestors.²⁶¹

Set against this female goddess, there are the male ancestral spirits. This is because only male children can perpetuate a lineage and live as spiritual guardians of their lineage after their death. Because of this, sacrifices must be offered from time to time to them and the smaller gods, in order to ensure their favour.

We can thus see that there are separate female and male powers in the spiritual world of the traditional Igbo, just as there is a dual sex system among the living.

²⁵⁷ Forde and Jones 1950, 25.
²⁵⁸ Ibid.
²⁵⁹ Ibid.
²⁶⁰ Ibid.
²⁶¹ Ibid.
6.2 Men's religious organisations

One of the most important religious officials in Asaba was the Ayiwe or Ezeugbo, who was appointed through divination. The Ezeugbo was one of the most important male figures in the religious organisation. This office was said to be given to poor people because it was surrounded by many bad conditions, and was considered worthless.262 The Ezeugbo played a very important role in the town and during the new yam festival, known as the iwaji ceremony. He also held the symbol of authority for the community. The Ezeugbo was appointed every ten years, and during the period of his appointment, he stayed in seclusion for a period of twenty-five days, attended to and cooked for by young boys. During this period he was forbidden to eat any food that had not been cooked in a sacred kitchen known as ukoni. Nor was he allowed to carry anything on his head. At the end of the seclusion period, any freeborn woman who cooked for him must be wearing a special cloth. In the house of the Ezeugbo, the fire was always burning and never put out. The ashes were saved, and when he died, he was covered with the ashes. If he died during the period of his office, it was considered an abomination, and he was not granted a proper burial but thrown into the bad forest (ajo ofia).263 The last of the Asaba Ezeugbo's was Obi Okonjo, who died in 1979.264

Another important male figure in Asaba religious organisation was the Orhene, the male priest of the Onishe river goddess. His duty was to make prophecies to the people concerning the wishes of the goddess.265 The Orhene normally made these prophecies while in a trance. He was usually a middle-aged man and a believer of traditional religion. A young man could not be chosen as an Orhene because of the religious rituals involved in the work. The Orhene in those days might disappear for months into the river Niger, staying with the goddess Onishe. When he reappeared, he carried huge stones from the Niger, while prophesying to the people the wishes of the goddess. The last of the Asaba Orhene was said to have died in the 1950s.266

Apart from the Orhene there was the Okpara (Okpala or Diokpa), who has a role to fill still today. Apart from his political functions at the lineage level, the Okpara was also concerned with religion. Nowadays, the Okpara holds the ofo of the lineage and offers sacrifices for the welfare of his people at the lineage level. He is also seen as the custodian of the ancestors, and the emblems of the lineage ancestors are kept with him. This symbolises his relationship with the founders of the lineage. He also organises the exploita-
tion of family lands, and makes purification rites for his lineage members in connection to this, when the need arises. However, his strictly religious role is waning.

It should be noted that the slaves (male and female) in traditional Asaba society were not allowed to play any religious role. This was not only because slaves were regarded as an abomination, but also because they were not members of any patrilineage.

6.3 Women's religious associations

In addition to these male figures, there are some freeborn women who also have essential functions in the religious organisation. One of these figures is the *Omu*, the leader of the women of the community, as previously noted. The *Omu* is an intermediary between the people and the goddess *Onishe*, a very powerful and respectable divinity in Asaba. She purifies the town before any festival, drives off unclean spirits, and proclaims to the people any decisions concerning the religious welfare of the community. She ensures that the women in the community stick to their traditional worship. She and her councillors act as custodians of the welfare of the community; they perform propitiatory rites and sacrifices in order to prevent wars and epidemics, and to ensure the welfare of the people. When she finds it expedient, she exercises the prerogative of cleansing and releasing widows from the protracted traditional mourning.

Formerly, the *Omu* exercised some important functions such as the making of the market medicines, the cleansing of the market from evil spirits, and the making of sacrifices to the community gods and ancestral spirits.\(^{267}\) She performed the yearly ceremony of *ofala* in the community.\(^{268}\) Further, she was responsible for the making of purification rituals in the holy land of Asaba (*ani-ahaba*) for the maintenance of peace in the community.\(^{269}\) If there were rampant deaths of young people in the town, the *Omu* and her councillors would try to find out the cause and make sacrifices to appease the gods.\(^{270}\)

The *Omu* also has some freeborn women who assist her in making sure that everything concerning the religious welfare of the women in the community works. The *Omu* is not in any way related to the *Orhene*, the male worshipper of *Onishe*, despite the fact that they both do almost the same work in the community.

\(^{267}\) See Okonjo 1976, 49; Henderson 1972, 310-311; Thomas 1914, 187.

\(^{268}\) Henderson 1972, 321.

\(^{269}\) Akus 1994, 212-216.

\(^{270}\) Interview with Omu Nwoligidi Okocha, Asaba, February 8, 1992.
It is forbidden for anyone in the community to enter the room of the Omu. This is because of the belief that the powerful medicines, which she uses for her religious roles, are kept there and might be defiled.

Another female figure in the religious organisation is the Ada-isí. As earlier mentioned, the Ada-isí is the oldest woman in a lineage. This office is only acquired through age. This woman takes care of the socio-religious affairs of the women in the lineage. She is well respected by all the people in the lineage and seen as their mother. The Ada-isí performs a very significant role in the lineage, just as the Okpara. Her most important ritual function is carried out at the funerals of lineage members, as no one can have a proper funeral without her ritual participation. During the burial of lineage members, she performs a ritual ceremony for the family concerned. She ties a white cloth on the head of the first male heir of the deceased and also gives a piece of a stick called itali to the widow of the deceased, and shaves her head at the end of the ceremony. It is also her duty to perform annual purification rituals in the homes of men holding various titles, and to purify polluted houses. As a result of this, she receives certain amounts of money from the community.271 When an aspirant takes the Eze title, she confers the title on him and shaves his head after the symbolic death ritual of the udo ceremony. The Ada-isí also performs the ritual ceremony during the Olie-oma celebration, which is an ancestor veneration to remember the dead mothers in the community.272 She performs a very significant function during the Alo title taking, as she makes a rite of purification in which the candidate taking the title is cleansed for greater rituals ahead. She places the feather (ugo) on the head of the aspirant and gives him his staff of office called “alo”. She also offers sacrifices for the welfare of the women in the lineage. Formerly, she listened to the confessions of girls before going to their husband's houses, and also of married women who had committed adultery,273 and performed purification rites for them. When the market in the community had to be changed to a new site, and the diviner was consulted about the deity (alose), which should be in the new site, it was the Ada-isí who sacrificed to it before the Omu attended the market.274 If the wife of an Eze titleholder fell down, it was the duty of the Ada-isí to make a sacrifice of a hen where she fell.275

Some of these cults and spirits, which, according to the traditional custom, are female concerns, are still observed by Igbo women.

271 Thomas 1914, 51.
273 Thomas 1914, 51.
274 Ibid., 188.
275 Ibid., 189.
In matters concerning religion in Igbo society, freeborn women feel free to express their opinions in the community even when the men are present. That is, they speak up when their own religious cults are concerned.

Among the Igbo, age is highly respected and only old people make sacrifices to the gods and the ancestors. This is because it is believed that the old are the closest to the spirits and will soon join them. Also, it is believed that the old people serve as a link with the past.

6.4 Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, the women's role in religious life was particularly important in traditional Igbo society. Not only do the freeborn women play important roles in religion, they also have their own cult societies.

In this respect, we can perceive another parallel between the organisation of men and women. Just as there are parallel institutions for men and women in political and economic matters, there are parallel religious institutions for men and women. This parallelism is characteristic of the entire social and religious organisation in Igboland, especially in Asaba, which is part of western Igboland. The parallel, sex-segregated system has implied that women are allowed to take care of every religious, social or economic decision that has been defined as their own area of competence. Since the discussions that take place before any decision are open to one sex only, especially in the religious sphere, this implies that the women feel free to express their own opinions without being embarrassed by the presence of men. Since this applies to all female organisations, it also applies to religious matters. This is an important factor to take into account when we are to assess the change of women's religious influence in the Christian associations that have been introduced in Igboland.
CHAPTER 7
Life Cycle Rituals

7.1 Introduction
Women's roles in life cycle rituals in Igboland are not very different from anywhere in Africa. Beside the women's religious influence through their own cult societies, they also have important roles to play in the life cycle rituals of people belonging to their own descent group, especially their own brothers and sisters, but also their own children and husbands.

7.2 Birth
In traditional Asaba society, the birth of a new child has always been regarded as the most important event in both a man's and a woman's life. The birth of a child was believed to contribute to the consolidation of the marriage. Children were therefore seen as the centre of family life and a bond that united husband and wife, and also a continuation of the lineage. So children were admired, and the essence of founding a family in order to continue the lineage was realised by having them. As soon as a new bride became pregnant there was joy in the family. Pregnancy in traditional Asaba society was surrounded by many taboos, some of which were directed against eating certain types of animals, or looking at objects that were considered to be ugly. There was also a ban on extramarital sexual intercourse.276 A barren woman was treated badly and seen as an outcast in the community.277 In traditional Asaba society a birth could be considered either normal or abnormal. Abnormal births were sudden deliveries, which sometimes occurred when a woman was going to the market or was working on the farm. As a rule, children were delivered in the midst of a group of several women at the back of the child’s mother’s house (ofe-ulo), screened off with a fence. The woman giving birth was assisted by the elderly women of the household, at times by their relatives and family, and sometimes by a traditional birth attendant.278 Men were not allowed to be present during child-

276 Agbasiere 2000, 129.
277 Talbot 1969, 353.
birth. In some parts of Igboland, women prayed and made sacrifices to the gods to help them during childbirth, and their husbands sometimes made sacrifices as well. As soon as a child was delivered, it was laid on a fresh plantain leaf, and afterwards brought into the house and laid on a bedstead on a plank, which had been put on the floor, and was called mgbo. The first public announcement of the birth of a child was followed by an initiation. The child's father informed his mother-in-law about the birth of the child, and asked her to make a sacrifice at the shrine of the fertility divinity. The purpose of this ritual was to ask for breast milk for the newborn child. If this was not done, it might mean a lack of breast milk, which could lead to the death of the child. If a child were not born at the expected time, the parents would consult a diviner to find out the reason. If a god caused the delay, the mother was asked to make a sacrifice, but if the delay was found to have been caused by a witch, she was told to perform an ichu-aja ceremony to drive away the witch. In Igboland, a child was circumcised during the first month of its life. Further, the males were cicatrised in the face and the females on the body. But among the western Igbo, in Asaba and other communities in the vicinity, the circumcision could be done from the time the child was one month up to ten years of age.

The birth of a baby was followed by twenty-eight days of confinement for the mother and child. The entire period was called oge omugwo. The first part of the confinement (the ndu period) began immediately after the birth of the child, and lasted for four days. Both the mother and the child were confined in a room referred to as uno omugwo. The woman was looked after and cooked for by the most senior married woman, who belonged to the husband's lineage, or by her mother, for four days or more. During the first four days, the mother was not allowed to bathe, although she was allowed to wash her baby. The room, where the mother and the child stayed, was left unswept, and a fire made in the room, a fire that must not be put out. Normally, the ashes from this fire were only removed from the room at the end of the post-parturition period, when the fire was put out. This practice has been discontinued among the modern, educated Asaba women.

279 Talbot 1969, 354.
280 Ibid., 362, 368.
281 Agbasiere 2000, 130.
282 Ibid., 131.
283 Ibid.
284 Talbot 1969, 363.
285 Ibid., 403.
286 Ibid.
287 Agbasiere 2000, 132.
288 Interview with Mrs. S. Azinge, of Ugbomanta quarters, Asaba, April 20, 1990.
289 Green 1947, 162.
290 For further information on seclusion, see Talbot 1969, 355, 394; Agbasiere 2000, 132.
291 Green 1947, 162; Agbasiere 2000, 132-133.
The disorderly condition of the room matched its supposedly defiled state and that of its occupants, i.e. the mother and the child. On account of this, the room was taboo to many people, and in particular to titled men of Mkpalo and Eze. These groups of people could not enter the room until it had been purified at the end of the twenty-eight days. The child was regarded as being in the process of becoming a human being for the period of those twenty-eight days. According to Asaba traditional belief, human beings use mats to lie on, and as the baby was still far from human, it had to lie on leaves of banana or plantain for four days. The mother was not allowed to use the normal chewing stick to clean her teeth during this period, and in its place the leaf stalk of an egbo tree was substituted. This was significant, because the Asaba people demarcated portions of land with this tree. It was used to indicate land rights and was the symbol of the land deity for patrilineages or their segments. Thus the use of this stick as a chewing stick implied that, by giving birth, the woman asserted her right to belong to her husband's group. The ndu period normally ended on the fifth day, when there was a general cleaning up of both mother and child. The baby's hair was shaved and its banana leaf replaced by a small mat. The clothes used by the mother during the first four days were exchanged for new ones and she was now allowed to use a chewing-stick to clean her teeth. The four-day's ashes, which had been allowed to accumulate, were now cleaned away, and the room swept and tidied.

In the customs connected with birth, certain attention was paid and special care was taken in connection with the disposal of the navel-cord. A tree was planted on the spot, where the child had been born. The parents regarded its growth as a characteristic symbol of the growth of the child, and on no account was it to be cut down or sold as long as the child lived. This formal treatment was only given to a child delivered in a normal way. If, in response to traditional treatment, the placenta or the umbilical cord had fallen off by this time, it was preserved for the final cleansing at the end of the twenty-eight days, when it was buried or planted with some fruit, for example a fruit from a coconut palm or an oil palm. Talbot also describes this: The piercing of the baby's ear was always done by a member of the Umuada or Inyemedi, who was very experienced and skilled at such operations; “after-birth are buried sometimes together, but often the latter is secretly removed by the women of the house. The former is usually placed in the ground near a young plantain, oil- or coco-nut palm, or one of these is planted on top of it”. This planting of the umbilical cord of the baby with a coconut palm symbolised a long life for the baby. For a child born outside

293 For further information on traditional childbirth rites in Igboland, see Talbot 1969, 355; Agbasere 2000, 131.
294 Uchendu 1965, 58; Agbasiere 2000, 132.
295 Talbot 1969, 355.
the community, the umbilical cord was usually preserved and brought back for a rite to be performed in the father’s home.  

The circumcision of a child took place eight days after birth. For baby girls, circumcision took place at the same time as the ear piercing, *ikpopuntu*, since the piercing of ears was a painful operation, which the child had to undergo before the end of the twenty-eight days of confinement with her mother. The circumcision of a girl was done by a traditional circumciser or experienced women from the lineage. During this operation the foreskin of the girl's clitoris was removed. A member of the *Umuada* or *Inyemedi*, who was very experienced and skilled at such operations, always did the piercing of the baby’s ear; the baby's hair was also cut. These measures were intended to ensure the child's physical conformity to that expected of members of the community.

The love of the parents for a child is expressed in actions towards the preservation of the child's life, for which a number of ceremonies are performed. But despite this, not all children were acceptable to the people. The birth of twins was seen as something evil in the community, and, because of this, such children were cast away, while their mother had to go through a period of purification. (For further reports on the treatment of twins in Africa, see Lagercantz 1950).

### 7.2.1 Naming

In Africa, there are several naming customs. In some communities, the name is decided before the child is born; in some other areas, the name is given as soon as the child is born, with no ceremony or ritual. But in several cases there is a naming ceremony in the community, at which several members of the family, relatives, neighbours and friends are present. In many African communities a person's name is considered to be part of his or her personality. Still today, in Igbo society, the naming of a child (igu-afà) is seen as the most important event for the child's family, and for the community as a whole. In the naming of a child, many things are taken into consideration. By the name, one may be able to tell whether the child is male or female, tell the historical implications that the name refers to, or commemorate events of importance to the parents or to the *umunna* (lineage). By the name the Igbo can infer whether a child was born on a market day. For example *Nwokeke* and *Nwanyieke*, respectively, refer to males and females born on the Eke market day. The Igbo use a pattern of surnames or family names, making it easier to follow lineal descent. The name of an ancestor is taken to reflect the

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296 Agbasiere 2000, 132.
298 Ibid.
299 Mbiti 1975, 87.
300 Agbasiere 2000, 135; Uchendu 1965, 60.
social significance of the links with the past. The person who is believed to be the reincarnation of a dead father or ancestor is given the ancestor's name, but not as a first name. This attitude illustrates a continuous relationship between patterns of personal names, patterns of family constitution and religious beliefs embodied in ancestral guardianship. In Igboland, the naming of a child is seen as a very important event. Mostly this takes place about twenty-eight days after birth, when the child's circumcision wound has healed.³⁰¹ Before a child is named, a diviner is consulted as to what person has reincarnated in the child.³⁰² The child might be named after this person.³⁰³

As mentioned above, in some parts of Igbo society, the second name reflects events surrounding the birth of the child, for instance if the child was born at night, in the bush, if the family is prosperous, etc.³⁰⁴

In different parts of Igboland, the naming customs vary. In some parts a child might be named by the parents, or by brothers and sisters, in other parts by the grandfather or grandmother, the Okpara (oldest man) of the quarter, or the eldest man of the lineage (umunna).³⁰⁵ In other places, a child might also be named by the senior Ada or the Ada-isi of a lineage. It is also customary, during the public naming ceremony, that the father of the child with his extended family performs a private ritual at the shrine of Ala.³⁰⁶

As already mentioned, the mother and child were kept in confinement for a period of twenty-eight days. After this followed the naming ceremony. Relatives and friends were informed a few days before the 28th day that the mother and baby would be freed from their isolation (iju n’omugo). Everyone who was informed understood that they were invited to the child's naming ceremony. The number of people present was never limited and it would be an offence to hear of such a ceremony without taking part. Presents were given to the child, for what belonged to the baby belonged to the mother. The eldest woman from the child's village named the child. She normally started thinking of a name for the child quite early in the pregnancy.³⁰⁷ Since she was barred from the place of birth by a traditional taboo, she sent a special representative to visit the child and the mother shortly after the birth of the child. The old woman’s delegate would give her detailed information about the baby's appearance and the mother's condition, as well as any remarkable incidents that might have taken place, before or after the birth. In searching for an appropriate name she would keep these details in mind, consult the father, review events in the family and note the stresses within it,

³⁰¹ Agbasie 2000, 135.
³⁰² Green 1947, 54, 162; Uchendu 1965, 60.
³⁰³ Agbasie 2000, 135.
³⁰⁴ See Talbot 1969, 356; Wieschhoff 1941, 212; Green 1947, 54; Mbiti 1975, 87-90; Sundkler 1980,83-84; Uchendu 1965, 60.
³⁰⁵ Talbot 1969, 363-364.
³⁰⁶ Agbasie 2000, 135.
and pay attention to the attitudes and comments of the family's friends and enemies. She also took into account occurrences of wide public interest.

If the weather was good, a wide-open space that would accommodate all the visitors was chosen, and the women prepared for the occasion. Seats were often arranged to enable a rectangular space; the mother's patrilateral relatives were separated from the father's and they would sit separately, across from each other. The *Umuada* faced the party carrying the baby, and in front of the *Umuada* and the baby a table was placed. This *Umuada*’s table held among other things a plate of kola-nuts, some beverage and a white basin of water, into which coins were dropped. “The traditional reason for this was to remove or diminish the troubles which money was supposed to bring to the child as money was believed in the community to be “hot” and must be cooled with water.”

The naming ceremony would sometimes be connected with a very elaborate gathering including local musicians and dancing groups. After the musicians and the dancing groups had performed, and the gathering was beginning to reach the expected limit, the *Umuada* would stand up and begin their part in the ceremony.

After greeting all the visitors according to their titles and ranks, the *Umuada* made a speech declaring the reason for the gathering, and prayed for its success. The eldest woman among them, the *Ada-isi*, would take one of the kola-nuts and cut out several little pieces with the nail of her right thumb, throwing them in different directions while inviting the ancestors to share the kola-nuts with the assembled group. The ancestors were called to join in to ensure the child their protection and guidance and to give the *Umuada* the honour of naming the child. The *Umuada* prayed that the child might grow up in the fear and respect of its elders and Asaba traditions, and that the child should have a long life. The *Umuada* then took the drink that was provided, and, after praying in like manner, poured out a small quantity on the ground for the ancestors. At the end of each prayer, all replied by repeating *Ise* (Amen) several times. Food was eaten and women danced, accompanied by small children.

As soon as the women decided that it was time to “name the child” the appropriate officiant called for silence. The head of the women, the *Ada-isi*, made a speech explaining what lay behind the name, but in guarded terms, so as to leave everyone guessing until she actually pronounced the name. The *Ada-isi* named the child while presenting it with a gift. Sometimes taking the child in her arms, she made her speech just before pronouncing the name, whereupon the mother's patrilineal *Umuada* made a sacrifice for the

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308 Interview with Mrs. N. Achuzia of Umuezei quarters, Asaba, April 10, 1992.
309 A child in Asaba society may also be named to honour a brother or sister, uncle or aunt, who has no son or daughter of their own, or to express gratitude to a special friend for a favour received. In some cases a child may also be named after a departed relative whom the child resembles.
child. They would kill a goat and sprinkle the blood on the child to cleanse it from any evil powers. During the naming ceremony, the ceremony of “izo iday” was performed by the Umuada, who tied two cowries together with a strong cotton thread, around the child's neck, to help the child to become a successful person in life.

In Asaba traditional society, a child was incomparably superior to most other cherished values, be it a female or male child, and, beside this, most other forms of wealth or value were insignificant. The birth of a child symbolised God's active presence in the community, and the child's continued life was important to the people, because it indicated God's continuing presence. Basically a child (nwa) means “God with us”, but to assume that God is with a person or a family is to cast the whole weight of his power and strength in their favour. This is perhaps the greatest value of a child to the Asaba people, and every name implies or suggests to them that the ultimate source of children is God. This is a firm belief among many Asaba people.

These rites of birth and childhood introduced the child to the corporate community. The child was believed to be passive and still have a long way to go. It was believed that it must grow out of childhood and enter into adulthood physically, socially and religiously. The Asaba people therefore had rites and ceremonies to mark this great change.

In all these rituals, the women have always had a great role to play. But since Christianity was introduced in 1857 in Igboland, there have been many changes, and I am going to look at these various changes.

Regarding the traditional naming ceremonies after birth, the missionaries have been preaching against them, since they believed that the ceremonies involved some traditional rituals. The missionaries have also encouraged the new converts not to name their children in the traditional naming ceremonies but to name them in the Church. Thus, the traditional roles of Igbo women in naming ceremonies have declined, as most Christian parents now name their children in the Church.

Igbo family names, which also have social significance and are given to children at the naming ceremonies, have undergone tremendous changes as well. The Church makes it compulsory for its members to take Christian names from the Bible, or names of prophets and saints, in abandonment of their traditional names at baptism. Even this had a great effect on the previous roles that the Igbo women played in traditional naming ceremonies. Since their roles were now replaced by those of the priests and godparents during baptism, nowadays one hears such names as Joseph, Peter, James,

311 See Sundkler 1980, 83-85; Salamone and Mbabuike 1994, 213, for further information on the introduction of Christian names or baptismal names by the missionaries in different parts of Africa.
Paul, Mary, Martha, which have nothing to do with the traditional names, while the traditional names are formally recorded but never used.

As earlier mentioned, from Igbo names one would be able to tell the historical implications surrounding the bearer of such names, which is something that the Christian names never offer. An Igbo name was a convenient mechanism for preserving continuity and remembrances and in order to identify people in their social context, and for tracing family descent as well. This was a custom that the present Christian names never substituted. Further, the institution of godparents for children at baptism, and the role of the priests, replaced the former role of women in the traditional naming ceremony. In this way, an important set of female roles was replaced by the roles of male priests.

7.3 Initiation

The initiation of the young was one of the key moments in the rhythm of individual life, which was also the rhythm of the corporate group of which the individual was part. What happened to the single youth was also happening collectively to the “corporation” of parents, relatives, and ancestors. According to Metuh:

> The term 'initiation rites' is often erroneously taken to refer exclusively to rites, which mark the passage from childhood to adult life, or what has been called 'puberty rites'. Initiation rites could accompany admission into age groups, secret societies, the ordination of a priest or medicine man or even the enthronement of a king.\(^{312}\)

An initiation ceremony was supposed to help the youths prepare for marriage. One of the most important aspects of it was the seclusion period, during which the youths were taught various things about the life of their people, history, traditions, beliefs, and the ways to take care of their family. Initiation could also be seen as a public recognition that a person was moving from childhood to adulthood.\(^{313}\) As noted by Mbiti, “it is a central bridge in life. It brings together one's youth and adulthood, the period of ignorance and that of knowledge.”\(^{314}\)

Initiation rites therefore have many symbolic meanings, in addition to the physical drama and impact, as the youths are ritually introduced to the art of communal living. The most dramatic time would occur when they withdrew from other people to live alone in the forest or in specifically prepared huts away from the village. They would go through a period of withdrawal from

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\(^{312}\) Metuh 1987, 205
\(^{313}\) Cf. Mbiti 1975, 93-94.
\(^{314}\) Ibid.
society, absence from home, during which time they received secret instructions before they were allowed to rejoin their relatives at home. This was a symbolic experience of the process of dying, living in the spirit world and being reborn (resurrected). The rebirth, that is the act of rejoining the families, emphasised that the young people were now new, they had new personalities and had lost their childhood.

Another major significance of the rites was to introduce the children to adult life, as they would be allowed to share the full privileges and duties of the community. They had entered into a state of responsibility; they had inherited new rights, and were expected to fulfil new obligations in society. This incorporation into adult life also introduced them to the life of the ancestors as well as to the life of those yet to be born. The initiation rites also prepared young people in matters of family responsibilities.

Initiation rites also had a major educational purpose. The occasion often marked the beginning of acquiring knowledge, which was otherwise not accessible to those who had not been initiated. It was a period of awakening to many things, a period of dawn for the young. They learned to endure hardship, live with one another, and obey their elders.315

Girls were initiated and given instructions by the elderly women. These instructions concerned certain matters regarding female adulthood, which they had not been aware of in the Fattening-House.316 During an earlier period in the Fattening-House, the girls had been taught how to become sexually attractive. However, during the initiation, they were taught how to secure a female authority and competence in social, economic and religious matters.

Men often managed the instruction of the boys, while women managed that of the girls. However, sometimes a woman could manage the initiation of both male and female children. Managing the initiation of girls was considered more serious and it was usually followed by some ceremony. The girl's clitoris was cut off, and the entrance to the vagina made larger, an operation which was always performed by women.317 It could be done in infancy, before a girl had her first menstruation, or before she got married. During this period, the girl lived many months in seclusion.318 A triangular piece of iron, which was slightly ornamented at the top, with a little handle was used for both men and women during the operation.319 After the operation, or at the end of it, the young girls were transferred into the status and functions of grown-up women.

Asaba initiation rites may be divided into three parts, the first two being the most important. Formerly, everybody had to go through the first two

315 Interview with Mrs. P. N. Edozien, of Umuezei quarters, Asaba, September 18, 1991.
316 Talbot 1969, 390.
319 Talbot 1969, 391.
parts, but only a small number of people went through the third, which was performed when they were over forty years. However, only the first two parts counted as the initiation proper.

A person who had not been initiated was not a full member of society. Furthermore, no matter how old or mature she may be, so long as she was not initiated, she was despised and still considered a child. Slave girls were not allowed to go through the initiation ceremony, because they were not regarded as part of the traditional society and did not have the same rights as freeborn women.

Children went through the first stage of initiation when they were about four to seven years of age. The ceremony took place in the months of November and December, when it is dry and relatively cool, and the girls underwent clitoridectomy as mentioned above. The date for the ceremony was announced to take place at a given time, and when it arrived, all the children were gathered together in the house where the ceremony would take place.

As mentioned above, women performed the operations on the girls. It was a painful operation, but the girls were encouraged to endure it without crying or screaming, and those who managed to go through it bravely were highly praised by the community. After the ceremony there was public rejoicing, with dancing, singing, drinking, libations and food offerings to the ancestors. In the course of the following few weeks, while the wound was healing, relatives would come to visit the initiated girls and bring them presents.

In this first stage of the initiation, the removing of a small portion of the girl's clitoris symbolised a separation from childhood, parallel to the cutting of the umbilical cord when a child is born. The sexual organ attached the child to the state of ignorance, and the state of inactivity. But once that link was severed, the young girl was freed from that state of ignorance and inactivity. The shedding of her blood during the initiation bound her mystically to the ancestors, who are symbolically living in the ground, or are reached through the pouring of libation. The physical pain, which the girls were encouraged to endure, was the beginning of training for difficulties and sufferings in later life. The presents given to the initiates by their relatives were tokens of welcome into the full community. It also symbolised the right to own property.

The dancing and rejoicing strengthened community solidarity, and emphasised the corporateness of the whole group. The offerings and libations to the ancestors emphasised and renewed the link between the living and the departed, between the visible and invisible worlds. It should be noted here, however, that girls, whose parents had died before they were initiated, would

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320 Interview with Obi Ojinji Mowah of Umuonaji quarters, Asaba, June 10, 1990. He was a member of the Oturaza Council of Chiefs.
be initiated at a much later age than usual. It is not quite clear why this was so; perhaps it was in order to allow the girls more time to grow, since initiation thrust upon them greater responsibilities.

There was no set period between the first and second initiation, but the latter could take place a few weeks after the first. The first was primarily physical, while the second was mainly educational. The ceremony lasted from four to ten days, during which the candidates were secluded from the public, and lived in huts built away from the villages. Certain women, to whom the responsibility of introducing the candidates to all matters of womanhood was delegated, were supposed to accompany them. The Asaba people described this duty as “brooding over the initiates”, the way that birds brood over their eggs before hatching. On the first day, they learned educational songs and encountered symbolic obstacles, while on the second, they had to face a frightening monster. This was a structure of sticks and trees, from the inside of which someone made fearful bellows like those of a big monster. The initiates did not know exactly what it was, since that was one of the secrets of the ceremony. Afterwards they were not allowed to divulge the matter to those who had not been initiated. They faced this “rhinoceros” bravely, shooting it with bows and arrows, in order to destroy it. In the same way they would destroy a similar enemy.

On the second day, the initiates rehearsed adult life. The girls cut small twigs, which symbolised firewood for the home. Later the same day, the women spat palm wine over the candidates to bless them, and the girls returned to their “home” in the bush. Here they must overcome objects that were placed before them. Each girl was given a special stick that she must retain, and, in the evening, a dance for the initiates was performed. With the special sticks the girls performed symbolic sexual acts. The next day, they were examined on the meaning of riddles and puzzles, carved on the sticks, or drawn in sand. Afterwards, the girls fetched sugar canes, and with the sugar cane they made drinks for their incumbents.

On the third day, the initiates and the women would go to a sacred tree, usually a fig or sycamore tree on a riverbank. The women took a small amount of sap from the tree, and gave to each candidate. The initiates pretended to eat, while the women made a small cut on the clitoris of the girls.322

The fourth day was spent peacefully, while on the fifth day, the girls would cry out that the enemies had come. The ceremony could end at that point, and the young girls now returned to their individual homes. After this, their parents performed a ritual ceremony for the initiates.

This description is intended to illustrate the significance of the initiation rite. Certain meanings clearly emerge from this description. Corporate living was instilled into the thinking of the young girls by making them live together in special huts in the woods. This experience was like a miniature

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community. The women played the role of the elders, and it was extremely important that the young girls showed respect to them. Seclusion served to make them concentrate on what they were doing, and it also symbolised death, followed by reincarnation. It was a new rhythm for the young girls, as well as for their wider community. The frightening ordeal of the “rhinoceros” was a psychological device, partly to emphasise the seriousness of the occasion, and partly to drive out fear from the girls, so that in times of danger they would not flee, but take courage to defend themselves and their families. The riddles carved on the special sticks, or drawn in sand, were symbols of knowledge to which the girls now had full access. The initiates were now entitled to know every secret of tribal life, things known by exclusive groups. The rite at the sacred tree was a reminder of the religious life, and a symbolic visit to the ancestors, and the spirits, who were thought to live there. The occasion was a renewal of the link with the spiritual realities and a reminder that the ancestors were “present” with them. Permission to eat foods, which the initiates were previously forbidden to eat, was a symbolic and dramatic way for them to open up, and to participate fully in all the affairs of the town. The slight cut on the clitoris of the girls at the sacred tree indicated the sacredness of sex in the sight of God, spirits, ancestors and the human community. The return home was an experience of resurrection; death had passed, their seclusion had ended, and now they rejoined their community as people with a new status. The ritual performed by their parents as the final seal of the ceremony symbolised that the children were fertile, now initiated and authorised to carry on the burning flame of life, and also that a new generation was now socially and educationally born.

Thus we can see, first, that women had important functions in connection with the initiation of children to adult life. As in most other matters, there was a parallel or dual-sex structure of initiation. Yet, women could also have important functions in connection with the initiation of boys. Since the initiation was regarded as socially significant, the organisation of the initiation shows that women had an important social significance. Secondly, we should note that an important aspect of the initiation for girls was training and encouragement to be brave and to defend themselves. Since this symbolism was an important part of the initiation, it may be seen as an expression of the value of female courage and determination in Igbo culture.

But with the introduction of Christianity in Igboland, there has been a dramatic change in this area. The Christian “initiation ceremony” called the Holy Communion has replaced the important roles played by the Igbo women in the initiation ceremonies in the traditional Igbo society. As a result of this, the former roles played by the Igbo women in the initiation ceremony in traditional Igbo society declined, as Christian parents now encourage their children to go through Christian initiation, while abandoning the traditional initiation ceremony.

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Further, it should be noted that courage, and the capacity to defend oneself, is by no means any Christian virtue, as far as women are concerned. Yet, the Igbo women have grown up with such values, but they will not be trained to defend themselves, or to stand up for their own rights, when learning to behave according to Christian standards.

7.4 Marriage

In traditional Asaba society, marriage (*inu-nwunye*) was considered a very important institution. It was regarded as the most important union between a man and a woman. Marriage was not an arrangement entered by two individuals, but rather a relationship of alliance, which involved two exogamous descent groups. There was no romantic love and the choice was not only individually made, but was contrived with the help of the parents or a third party. The primary matter was the love growing out of the families; the feelings of the individuals marrying were secondary. The loyalties to new kin groups created by the marriage, and the integration of the persons involved into the society were emphasised. The careful steps taken in the choice of a wife, or in the acceptance of a husband, reflected this social significance, and the ceremonial feasts and rituals showed the solidarity that all members of the society should give to the individuals. According to Mbiti, “for African people, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all members of a given community meet the departed, the living and those yet to be born.”

Marriage was thus a very important phase in a person's life. This is perhaps true everywhere, but among the Igbo, it was considered a precondition for adult life.

Also among the Asaba people and the Igbo in general, marriage was seen as a very important contract, both for the individuals in the clan and the community as a whole. It was regarded as a generating factor for the community. The Igbo thus see marriage as the most central part of their social structure. Their concept of marriage cannot be separated from their idea of religion. Thus when a child comes of age to be marriageable, he or she is initiated before marriage, as indicated above. Apart from this, traditional Igbo marriages were ideally polygamous, but in modern times and with the advent of Christianity, most of the marriages have become monogamous.

As mentioned above, most of the Igbo marriages were alliances between two

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323 Cf. Mbiti 1975, 133.
324 Spörndli 1942-45, 113.
325 Agbasie 2000, 93; Uchendu 1965, 51.
326 Agbasie 2000, 93; Spörndli 1942-45, 113-114.
327 Agbasie 2000, 93.
families, rather than contracts between the two individuals involved, unlike European marriages.

Owing to the nature of the Igbo kinship system, the type of woman to be brought into the family must be “looked at properly.” Firstly, she must come from another exogamous lineage group. Secondly, such a marriage helped to establish friendly relations with groups that might otherwise be regarded with hostility. Until a person was married in Igbo society, he or she was not seen as a mature person, no matter how rich or prosperous that person might be. Marriage was seen as a symbol of a man’s maturity and his ability to live separately from the rest of the family, and to cater for himself and his family. It was also the evidence that a man was seriously minded and ready to assume responsibility in society.

As Igbo marriages were based on lineage exogamy, individuals were not allowed to marry any of their close relatives, whom they called “brother,” “sister,” “daughter,” etc. If a young woman married any of those relatives, her marital intercourse was considered incestuous, and she would either have no children, or she would bear children who would not survive beyond childhood, presumably as a punishment from the gods and the ancestors for breaking the rules of behaviour in the sexual domain. Sex, likewise, was not allowed between two individuals who were believed to be relatives; sexual intercourse between such people was regarded as an abomination. The marriage institution in Igboland is also governed by the notion of birth status. Thus, it is forbidden for nwadiam, “a free-born,” to marry an osu, “a cult-slave,” or ohu, “a bought slave,” or their descendants. The application of this law with regard to the category ohu has become less rigid with the advent of Christianity and education.

In Igbo society, the main meaning of life is regarded as marriage and the begetting of children for the lineage and the ancestors, and this is seen as the most important ritual act of human existence. Like other Igbo communities, the people of Asaba have great respect for marriage. As in other Igbo communities, the marriage contract in traditional Asaba society was based on an agreement between two extended families or lineages, rather than between the man and woman whose union was its primary object. It entailed the payment of a bride price, the conclusion of religious ceremonies and rituals, and the celebration of the marriage ceremony. Divorce and marital instability were strongly discouraged, because marriage was seen as permanent, broken only by the death of one of the spouses. It was very important for all girls to be virgins until marriage. At the time of marriage, a woman who had not lost her virginity was given various gifts, such as achamu, a

328 See Uchendu 1965, 50; Spörndli 1942-45, 115-121; Thomas 1914, 61; Agbasiere 2000, 93.
329 Agbasiere 2000, 94.
331 Isichei 1973, 689.
332 Agbasiere 2000, 95.
kind of bead that was regarded as very expensive. In her husband's family, a woman, who was a virgin before marriage, was well respected by her husband and his relatives, and such women were very proud of this.\textsuperscript{333} It was also an abomination for a married woman to have extramarital sexual relations.\textsuperscript{334}

Marriage was therefore seen as a sacred institution that every man must enter into before he could claim any rights to a woman. To ordinary people, marriage was not a privilege but a right, and even an obligation, for it was through the process of procreation resulting from marriage that the continuity of the society was ensured. Anyone who refused to get married was considered to be committing a major offence; he or she was regarded as someone who was cutting off the link between death and life, and everybody would be against him or her. Procreation was a necessary condition for the recognition of marriage. Hence pregnancy was highly honoured. Children were always desired, but male children were preferred to female. This was because of the view that when a man died, it was the male children who continued to cater for the family, while the females would get married and leave the lineage.

And so, everything possible was done in the community in order to prepare people for marriage and make them think of it. For an Asaba woman, marriage ranked first on the scale of values. In Asaba traditional society, the end of the wedding ceremony was not the end of the marital process; in fact it was the beginning of a family interaction that was proved in practice. The new family was still regarded as immature and in need of more care, until it fully matured as a real family with children.

In Asaba traditional religion, various rituals were involved in marriages, because it was believed that it was a means of repaying the ancestors, from whom one received the seed of life.\textsuperscript{335} It was in the light of this that, in Asaba marriages, the ancestors were invited to bless the marriage and give their consent. In Asaba traditional society, women played important roles in marriage ceremonies.

\textit{Marriage preparations}: Marriage was a recognised institution, by which women could validate their status in society.\textsuperscript{336} No matter how a man acquired a wife, the process of betrothing and marrying a girl was a long, ceremonious one, often taking several months. Marriage was so important and central to the people that nothing connected with it was taken lightly. Before any wedding, the eldest woman in the man's village would approach

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{333} See Isichei 1973, 685; Thomas 1914, 65; Uchendu 1965, 52; Agbasiere 2000, 104.
\item \textsuperscript{334} Thomas 1914, 60; Isichei 1973, 695; Agbasiere 2000, 129.
\item \textsuperscript{335} Interview with Ogbueshi Nwoigidi Okocha, of Umuonaji quarters, Asaba, January 6, 1991. She is the \textit{Omu} of Asaba, the leader of the womenfolk and a member of the Asaba traditional council of chiefs.
\item \textsuperscript{336} Interview with Obi J. I. G. Onyia, of Umuezei quarters, Asaba, February 8, 1990. He used to be a Frontline nationalist in Nigeria and a member of Asagba’s Cabinet.
\end{itemize}
the diviner in order to inquire whether or not the marriage would be supported by the ancestors and gods. If the marriage was confirmed by the diviner to be a successful one, the immediate family of the man concerned was informed. But should the marriage be proclaimed not to be a success, the family would stop it immediately. This was done in order to prevent evil occurrences in the family. If it was ratified as a good marriage, the Umuada of the man's village would proceed to make sacrifices to the ancestors of the village, asking them to be with them throughout the marriage preparations, and to guide and direct them in all the processes involved in the marriage. After that, the head of the married women of the man's lineage was informed, and in turn informed the other married women in the village. This announcement to all the women in the village was a way of telling the women to be ready for the rituals and ceremonies, which accompanied the occasion of the wedding. After this, the actual marriage ceremony could start. The whole process of marriage in traditional Asaba society falls into four stages.

The first stage: investigation. When parents had found a girl for their son, their first step would be to make inquiries about the girl. The *curriculum vitae* of the individuals were often not enough. Case histories of the families extending to all known generations were studied. After these facts had been gathered, the degree of consanguineous relationship was traced, since marriage between two related persons was against the rules of exogamy and the prohibitions of incest.

The parents of the would-be bridegroom tried to find out the background of the family of the would-be bride. Inquiries (*ajuju*) were conducted concerning the girl's character, whether she had been engaged before, and if so, to whom. The groom's parents would try to find out about her manners, whether she was respectful to elderly people, obedient to her family, sociable with her friends, clean and very productive. If she was a grown up woman, it must be found out why she had stayed unattached for a long time. Any previous sicknesses or dreadful diseases suffered by the girl, such as leprosy, epilepsy, smallpox, or other types of illnesses that might affect her marital life and childbearing, were investigated. The parents would also want to find out whether she was strong enough for farm-work or lazy, whether she was talkative and had a tendency to gossip, and whether she was tough and bold enough to handle family property and defend it against outside interference. Thus, once again, we find that female toughness was considered to be a virtue.

Inquiries were also made about her family background to find out if there had been any history of premature deaths, twin births, divorce, theft, or murder, and what social class the family belonged to, for example if they were *osu* or *ohu*, and if the family kept and respected the rules of exogamy.337

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337 See Uchendu 1965, 51-52; Spörndli 1942-45, 115; Agbasiere 2000, 102-103;
Further, there were inquiries about their social behaviour, if they were debtors, if they practised witchcraft, and if their gods and ancestral spirits were wicked or kind, and, finally, if any family members had died by accident.

The aim of this inquiry was to make sure that the new wife would not introduce into the husband's lineage anything that would be detrimental and damaging to the group. Nothing was left uninvestigated, but we should note that the bride's competence was important. Inquiries were also made about the would-be husband, but the emphasis was on the girl, because she would leave her homestead and go to that of her husband.

If all these inquiries were satisfactory, the parents of the man consulted the fortune-tellers to confirm the facts, and to make sure that the marriage would be a success, before going to the girl's parents' house. If the fortune-teller revealed some unforeseen hindrances, the matter was not discontinued, but offerings and sacrifices were made to abate the gods and the ancestors. If the oracle favoured the suit, the marriage could be approved. All this was done to ensure marriage stability and to guarantee longevity and health for the new couple. After the choice had been made and the necessary inquiries conducted, the parents of the would-be husband (bridegroom) consulted a relative or friend, who knew the family very well, and asked him to assist at the introduction to the girl's (bride's) family.

As we have seen, one of the main objectives of the preliminary investigation was to make sure that the bride would be able to act as a competent woman, and to defend the family property. This is another sign of the importance attached to female competence.

On the appointed day, the relative or friend, who was also the marriage witness, would lead the bridegroom along with his father and relatives to pay a visit to the girl's father, in order to make their intentions known. This tradition is known as *iku-aka-na-uzo*, which means “knocking at the door.” This “knocking at the door” was very symbolical, because it marked the beginning of the marriage. If the girl and her parents accepted the proposal, her father would then inform his extended family (*umunna*), and ask if they had any objections to the marriage. This was followed by another process known as *ibu mmanya ikpa aka* or *ibu mmanya umunna*. On this occasion, the man and his family would bring some palm wine, kola nuts and tobacco to the bride's father and his extended family (*umunna*). The eldest man among them blessed and broke open the kola nuts, and threw some (with...
libation) to the ancestors, after which all the people present at the ceremony would eat the kola nuts and drink the wine. The bride's father now introduced the prospective son-in-law to his extended family. After this visit, the man went home with his relatives and told the news to his father's patrilineage, and then made another appointment to go back to the bride's family.\footnote{See Akus 1994, 102-103; Agbasiere 2000, 104-105; Spörndli 1942-45, 116.}
The opinion of the diviner was also sought concerning the success of the marriage, as mentioned above.\footnote{Uchendu 1965, 52.} If he had a positive view of the marriage, the marriage arrangements would proceed.\footnote{Ibid.}

To sound out the will of the gods and ancestors about the success of the marriage, professional soothsayers were also employed. It was the duty of the women to seek their information and make it available. If their verdict was that the marriage would not succeed, the match was generally abandoned. If fortune-tellers approved of the match, it would be difficult to stop it from developing into marriage.\footnote{Interview with Ogbueshi Akunwata Okocha, of Umuezei quarters, Asaba, March 19, 1992.} Sometimes, the prognostications of the diviners were conditional. For example, they might declare that for the marriage to succeed, a sacrifice had to be offered. The condition was usually fulfilled before the wedding took place. At other times, the condition would be that it would last as long as the marriage. For instance, the couple might be told by the diviner to perform sacrifices to the gods throughout the period of their marriage.

The second stage: Getting to know the in-laws. If the investigations described above proved satisfactory, the mother of the bride played a very important role in the conclusion of the preliminaries, in order to create a good in-law relationship. She saw it as her immediate task to work to create and develop the inter-in-law relationship (ogo bu ujuju o mia o dolu), as this was called in Asaba society. Her main role at this point was to bring the two families together in order to create a good relationship between them. It was also at this stage that the bride would get to know the husband's family, mainly by visiting, and by staying with her mother-in-law for a period of time.\footnote{See Spörndli 1942-45, 116-117; Uchendu 1965, 52; Agbasiere 2000, 105-106.} At this point, the bride's mother would give advice to her daughter regarding her marriage, and advise her not to get pregnant until the wedding had been completed.\footnote{Uchendu 1965, 52; Agbasiere 2000, 105.}

The visits to the mother-in-law and other members of the man's family helped to test the bride's character and her abilities in domestic work.\footnote{See Uchendu 1965, 52; Spörndli 1942-45, 116-117; Jordan 1949, 210; Ogbalu 1973, 21; Agbasiere 2000, 106.} But the most important thing observed during her stay in her future husband's homestead was her manners, since that was believed to be more important
This visit also gave the prospective bride an opportunity to crosscheck the information that had been given by the intermediaries during their inquiries.

On the day she went home, the husband and his relatives presented her with many gifts. The mother of the bride would be happy after such a satisfactory visit. At the end of this, any man who tried to woo the bride or seduce her would be doomed to social ostracism and public ridicule.

After this followed the **ineze** gift. The **Umuada** of the bride's village would accompany her to the river with a piece of cloth and some cowries, and, in front of the shrine of **Onishe**, the bride would state her intent of marriage. The cloth and the cowries were then left in the shrine of the deity. This act was believed to be a way of begging the deity to release the lady, and if this was not done, the belief was that the marriage would not last, as **Onishe** herself would not sanction the union.

The third stage: The **ineze** gifts. This phase began just before the future wife had her first menstruation after the betrothal. When her breasts began to develop, her prospective husband was supposed to equip her for her monthly menstrual flow. In traditional society, she was expected to be in seclusion, and to wear a certain kind of cloth, as long as her period lasted. When it was over, she washed the cloth and preserved it for the next time. At this period, the girl’s mother, who would thank the gods for her menses, made sacrifices to them. After this ritual, the **Umuada** would go to the shrine of the ancestress and pray to her to come into the family of the bride, and to protect her and the husband. At the end of this, they would sing and dance around the shrine of the ancestress, kill a goat, and sprinkle its blood on the shrine. The killing of the animal was to appease the ancestress, so that she would take full control of the marriage, and make it a successful one.

The **Ewu-chi** gift. If the young man, who had manifested his intentions to marry a particular girl, was still acceptable to the girl's family, he followed up his **ineze** gift with a ritual ceremony. He would bring to the girl's family a female goat and some hens. This goat was called **ewu-chi**, and was neither killed for sacrifice, nor used to provide meat during the festivity. It was carefully looked after and expected to produce kids, which were sold with the eggs and chickens from the hens. The proceeds from these sales were used to purchase some of the essential things that the new bride would need in her future home. These usually included cooking utensils, washing bowls, containers of all sorts, spoons, a mortar and pots for storing and fetching water, baskets, knives, and whatever else she might need in her function as a housewife. Sometimes, the proceeds could be spent on her personal effects, such as beads and clothes. If, during this period, the goat or hens died, she

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348 Uchendu 1965, 52; Agbasiere 2000, 104.
349 Agbasiere 2000, 106.
350 For further information on this, see Agbasiere 2000, 97-98; Talbot 1969, 394.
was told that her spirit did not like the man. This was a sign that the marriage would not be fruitful, and the engagement had to be stopped, just like in the case of any warnings of the diviner.

The fourth stage: The success of the bride's visit started a new stage called *ibu mmanya ilo*, or *ilo* gifts. This stage consisted of two rites: the bringing of wine (*ilo* gift) and the payment of bridewealth (*oziza*)\(^{351}\). This phase announced the would-be husband's intentions to the public at large, and to the girl's entire quarter. It was followed by a gift of palm wine, kola nuts and tobacco, as in the *mmanya ikpa*, but in much larger quantities. Every family, no matter how poor or wealthy it might be, performed this ceremony. Before the ceremony, the girl's father invited all the members of his family. During the ceremony, the chief host was always the girl's father, but in some cases the eldest man in the lineage (*Diokpa*, or the *Okpara*) could preside on the occasion, with both male and female members of both families present.\(^{352}\)

The palm wine, kola nuts and other things brought by the bridegroom and his family were kept until the girl's father brought out his own kola nut, and introduced the matter to the people. He then broke open the kola nut, which was shared. After this, the bride and the bridegroom were called out from the house, normally accompanied by the girl's mother and her close friends. The father of the girl would give a piece of the opened kola nut to the girl, who would eat part of it, and give the rest to the bridegroom. He would also pour some wine into the cup, and make a libation of it, and ask the girl to come before the people. When she appeared, certain questions were put to her to be answered, such as whether she agreed to be the wife of the man. If she answered yes, she would be asked to authorise them to drink the wine. If she did this, it indicated that she had agreed to marry the man, and the girl's father would ask her to take a sip of the wine, and give the cup to the man of her choice in the gathering. The bride gave the cup to the prospective husband, and the people would now cheer: “They have become husband and wife” (*aburu la ha di la nwunye*).\(^{353}\) The bridegroom would also be asked the same questions, and, if he agreed, the bride's father would offer prayers at the quarter's common house, where the “*mmanyailo*” ceremony was conducted for the gods and the ancestors, and ask the gods and ancestors for their guidance and success in the marriage.\(^{354}\) This was the first ritual of acceptance and future togetherness of the couple, witnessed by the families, the goddess of earth and the ancestors. After this ceremony, the bride and the bridegroom returned to the house. From this day onwards, the bridegroom would start making visits to the bride's family with palm wine, a pinch of snuff and small gifts for the bride and others. The bridegroom was authorised to come

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\(^{351}\) Akus 1994, 103-106.

\(^{352}\) Ibid., 103.

\(^{353}\) Akus 1994, 103-105; Agbasiere 2000, 107; Uchendu 1965, 53.

\(^{354}\) Akus 1994, 104.
and go, but not to sleep with the bride. They would not kiss or hold hands. Tradition forbade it.

**Bridewealth:** We may also distinguish a separate part of the fourth stage, which implies the payment of bridewealth (*oziza*). If the bride willingly allowed the wine ceremony (*mmanya ilo*) to go through without any problem, her fiancé would prepare for the *oziza*, or the bridewealth. In most Igbo societies, the payment of bridewealth differs from one community to another. In some communities it is a very long process, which could take a man's lifetime. But in the Asaba society, this custom differs; only a small amount of money was given to the girl's parents as bridewealth, and the money paid for the education of the girl was never demanded from the prospective husband, as was done in some other Igbo communities.355

Before the advent of modern currency, bridewealth in most Igbo communities was paid with cowries, but nowadays the payment is made with money. Besides, to pay bridewealth is a custom that still prevails, even among the Christians. During the ceremony of the payment of bridewealth, only the elderly male members of the two families are present. This used to be preceded by drinks provided by the future husband. The bridewealth was usually given to the bride's father, who distributed it to the family. He would give some money to the girl's mother and other close relatives.356

**Marriage feast:** Having fulfilled his customary responsibility in paying the necessary bridewealth, the bridegroom and his family asked permission of their parents-in-law to wed their “wife”. On the wedding day, the expenditure was high. It is impossible to equate it in terms of money. It was, on the one hand, a matter of prestige for the bride's parents to be able to make a large feast in honour of their daughter, and, on the other, a way of expressing satisfaction and honour to the family of the bridegroom. To an Asaba man, it was an honour to have “married out” a daughter. A long sojourn of a girl at her parents' house could have shown that she had a bad character, or that some omen was pursuing the family. But if everything was satisfactory, this was one of the reasons why an Igbo marriage feast was vast in scale and planning. Both the scale of the feast and the number of people to be invited, which was often unlimited, and the quality and quantity of the dowry, would often be important topics for gossip.

In some cases, people would arrange for a Christian wedding ceremony after the feast given in connection with the payment of bridewealth. The family of the groom would announce the date of the wedding. On that day,

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356 For further information on Igbo high bridewealth as a result of academic achievement, see Aghasiere 2000, 109.
357 Ibid., 109-110
the groom's family, both men and women, would go to the bride's family and receive her ceremoniously with dancing and singing.

The final part of the fourth stage is, today, the preparation of the marriage feast and the performance of the wedding, aya ogba (endowment for marriage), marking the end of the marriage rituals. This stage involves some major preparations that are usually done by the bride's mother.

Very early in the morning on the wedding day, a cow, goats and chickens are slaughtered. Palm wine, local gin, tobacco and kola nuts are brought by the groom's family. The feast is usually profuse, with the help of the extended family groups. The age-mates of the bride and bridegroom are present. The bridegroom's age-group help to provide the wine, and also to carry it to the in-laws. They also play music and help to organise the function. During this preparation, the whole atmosphere will be electrified with fun, amusement and merriment.

Even today, the things given for dowry to the bride's family play a more conspicuous role in public. Those things vary from one family to another, depending on the material position of the bride's family.

The bride's mother will also shop for her all the things that her daughter will need as a housewife, for instance cooking utensils, clothing, and food items, such as coco-yams, animals,359 etc. In addition to this, the bride is also given various kinds of gifts by her relatives,360 such as a broom, a mortar and pestle, wooden carved spoons, etc.

During this ceremony, the village musicians and the bridegroom’s age group play music. The bride is led into the compound square and seated on a chair. As the musicians play, the couples are invited to dance. The bride is always the centre of interest. She will dance rhythmically; interpreting her desires and wishes for life with the movement of her body, waist and hands, and the husband is invited to join her.

After this, the Diokpa or Okpara of the family, who is also the holder and keeper of the lineage ofo (staff of authority), enters. He is the ritual priest. After making his speech and giving his advice to the couple, they are instructed to follow the footsteps of their parents and elders, and to obey the customary laws. The couple is wished many children, wealth and good health. Their parents will also bless them.

At the end of this celebration, the members of her age group lead the girl to her husband’s house. She bids farewell to her parents, not without tears. Normally, the people of her party, who have been all cheerfulness and laughter, now change to pretend sorrow and weeping. Courtesy demands in many ways, unwillingness of the bride to leave her home and of her family to let her go; all of this develops into a “mock” performance.

359 Green 1947, 161; Agbasiere 2000, 110.
360 Agbasiere 2000, 110.
Before the daughter’s departure, the girl’s mother hands over the sacrificial objects needed to perform a traditional ceremony of prayers and sacrifices for the girl's fertility in her husband's house. The girl’s father, or an elderly relative of his family, usually performs this ritual ceremony.361

After this, the girl’s properties and goods are displayed in her family before they are carried and exhibited on the way to the groom's house, with songs attracting spectators and well-wishers. She is led in company of her age mates and other people. The scene now shifts from the bride's family to the groom's.

Formerly, relatives from both sides paid a visit to the couple on the day after the wedding ceremony.362 It was a custom for the wife and husband to be secluded for several days after the wedding. This seclusion was then followed by exposure to the public.

The weeping and lamentations during the wedding ceremony are supposed to be an expression of the feeling of loss that follows from the temporary parting from a daughter, who has spent most of her life with her family, but who would now have to adjust to another household-setting, different from that of her natal family. According to my analysis, the seclusion symbolises the couple's birth into a new life. The rituals and ceremonies, which follow the wedding, are a way of conferring a change of status and also to strengthen the efforts that have been made to cement friendship and marriage bonds between the two families.

Changes in marriage rules: Thus we can see that many of the customs belonging to "traditional society" added to the importance of Igbo women in traditional society.

With the introduction of Christianity in Igbo communities, the missionaries also introduced the Christian marriages in the Church and encouraged the newly converted Christians to marry in the Church, while abandoning their traditional system of marriage, in which the Igbo women played a very significant role. The traditional Igbo marriage was now replaced by the Christian marriage in the Church, which was presided over by a priest. This implies that the Igbo women’s traditional roles in marriage rituals declined, as new couples now wed in the Church. This has had a great effect on the role played by the Igbo women in traditional Igbo society, for instance in such issues as marriage rituals.

There was thus a shift from the traditional marriage to the Christian marriage. Further, because of this, the choice of wife or husband in Igbo communities took another turn. The possession of a formal education has been added to the qualities traditionally required in a partner. The profession of the husband also plays a big role, because the marriage of a girl to a prosper-

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361 Ibid.
ous young man enhances the social and economic position of the wife and her family. In addition to this, with the new Church marriages, some men are allowed to choose their own spouses, as compared to the traditional marriage where the parents made the choice. With this new system, where individuals make their own choices, the formal marriage visits in traditional society (iku-aka-na-uzo) are replaced by long marriage courting between the prospective husband and a wife, and by a tendency towards individual taste more than towards the choice of the family or lineage. The parents are now formally informed about the wedding celebration when the partners are ready.

Changes have also taken place in the family system with the introduction of the Christian marriage and marriage by ordinance. Both these forms of marriage have given the Igbo women a new legal protection, which was not previously recognized in connection with the traditional Igbo system of marriage. Monogamy is also gradually replacing polygamy, as the new converts have changed toward monogamy. The former system of leviratic marriage, implying that a widow could become the wife of any of the kinsmen of the husband at his death, has also been abolished.

7.5 Death and funeral rites

The Igbo concept of death (onwu) is connected with the people's beliefs in relation to the supernatural forces that control the universe. The Igbo see individual existence in this world as a continuation of life in the spirit world. Death is seen as one phase of existence, while birth is another. These two phases are believed to be intertwined; the status one had on earth continues in the spirit world. As a spirit one influences the living, and the living influence the spirits as well. So it is believed that without rites and ceremonies at a funeral, the deceased will not enter the land of the spirits but wander around on earth, which will also prevent him from attaining ancestorhood. This is why the Igbo see it as a necessity to perform funeral rites for the deceased. It is also believed that Chukwu (God) has a destiny for each individual, which is known in Igbo as akala aka, and that destiny is death.

“To die and be buried in a strange land is utterly repugnant to the Igbo. If at all possible, burial must take place at home. The spirit can never find rest in alien surroundings; hence every effort is made to transport the corpse to its old home.” In some cases, when a person has died in a foreign place

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364 Noon 1942, 638.
365 Noon 1942, 639; Talbot 1969, 493.
366 Noon 1942, 639.
367 Basden 1938, 278.
and the corpse has been buried, some people even go to the level of removing the corpse from the ground, after it has been buried for several days, in order to take the corpse home, rather than to accept that it would remain in exile. The wish of all Igbo men and women is to rest with the souls of their ancestors; it is a very real fact and poignant hope among the Igbo.368

Funeral rites are therefore seen as very important among the Igbo.369 The time after a death is a period of sadness and anxiety in the community, and a time when the deceased person is mourned by their loved ones. It also a time of much movement among the living, when people go from one lineage to another to visit the relatives of the deceased.370

According to Mbiti, “Death marks a physical separation of the individual from other human beings. This is a radical change, and the funeral rites and ceremonies are intended to draw attention to that permanent separation.”371 The purpose of funeral rites in Igbo society is to be sure that the deceased person reaches the spirit land. Without a proper funeral it is believed that the deceased will never enter the land of the spirits, but wander around as a ghost or an evil spirit.372 Many funeral songs sung by the Igbo during funerals describe death as going home, or going to the spirit land, ila ulo, or ila ala mmuo; death is not seen as a disaster but rather as going home to meet God (Chukwu), and most of the funeral rites performed during the burial are a symbolic way of preparing the deceased person to enter the land of the spirits.373 But it should be noted that the term “going home” is never used when referring to the death of a child.374

Most of these funeral rites are significant Igbo customs, and Igbo women play significant roles during these rituals, provided that they are freeborn. For instance, without the role of women such as the Umuada, no one in any Igbo community could have a proper funeral rite.

Igbo traditional funeral rites are based on what kind of death a person had, and on the status that the person had on earth. As Thomas puts it, “the rites of burial vary according to the age, sex, and importance of the deceased. More sacrifices are necessary for a man who is married and has children than for a young man who has not taken a wife.”375 Not all deaths are regarded by the Igbo as good deaths. Some are seen as bad, such as a violent death by accident, suicide, or death caused by lightning, leprosy, cholera, smallpox, or dropsy. These kinds of death are regarded as the result of sin, and in such cases, the deceased person is not buried or mourned in the community but

368 Ibid.
369 Talbot 1969, 493.
370 See Green 1947, 165; Basden 1938, 279.
372 Metuh 1981, 142-143.
373 Ibid., 139.
374 Basden 1938, 282.
375 Thomas 1917, 181.
thrown into the bad bush, *ajo-ofia* or *ajo ohia*.\(^{376}\) The type of death also determined the kind of funeral one was given in the community, and one's spirit status in the afterlife.\(^{377}\) Married people, both male and female, were given full funeral ceremonies along with real mourning, while unmarried youths were not given elaborate burials, although they were mourned. Children never received burial ceremonies, although they were mourned for a short time by their parents and immediate relatives.\(^{378}\) In addition to this, not all adults in traditional Igbo society received funeral ceremonies. Firstly, slaves had no funeral ceremonies; secondly, those who died a shameful death and those who died of certain diseases were not given full burial ceremonies.\(^{379}\) Among the Igbo, death caused by illness was always linked with evil forces; when a person died from illness, it was always said to be caused by sorcery, an offended ancestor or spirit, or magic performed by an enemy.\(^{380}\)

The Igbo funeral rites included three phases. The first was the public mourning, when the corpse was buried, the second was the prescribed mourning, and the third was the appropriate burial celebration and the con
erment of ancestorhood. Each of these phases was performed with elaborate ceremonies.\(^{381}\) But my main concern here is the public and prescribed mourning.

According to Asaba belief, one important obligation that all living owe the dead is burial, in the form of a funeral. A high premium is paid for funeral ceremonies in order to give honour to the dead and also to enable the spirit of the deceased person to reach the spirit world. There are two main burial rites, one for titled men, and the other for non-titled people.

When a person dies in the community, the women immediately burst into loud crying.\(^{382}\) The widows of the deceased loosen their plaited hair and leave it untidy, and also put on black clothes from the day of the death. They are not allowed to engage in any kind of activity or work until the termination of the mourning period for the deceased.\(^{383}\) Every adult person is buried in the house, except for those who died “embarrassing deaths,” and those whose bodies have swelled because of illness.\(^{384}\) A woman is not buried in her husband's home.\(^{385}\)

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\(^{376}\) See Metuh 1981, 140-141; Basden 1938, 276.

\(^{377}\) Ibid., 141.

\(^{378}\) Agbasiere 2000, 143; Akus 1994, 108.

\(^{379}\) Agbasiere 2000, 143-144; Hilary 1995, 291.

\(^{380}\) Green 1947, 54; Agbasiere 2000, 144.

\(^{381}\) Agbasiere 2000, 144.

\(^{382}\) Talbot 1969, 495; Basden 1938, 270.

\(^{383}\) Agbasiere 2000, 147; Basden 1938, 279.

\(^{384}\) For further information on this, see Thomas 1914, 37; 1917, 165.

\(^{385}\) Talbot 1969, 495; Thomas 1914, 37; Basden 1938, 284.
Formerly, funeral ceremonies began immediately, or the day after a person's death, when the body was buried in mats or a coffin. It was proclaimed to the public in the following ways: In the case of a titled man, the village drum (okanga) was played throughout the night before the funeral ceremony; slaves (ohu) were also killed during the ceremony. The night before the funeral, and also in the morning, a gun was fired in order to tell the community that a great man had departed, and also to remind people that the funeral ceremony for the deceased would be taking place on that day. Further, it was also a way of notifying the spirit of the deceased of the coming proceedings, so that he may rejoice with his relatives and also get ready to join his brother spirits. Another reason for the gunfire was to drive away any vindictive spirits that might be around the house of the deceased.

Before the funeral ceremony started, the body of the deceased was symbolically washed and prepared through a process of purification by the Umuada of the deceased's lineage. The hair was shaved and the body anointed with camwood dye, ufie, and dressed in the deceased's best clothes and laid in state. A ram was killed and the blood dripped into the eyes of the deceased in order to enable him to see clearly on the journey to the spirit world. A goat and a fowl were also sacrificed. Their blood was used to cover the corpse, while the feathers were put around it. The deceased's box of cloth was opened, and the cloth, bag, pot, plate, and all that was needed to equip him in the spirit world, was put in the grave. Various rituals to protect the deceased from any obstacles that might prevent him from entering the spirit land, and also to pray for his reincarnation, normally followed this. After this, the Umuada from the deceased's lineage spent a few nights with the bereft family before they dispersed.

Second burial: A second burial ceremony, “ini-ozu,” which lasted for a few weeks, could take place immediately, or several months, or years, after the actual burial. This custom was motivated by the religious belief that when a person died, he or she would sometimes wander around on earth,
instead of making a straight journey to the spirit world. The second burial ceremony was therefore performed in order to enable the deceased to reach his destination in time. In the case of Eze title-holders, this was preceded by the killing of slaves, something that was stopped during the colonial era.399

The second burial rites in Asaba were observed in the following ways:

*The first stage, ewu-oya:* During this ceremony, there were different offerings for men of different titles. For a man who had taken the title called Nkpese, a he-goat and a ram were killed, and for a man who had taken the title called Nkpalo, three goats were killed.400 In the case of an Eze title-holder, different items for the rites were gathered together, such as palm wine, yams powder etc. As mentioned above, the deceased's head was shaved and a bead (idibwe) and chalk put on his mouth. On the head of the deceased Eze title-holder, a red cap was placed with two eagle feathers (ugo). The Ada-isi of the lineage sacrificed a he-goat and a rooster for the deceased.401 In the evening, the Ada-isi went to the market place, where some of the women from the lineage would bring a pot of palm wine, a mat, and a white, plain cloth. The Ada-isi removed the bead from the mouth of the deceased, which had been placed there by his eldest son, and put it in her calabash, and took it away.402

*The second stage, igbudu:* During this ceremony, in place of a corpse, a catafa made of white bamboo mat was placed on four vertical sticks with a white strip of cloth across it. Two goats were slaughtered in the case of a non-titled person, while a cow and four goats were slaughtered for a titled man. If the deceased was a member of the Ogbu society, an association of war veterans and hunters would also kill a ram in his honour, and a dance was performed.403 This ceremony took place when the deceased was lying in state.

*The third stage, onwichi unu:* This was marked by exquisite performances of drumming, singing and dancing by various dancing groups, consisting of both men and women, from the community.404 They danced around the town singing songs about the glory of the deceased's achievements in life and those of his ancestors.

*The fourth stage, egwugwu:* If the deceased was a titled man, a masquerade called egwugwu came out seventeen days after the burial. This egwugwu was believed to be a spirit representing the dead man on earth.405 The eg-

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399 Interview with HRH Prof. Obi J. C. Edozien of Umuezei quarters, Asaba, March 5, 1994. He is the Asagba of Asaba, that is, the traditional head of the Asaba community, and also the head of the Oturaza council of chiefs and the Ichiokwa of Asaba. For further information on this, see also Basden 1938, 294.

400 Thomas 1917, 182.

401 Ibid.

402 Ibid.

403 Talbot 1969, 495; for further information on this, see Basden 1938, 289.


405 See Talbot 1969, 493-494; Parkinson 1906, 313; Thomas 1917, 18; Isichei 1991,
wugwu paraded in the town, all the while collecting money and chasing people, especially women.\textsuperscript{406} This was always an occasion of great joy, and people come out to watch the masked \textit{persona}. The essence of this personification was to keep the memory of the deceased ever fresh in the minds of people, so they could be constantly inspired by this symbolic presence.

\textit{The fifth stage, ikpowa-ikenga:} This stage marked the severance of the mundane relationship from the shrine of the dead man, as the \textit{ikenga} symbol of the guardian angel was taken out from the deceased's shrine by members of his age-grade and split asunder.\textsuperscript{407} The \textit{Umuada} from the deceased's lineage killed a fowl and sprinkled the blood on his grave. This ritual was a mark of respect for the deceased and also a way of wishing him a safe journey to the spirit world.

\textit{The last stage, ikpo igbalukwu:} This was the final stage in a traditional Asaba second burial. Here the \textit{Inyemedi} of the deceased performed the rites of \textit{ikpo igbalukwu} in the premises of the deceased. The ritual took the form of collection and burial of all pots, calabashes, baskets, and other temporary vessels used during the funeral. At the end of the burial, the wives shaved their heads,\textsuperscript{408} changed their clothes and made sacrifices for the deceased. It should be noted that in Asaba, unlike some other Igbo communities, the sons of the deceased were not allowed to shave their heads, only the daughters.

After this, mourning continued for one year, if the deceased was a “titled” man, while for ordinary people it usually lasted seven months.\textsuperscript{409} The widows stayed in their husband's house during the entire period of mourning. They were not allowed to leave the house, and could only take baths at night.\textsuperscript{410} Their drinking water was kept separately from that of other people in the house and their food was also cooked separately.\textsuperscript{411} The widows slept in the room where their husband had been buried.\textsuperscript{412} During this period, they carried a piece of stick in their hands, and were not expected to talk loudly in the village.\textsuperscript{413} The fulfilment of this obligation of mourning was believed to free the widows from their duties to their late husband, and allow them to enter into new marriages.\textsuperscript{414} It was also a way of honouring the deceased. The untidy state of the widows during this mourning period was believed to prevent the spirit of the deceased from taking them away. The shaving of the wives' heads marked the end of the funeral ceremonies, and was also a sym-

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{520} Akus 1994, 108-109, 114.
\bibitem{406} Thomas 1917, 184.
\bibitem{407} Parkinson 1906, 313.
\bibitem{408} Agbasiere 2000, 147.
\bibitem{409} Talbot 1969, 496.
\bibitem{410} Ibid.
\bibitem{411} Ibid.
\bibitem{412} The colour of the funeral dress worn by family members and sympathizers during burial in Asaba society is black.
\bibitem{413} For further information on this, see Agbasiere 2000, 148.
\bibitem{414} Ibid., 150.
\end{thebibliography}
bol of separation, showing that one of the members of the lineage had been separated from them. It was also a sign that death does not put an end to life; the growth of new hair shows that life continues. The broken calabash, the pot, and the meat deposited on the grave of the deceased by the *Ada-isi*, were marks of permanent severance of the deceased from the affairs of the world. The blood put on his eyelids was to distinguish him from the living, and also to enable him to see his way to the land of the spirits. The sacrifice of a he-goat and a rooster by the *Ada-isi* indicated the deceased's ailing period. The period of mourning was a “liminal” period.415 Death would, as it were, disorganise the social and spiritual relationship, which held the society together, and thus turned the period into a chaotic state. Furthermore, it was a period of separation for the women, who were secluded from the profane world of daily life. The changing of clothes then reincorporated the widows into the community.

7.6 Conclusion

We can see that the women had many functions in the traditional life cycle rituals in Igbo society, at birth, naming, initiation, marriage, and death. However, these roles in the life cycle rituals declined when the Christian missionaries took over in Igboland. Earlier, the women's toughness and competence were stressed, and several female organisations played a significant role.

Further, in Igbo traditional society, good manners as seen in this chapter, were for women to keep quiet in mixed associations where men and women were present. The women were expected to listen and talk less, while the men made most of the decisions concerning the associations. Because of this domination of men in mixed meetings, the women lost their previous right of being able to express themselves (which they had had in “dual sex” associations) and became “muted”.

Since the introduction of Christianity in Igbo society, some significant changes have taken place, especially in connection with burial ceremonies. Christian rituals have replaced the traditional burial ceremonies, in which the Igbo women played a significant role.

According to Christian, clerical views, any rites that are connected to “spirits” are against the Christian faith. But in the traditional view of the Igbo, some of the “spirits” are ancestors, and thus certain rituals of the patrilineal society have to refer to patrilineal ancestors. In this respect, the women from patrilineal families (thus, the freeborn, married women) had a great responsibility. For this reason, the married women were important con-

415 See Turner 1969, 94-130, for more information on “liminality”.

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tributors to the social order of the society, especially when matters of life and death were concerned.

7.7 Summary and conclusion of part one

In the first part of this study, an attempt has been made to present the general background of traditional Igbo society, with the geography, the settlement patterns, their individualistic and achievement-oriented spirit, and the interest in collective societies and clubs, title societies, etc. In chapters two to five, we have seen that Asaba traditional society was marked by parallel institutions for men and women in the political, economic and religious domains. There was a balance of power between the male and female, reflected at the communal level by the Asagba and the Omu, and at the village level by the Okpara (Diokpa) and the Ada-isi. This is due to the dual sex political system, which is practised by the western Igbo, especially Asaba. Asaba women from the Omu to the Umuada were significant members of the society and had a say in the political, economic and religious matters in the community. This parallelism could be seen in the entire organisation of the community. It applied to those who were freeborn, but not to those who were born of slaves. Those were also excluded from any rites that were connected to lineages or ancestors, and had no access to marriage rituals.

Further, we have also seen the significant roles played by the Igbo women in life cycle rituals such as those surrounding birth, initiation, marriage and death. Here, as well, we have to note that slave women did not play any significant role, since they were not regarded as members of the lineages because of their social status. The parallelism of men and women of freeborn status shows that the western Igbo conception of parallel worlds for the genders was deeply rooted in their outlook on the genders. This parallelism may also be noted in other realms. For instance, the fact that the genders were kept separate, had separate dwellings, separate eating spaces, and so on, was a sign that the western Igbo wanted to keep them separate in parallel worlds. For this reason, I would prefer to call the western Igbo view of the genders as a “parallel organisation,” rather than using the term “dual-sex organisation,” which was suggested by Okonjo in his article (1976). The parallelism of the organisation of men and women in separate domains with respect to the moral and political order may be regarded as a division of power. Yet, the parallel organisation also comprised other sections, where we should speak of the “significance” rather than the “power” of women, since the authority (in the sense of legitimate power) used to stay with the men. It was always (and still is) the man who had the prerogative to give orders to the women surrounding him. For example, even still today, it is the man who prescribes how things should be done in a family.
Even if many of the “traditional” customs have been abandoned – especially in the religious sectors – many of the customs from previous times still apply today. Thus, for instance, the parallel organisation within the moral, political and economic spheres applies today for people who have not joined any Christian Church. For this reason, I prefer to use the word “traditional” in contrast to the word “Christian.”

I have also noted that women of slave descendance did not have any power in the “traditional” organisation. This was also true for the parallel organisation of rituals. Since the female participation in such rituals depended on lineage membership, and since the slaves were not members of any lineages, women born of slaves were excluded from any significant roles in the traditional religious rituals and the life cycle rituals. As I see it, this may be one of the reasons why slaves (both women and men) were among the first converts. Even today, when slavery is long since abandoned, people in Asaba keep track of who is a descendant of slaves and who is not. The descendants of slaves are generally looked down upon. This may explain why there are more descendants of slaves than descendants of freeborn lineage members who are members of the Church today. However, the “traditional” (in the terms of non-Christian), parallel organisation of the genders still prevails outside the Church.

In addition to this, men were supposed to be aggressive in traditional Igbo society whereas women were supposed to be tough and co-operative, since this was part of the ideal for women in the parallel organisation in the “dual-sex” society. But the capacity to speak in public was a virtue for anybody (man and woman) in this society. However, in mixed company, the women were supposed to keep quiet. This was part of the good manners of women.

Since the mid-19th century, traditional Asaba society was challenged by British colonialism and Christianity. It is what happened in that encounter that I am going to explore in Part Two.
PART TWO:
CHRISTIAN MISSION, COLONIAL POWER, AND THE IGBO RESPONSE
CHAPTER 8
Colonialism and Christianity

8.1 Christianity and change 1830-1888

8.1.1 Introduction

The objective of this part is to determine how, with the coming of colonialism, Christianity, Western education and modernisation, the religious and socio-political role of women in Asaba traditional society in particular and Igbo society in general was affected. This part is structured into five chapters. The first chapter is the general framework, where I discuss the end of the slave trade and its aftermath, the beginnings of European interest in the Niger area, the Niger Expeditions, the coming of Christianity to Asaba and the CMS changes, and the historical changes which took place in Asaba between 1830 and 1888, the establishment of the Royal Niger Company, a British trading firm which traded in Asaba in the 1870s, and the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries, the Society of African Missions. In chapter nine, I discuss the establishing of colonial rule in Nigeria. Chapter ten deals with the colonial impact on Igbo women, the Aba Women's Riot of 1929 and its ramifications for Igbo women, and the continued impact of Western education. In chapter eleven, I discuss the growth of nationalism in Nigeria, the role of Igbo women in the Nigerian political parties, the churches and relief work in Biafra, and the effects of the Nigerian civil war on Igbo women. In chapter twelve, the last part in this section, I assess the reconstruction and the reconciliation that took place in eastern Nigeria after the Nigerian Civil War in 1970, the new states and local government areas that were created, the nationalisation of schools and educational system in Nigeria, and the Church developments in Nigeria since 1970.

8.2 The end of the slave trade

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, a number of European and American states decided to abolish slave trade.416 In 1771, Britain declared

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416 There is extensive literature on this subject. See, for instance, Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, 1975; Roger Anstey, The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810, 1975; Suzanne Miers, Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade, 1975.
that any slave who was in or had been brought to England, automatically became free. In 1807 an act was passed by the British Parliament, which made it illegal for British subjects to engage in slave trade. In 1833, another act abolished slavery throughout the British Empire. At the same time, all other European and American states passed laws forbidding their citizens from engaging in this trade.417

Nevertheless, it was soon apparent that the mere declaration that slave trade was illegal was not enough to stop it, so long as there was a market for slaves. To enforce these declarations, the British government signed a series of treaties with the principal maritime powers, which entitled ships of the Royal Navy to stop and search ships from other countries, and, if slaves were found on board, to liberate them, and condemn the ship's captain.

Discussions also began in certain quarters with a view to work out alternative means of abolishing slave trade. As early as 1792, it had been argued that perhaps a more effective way to abolish the trade would be to open up the interior of Africa for trade, for Christianity, and for what was described as “good government.” Several societies were subsequently formed in Europe for the purpose of achieving these objectives. In the course of time, Europeans began to penetrate the interior of Africa, either as explorers or traders or missionaries. It was as a result of the activities of these men that Europeans first came in contact with Nigeria.

After the abolition of slave trade and the introduction of the palm oil trade by the British government, Christianity was introduced. Because of the introduction of Christianity, the missionaries were able to preach the equality of all men before God, which was one of the basic elements of the new religion.

8.3 Beginnings of European interest in the Niger area

8.3.1 The Niger expeditions of 1832-1857

In 1788 and 1830 the African Association despatched a number of expeditions into the interior of Africa. In 1795, Mungo Park reached Segu on the Niger, but drowned at Bussa during a subsequent expedition.418 In 1825, Clapperton reached the Niger at Bussa. He visited Kano and Sokoto, where he attempted to negotiate a treaty with the sultan to stop the slave trade in his sultanate. The refusal of the sultan to entertain such an arrangement dismayed Clapperton, whose health soon broke down, and resulted in his death.

417 Fage 1969, 111-118.
He was buried by his companion and servant, Richard Lander, who subse-
quently returned to Badagri and thence to Europe.419

In 1830, Richard Lander, accompanied by his brother, John, traced the
course of the Niger from Bussa to the sea. The two men had a relatively
smooth journey from Bussa, but were captured at Asaba by Aboh men, who
surrendered them to the Obi.420 The Landers were, however, ransomed by a
Brass trader, who took them to the coast, hoping to recover his investment.
However, the trader was disappointed, since they sailed away without re-
funding the ransom.421

The Lander brothers later returned to England with the good news of their
discovery of the mouth of the Niger. They were warmly welcomed, as they
had solved the age-long puzzle about the mouth of the Niger. As a result of
this, other European countries began to rush to the Niger. Arrangements
were subsequently made to send men up the Niger to establish trading con-
tacts with the people of the interior. In 1832, an expedition up the Niger was
sponsored by MacGregor Laird.422 This attempt ended in disaster; out of the
48 Europeans who took part in the expedition, 38 died from fever.423

In 1841, another expedition was again sent up the Niger. Its purpose was
to establish a trading post, a Christian mission post, and a model farm at
Lokoja. This expedition was sponsored by the British government and in-
spired by the ideals of Fowell Buxton as enunciated in his book, African
Slave Trade and Its Remedy. Like the expedition of 1832-1834, this one also
ended in disaster. Out of the 145 Europeans who accompanied it, 48 died of
fever.424

These disasters proved to be a temporary setback to the first attempts to
establish trading and missionary contacts with the peoples of the Lower Ni-
ger. However, in 1854, another expedition was sponsored jointly by the Brit-
ish government and Maegregor Laird. This expedition was successful, as
none of its members died, thanks to the use of quinine.425 The way to the
interior was considered to have been opened, and each year an expedition
was sent up the Niger.

Most of the subsequent expeditions up the Niger were undertaken by mis-
sionaries and traders, sometimes accompanied by government officials. For
the rest of the century, various European nations scrambled for the wealth of
Nigeria on the banks of the Niger and in the Delta. The main reason for this
scramble was the abolition of slave trade in Britain and the rest of Europe,
which led to a transition from slave trade to palm oil trade, or from the "ille-

419 Ibid.
420 Ibid., 251.
421 Ibid., 280.
422 Laird and Oldfield, 1832, 1833 and 1834, vol. 11.
423 Ibid.
424 For the full story, see Allen and Thomson, A Narrative, 2vols, 1848.
425 See Baikie 1856, 30.
gitimate” to the “legitimate”, as some would call it. After the necessary access had been made by the various European nations involved in these expeditions to the African interior, the whole inland markets were now open to European commerce and industry.

The first European trading posts to be established on the Lower Niger were those at Lokoja, Onitsha and Aboh. They were the products of the 1857 expedition. Every year traders were sent up the Niger, and over the years, many trading posts were established at convenient points along the river. By 1888, there were over forty such trading posts, established at an approximate distance of twenty miles from one another.

The great demand for palm oil in Europe was accompanied by high prices for the product. The result was an increase in the number of European firms trading on the Niger. The 1860’s and 1870’s were particularly favourable for European firms trading on the Niger. Although the Africans in this region tried to meet the great demand for oil, in the short run, supply fell below demand. To secure their cargoes, the European firms began to compete vigorously with each other. One feature of this competition was the practice of giving lavish presents to the local inhabitants.

However, after 1875, these apparently “smooth and painless” beginnings came to a sad end, when the palm oil trade went into a long period of depression. The prices that palm oil attracted in Europe fell so sharply that the European traders on the Niger decided to re-examine their methods of securing their cargoes. First, they discarded the practice of giving presents to the local inhabitants. As we shall see, in due course, this refusal gave rise to grave friction between the Europeans and Africans on the Niger. Secondly, the Europeans began to compete more vigorously than before among themselves for the available trade. Some firms were swallowed up by more efficient ones, while others were eliminated entirely. These circumstances were the critical factors that led to the merging of many smaller firms to produce the so-called Royal Niger Company.

8.4 The Royal Niger Company and Asaba

After the Niger expeditions by the British in the 1840s and 1850s, a trading post was built at Lokoja in 1857, with Dr. William Belfour Baikie, the leader of the successful Niger expedition of 1854, in charge. In 1869, the British government decided to close their consulate in Lokoja because of lack of prospects in trade in the town.

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426 Ibid.
429 Ibid.
430 Ohadike 1991, 68.
Some British trading firms had already been established in this town, such as the West African Company of Manchester, Holland Jacques and Company, Alexander Pinnock and Company, and Miller Brothers of Glasgow. Even African merchants from Lagos and Sierra Leone, were not discouraged by this closure, but rather by the arrival of two French trading firms to Lokoja. The arrival of these two firms in 1875 and 1884 led to much competition between the various firms, both European and African.\(^\text{431}\)

This competition degenerated into a commercial war. George Taubman Goldie, who played a prominent role in the history of the Royal Niger Company, was quick to realise the fact that if this unhealthy competition remained unchecked, it could pose problems to British commercial interests in the region in the future. Goldie's perception of the negative consequences of this competition propelled him to work towards the amalgamation of the various British firms trading up the Niger. “The British government was at first reluctant to grant the charter, but when Goldie threatened to sell the treatises he claimed to have concluded with African chiefs, the British government reluctantly granted the request.”\(^\text{432}\) The result of this amalgamation was the birth of a big company. “On July 10, 1886, the National African Company became the Royal Niger Company.”\(^\text{433}\) This charter gave the company an authority over the lower Niger protectorate.\(^\text{434}\)

The Royal Niger Company then established its first capital of Nigeria at Asaba. From there they opened up trading posts in various places, like Iddah and Onitsha.\(^\text{435}\) The Royal Niger Company, having received a royal charter from the British government, saw itself as the only recognised government in the whole of the Niger territory. Having received this power from the British government, the company dissolved all native authorities, and treaties were signed by some of the Obi, who placed themselves and their people under the protection of the company.

This company caused a lot of problems and discontent for the Asaba people, and also for their fellow European traders.\(^\text{436}\) The Royal Niger Company attempted to stop human sacrifices at Asaba, and to free the slaves, which led to a series of wars, in which a lot of Asaba people lost their lives. In 1888, the soldiers of the Royal Niger Company bombarded Asaba. The reason for this bombardment of Asaba was the continued practice of immolation of slaves by Asaba natives. It was after the bombardment of Asaba in 1888 that Sir James Marshall, who was a Roman Catholic, invited the SMA Fathers of the Roman Catholic Mission from Lokoja to come, in order to open a mission station at Asaba.

\(^{431}\) Ibid.
\(^{432}\) Ibid., 69.
\(^{433}\) Ibid.
\(^{434}\) Ibid.
\(^{435}\) Akus 1994, 27.
\(^{436}\) Ohadike 1991, 70.
8.5 The coming of Christianity to eastern Nigeria

The coming of Christianity to Igboland occurred during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the pioneers were the British Church Missionary Society (CMS), which is a missionary society within the Anglican Church, founded in 1799. This society was administered by a combination of lay and clerical men. Following the foundation of Sierra Leone as a colony for resettling liberated African slaves, a mission of that society was established in Freetown. In a few years, the society had made such progress that Sierra Leone became the centre from which missionaries were sent out to other parts of West Africa.

The Yoruba of the Egba originating from the western part of Nigeria were the first group of people to come back to Nigeria after the slave trade, in order to spread the gospel. They did very well, and because of this, other settlers from other parts of the country, such as the Igbo, requested that missionaries should be sent to them. Their request was considered, and Rev E. James and three other Igbo people were told to travel to Fernando Po to get information on how to spread Christianity to Igboland. However, this attempt was not successful.

In 1841 another attempt was made to spread Christianity in Igboland. As mentioned above, in that year an expedition was carried out to the Niger with Simon Jones, an Igbo interpreter from Sierra Leone, and the Yoruba missionary Samuel Ajayi Crowther. When the boat arrived at Aboh, Simon Jones was left behind to teach the gospel, while the expedition continued to Lokoja. Simon Jones was told to remain there in order to make preparations for the establishment of mission stations in Aboh and other Igbo areas on the Niger. He remained there preaching the gospel to the people, but his stay was cut short by the early return of the expedition team because of a terrible outbreak of malaria, which killed most of the expeditionaries.

Naturally, this was a major setback for the mission. However, thirteen years later, another expedition was sent up the Niger. This was the 1854 expedition, which was commanded by Macgregor Laird with Dr. Baikie as naval surgeon. Unlike the previous one, this expedition was successful in that none of the 54 Africans and 12 Europeans died. Arriving back at Aboh

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439 Ibid., 62-63.
440 Ibid., 63.
on the 31st October 1854, Simon Jones was in good health, “and much re-
spected by all, both chiefs and people. He moved about among them with
perfect freedom, and made several visits up the river, to Ossamere
(Osamala), Onitsha and Asaba markets…” 442

After this, the next few years were spent by the Church Missionary Soci-
ety in planning for a mission station in Igboland. In 1857, the first station
was built at Onitsha. This station was headed by Rev. John Christopher Tay-
lor from Igboland, who had been born in Sierra Leone.443 Thus, missionary
activities in Igboland were considered to have started in 1857, because the
1841 and 1854 expeditions did not pave the way for the establishment of a
Christian mission. From the year 1857, Onitsha became a very important
centre of the CMS Niger Mission.444 From there, the members of the Church
Mission Society (CMS) came to Asaba in 1875.

8.6 Christianity comes to Asaba: The CMS change
8.6.1 Early ventures by Sierra Leoneans

In 1857, after the establishment of a mission in Onitsha, the representative of
the CMS travelled to other towns on the lower Niger in order to open more
centers.445 Christianity was therefore introduced in Asaba in 1875 by Sierra
Leoneans of the Church Missionary Society (CMS).446 The first attempt was
made in September 1873, when Rev. John Buck went to Asaba for this rea-
son, but achieved nothing. Two years later, Rev. M. Romaine visited Asaba,
and succeeded in opening a mission. Later he was helped by Obi Igweli to
get a piece of land for a mission post. Rev. Romaine paid a sum of money to
Obi Igweli, and then left Rev. Edward K. Phillips in charge of the station,
while he went to Sierra Leone.447

The piece of land that was bought from Obi Igweli, and where the Church
Missionary Society built a church in Asaba, later became the site of the first
Christian missionary establishment in the whole of western Igboland. Rev.
Phillips, the first missionary in Asaba, later became the first Christian mis-
sionary to work in western Igbo polity.

The people of Asaba did not welcome the arrival of the Church Mission-
ary Society to the town. They treated the missionaries and the Christians
with an attitude of indifference, so it was difficult for Christianity to displace
the traditional religion, or to penetrate the culture. Apart from this, Asaba

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442 Church Missionary Intelligencer 1855, 117-119.
443 Samuel Crowther and John Christopher Taylor, The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger,
1863. See also Isichei 1976, 70; Ohadike 1991, 63-64.
444 Ohadike 1991, 64.
445 Ibid.
446 Akus 1994, 120.
447 Ohadike 1991, 64.
people also engaged in human sacrifices, which upset the missionaries. In 1879, Rev. Edward Philips wrote:

One's heart would bleed to consider the quantity of blood that is here shed annually. The death of any chief would send six or seven souls unprepared to the grave. Men, women, and children, without regard to age or sex, as long as they are slaves, are sometimes massacred to satisfy the caprice of a monied chief.\(^{448}\)

Again, another CMS missionary reported:

The power of life and death over slaves is in the hands of the masters, as allowed by the custom of the country. The numbers of slaves destroyed annually in sacrifices to the gods, to ratify the investiture of new office, or to accompany any dead of importance as servants into the world of spirits, is really appalling.\(^{449}\)

This shows how the missionaries regarded the slaves versus their masters, and, since they wrote this, they must have been willing to preach the message of equality of all men before God to the people.

After one year of missionary work at Asaba, Bishop Crowther also wrote that a few people were coming every Sunday to listen to the word of God, but they were afraid to publicly confess their Christian faith because of fear for persecution. He also noted that the chiefs in Asaba, who had initially promised to send their children to school, did not do so, despite the fact that the children were willing to go. In spite of these obstacles, a few people, around 30 in number, gathered every Sunday to listen to God's word, and nine of them registered for baptism. At the end of one year of ministerial work in Asaba, seven boys had been enrolled to start in the mission school. With time, the congregation started growing, albeit with difficulty, and by 1879, more people had accepted “the word of the Lord.”\(^{450}\)

But after 13 years of intensive ministerial work in the town, the CMS had been able to convert only a few freeborn. The first converts were mainly from the lower class of society: Strangers, outcasts, and slaves, who had no status in the Igbo society. The strangers were mainly the workers of the Royal Niger Company, who attended services at the church, while the outcasts were people accused of some crime, or who were believed to have done something shameful in the society. Most of the first converts were from the slave class.\(^{451}\)

One of the reasons for the resistance to the new religion on the part of the majority of the Igbo may of course be connected to the fact that they (the

\(^{449}\) Church Missionary Intelligencer, 1879, 239.
\(^{450}\) Ohadike 1991, 64.
\(^{451}\) Ibid., 65.
freeborn) belonged to a hierarchical society, where people were ranked according to their status and achievements in the community. But when the missionaries came, they propagated for a more egalitarian society, where all men are equal before God. The freeborn refused to accept this message because they were not ready to be placed at the same level as their slaves. But the slaves, on the other hand, were very pleased with this message, and this made them accept Christianity.

After some time, great hostility grew between the Church Missionary Society and the Asaba chiefs. The chiefs were against the missionaries’ interference with their local customs and their preaching against human sacrifice. Such a message was believed to cause the slaves to rebel against them. They were also opposed to the missionaries preaching of the equality of all men before God.\textsuperscript{452} This later issue gave rise to much friction between the missionaries and the chiefs, which led to the conquest of Asaba in 1888 by the Royal Niger Company.

After the conquest, the people of Asaba withdrew from the Church Missionary Society. Even the slaves, who had accepted Christianity, began to withdraw from the missionaries.\textsuperscript{453}

The slaves in Asaba needed to be emancipated, but they knew that they could not achieve this by their own efforts alone. The advent of the European missionaries provided a much-desired opportunity, which they quickly grasped by siding with the missionaries in order to gain their freedom.

The preaching of a new religion that condemned the worship of African traditional religion was most unwelcome to people in Asaba. Besides, they knew no other religion except that into which they had been born, and it was strange to hear that a religion other than theirs even existed. Moreover, they did not see the need for a new religion, since they already had theirs. Because of these and a number of other reasons, the people of Asaba remained generally unreceptive to the new religion. One of the reasons for their resistance to the new religion may have been that the freeborn people in Asaba belonged to the upper class of a hierarchical society with ranks and titles, whereas the missionaries were propagating for a more egalitarian society.

As time went on, the missionaries became friendly with Obi Igweli, who secured a piece of land for them. Through friendly gestures, the giving of presents, and constant discussions, they succeeded in converting him to Christianity.\textsuperscript{454} Obi Igweli’s conversion was very advantageous to the missionaries. It was through his help that the missionaries won more converts.

\textsuperscript{452} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{454} Interview with Ogbueshi H. G. C. Aworh, of Umuaji quarters, Asaba, August 2, 1994.
For further information see CMS CA/04/1875 from the annual reports of Bishop Crowther, 1875.
As noted by Isichei, it was Obi Igweli who realised the importance that Christianity and commerce would confer on the Asaba people.455

Obi Igweli later invited the missionaries to his house, from where further work of evangelism was carried out. With the help of Obi Igweli, the missionaries went around the villages in the evenings to preach to the Obi in their Ukpo Eze (throne) and the village heads in their ogwa (meeting place).

At the initial stage of his conversion, Obi Igweli was ridiculed by other Obi because of the way he readily accepted Christianity. For a long time, the missionaries made a series of attempts to persuade the Obi and other inhabitants of Asaba to accept Christianity, but the early attempts failed. When the Obi finally decided to listen to the missionaries, they sent their slaves and not their children. This was done in anticipation that if anything evil came out of the new religion, the slaves would be the first to suffer. Apart from the slaves, another set of people who were attracted by the new religion were the outcasts. These included those accused of witchcraft, mothers of twins, and people with physical handicaps such as deafness, and those afflicted with infectious diseases like leprosy. As also observed by Isichei, the “bulk of the first Christian converts were drawn from the poor, needy and the rejected...” 456 As regards the freeborn, they were content to stay at home and enjoy all that was at their disposal. Those of them who had rich parents were content to stay and take chieftaincy titles, and become future leaders of the community; to them it was more advantageous to keep the status quo, rather than to accept a new religion, the importance of which was not yet seen nor heard.

As time went on, the converted slaves began to violate local customs, disobey the chiefs and show disrespect for tradition and, in addition to their disrespect for the chiefs, the slaves began to spy for the missionaries at the expense of the communal security. The people felt that they were being spied on, because the missionaries, during their preaching, highlighted many of the things that went on in the villages, such as the killing of twins, immolation of slaves, and more.457 As a result of this, people in Asaba were annoyed, but their annoyance was not confined to the slaves alone. The missionaries were also jeered at because they accepted slaves in the Church.

It was because of this that it took more than a decade before the CMS began to win freeborn among the people. However, it was not before the freeborn had seen the advantages of becoming a Christian, such as going to school, etc., that they began to be sympathetic to the early missionaries and consider becoming Christians.458

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455 Isichei 1969, 435.
456 Isichei 1976, 162.
457 Interview with Madam Rhoda Asiekwu, of Ugbomanta quarters, Asaba, July 1, 1991.
In the old days, freeborn people could only join other converts by escaping from their parents, since they were not allowed to become Christians. It also required much courage for an Asaba freeborn to become a Christian, as, besides being rejected by his parents, he was jeered at by other people. One of the early freeborn persons who became a Christian in Asaba was Pa Andrew Asiekwu. As a result of his decision to become a Christian, he was driven away from home by his father. He was later housed by the missionaries and employed as a gardener. Although some freeborn joined the Church, only a few of them did this without changing their minds in later years.

The slaves progressed in their new environment; they were free from manual labour on Sundays, and employed by the missionaries as cooks and gardeners. Besides, they were the first group of people to become educated and to rise to positions of importance, in the “modern” sense, in Asaba.

In 1895, attempts were made by the missionaries to open some mission stations in the hinterland of Asaba, in such places as Akwukwu and Onicha-Olona. The most interesting thing about this evangelical mission into the interior of Asaba was that some Asaba people accompanied the missionaries to open these stations.

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**Figure 10.** The Holy Trinity Church, Asaba, which was built by the CMS in 1875. Photo: Victoria Ibewuike.

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460 Akus 1994, 15.
461 Interview with Obi S. A. Onwegbuzia, of Umuonaje quarters, Asaba, September 1, 1994.
Different Religious Denominations in Asaba

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denominations</th>
<th>Number in the Groups</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholics</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglicans</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalists</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians from other denominations</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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Table 1. These are the different religious denominations in Asaba as of 1994, the number of people in each denomination, and the percent total of people in each group.462

8.6.2 The CMS affects Asaba polity

Asaba community life began to undergo changes in the later part of the nineteenth century. These changes were brought about by the Christian missionaries. When the CMS missionaries came to Asaba, the fundamentals of the Asaba traditional religion, as well as of the cultural and social life, were subjected to a series of attacks by the CMS missionaries on the grounds that they were against the Christian doctrine. In their attempt to spread the good news of Christianity, the CMS missionaries were prepared to stop such things as idolatry, immolation of slaves, title taking and polygyny, and thus the CMS missionaries condemned such objects of worship as idols.463 For this reason, most Asaba people resisted Christianity at the beginning. But later, some of the freeborn people became converted. For example, my father Ogbueshi F. E. Onochie told me that before Christianity came to Asaba, most men in Asaba had three or four wives, but when Christianity came and some were converted, the CMS missionaries told them to divorce their wives and keep only one.464 This had a drastic effect on the institution of marriage in Asaba.

462 The figures in Table 1 above were obtained from the detailed interviews I conducted among the people in Asaba, as there were no previous written sources on the number of people from the different religious denominations in the town.
463 Cf. Supra 1. 3.
464 Interview with Ogbueshi F. E. Onochie, of Umuaji quarters, Asaba, June 1, 1994.
As mentioned in part one, in the traditional Asaba society, slaves were used for the burial of titled people like the “Obi” or “Eze”. When the CMS missionaries arrived, they condemned this practice. But the Asaba people did not listen to the missionaries, as they did not see anything bad with the practice; to them it conferred a prestigious status on the titled person in the life beyond. The people and the CMS missionaries disagreed on this issue on several occasions. It was when the CMS missionaries noticed that it would be difficult for them to stop this practice without some force that they invited the officials of the Royal Niger Company to intervene. Under the instigation of the soldiers of the Royal Niger Company, Asaba was bombarded in 1888. In this bombardment, lives and properties were lost. After this, the Asaba titled men lost the grip on their slaves.

When the CMS missionaries arrived, they condemned polygyny on the ground that it was against the Christian doctrine. They also condemned the traditional marriage ceremony and preached in favour of couples wedding in the Church with a priest officiating, rather than the elders negotiating according to the rules of the traditional system. Due to the missionaries, Christianity helped to modify this act, and some Asaba people, who were Christians, later wedded in the Church.

All indigenous names were also censured by the missionaries (CMS), and they advised the people to take Christian names. All newborn children were to be baptised in the Church rather than by the traditional naming ceremony presided over by the elders. On several occasions, the missionaries and Asaba people disagreed on this issue. Here, the converts were left in a dilemma, because their people back home wished their children to be given indigenous names, whereas the missionaries condemned this practice. Any couple who decided to name their child in the traditional manner had to face suspension from the Church, or, alternatively, if the child was baptised in the Church, the couple were alienated from their families back home. But as time went by, the majority of the Asaba people became Christians.

Furthermore, the CMS missionaries did not accept traditional burials because of the rituals involved. But the Asaba people could not see anything bad in these customs. To them it was a prerequisite for the final appeasement of the dead. The CMS missionaries preached against it, and Christians who took part in traditional burials were asked to leave the church.

The CMS missionaries and the traditionalists, especially the Obi, did not agree on the question of title taking. Converts were not supposed to take the Eze or Obi title because of the rituals involved. But the Eze titled men could not see anything wrong with taking a title and making rituals before the deity

466 Interview with Mrs. N. Chukura, of Umuonaje quarters, Asaba, June 30, 1994.
467 Interview with Obi Juwah, of Umuezei quarters, Asaba, December 24, 1994.
Alusi. To them it was an accepted norm in the society. But after some time, most of the Christians in Asaba ceased taking the Eze title.

However, there were some other traditional customs, which were abandoned due to the CMS missionaries, and which are today abhorred by most Igbo people. One such custom was the killing of twins. Before the CMS missionaries’ arrival, twins were regarded as an abomination, and were either killed or put out in the bush in order to prevent disasters from happening. Apart from twins, the disabled were another group of people that benefited from the coming of the CMS missionaries. Like twins, they were previously not accepted in the community.

After the bombardment of Asaba in 1888, by the Royal Niger Company, Sir James Marshall, who was an employee of the Royal Niger Company and a Roman Catholic, invited the SMA fathers of the Roman Catholic mission, who were based in Lokoja, to come to Asaba and open a mission station.

8.7 Early Catholic establishments
8.7.1 The arrival of the first Catholic missionaries: The Society of African Missions

The Society of African Missions (the SMA) came to Asaba in 1888.\(^{468}\) Before the arrival of the SMA, the Church Missionary Society (the CMS) was the only Christian body in Asaba. As a result of this, there was no competition as regards the winning of converts.\(^{469}\) The sudden arrival of the Roman Catholic Mission changed the course of events, and an intense race for converts began. The Roman Catholics, knowing that it would not be an easy task to win converts, since the CMS already had established themselves in Asaba, adopted several different strategies in winning converts. They gave medical attention to the sick, the needful, the destitute, and the outcasts, whereas the twins and the disabled, who were cast away in the community, were rescued.\(^{470}\) While the Church Missionary Society (CMS) condemned the killing of twins, the Society of African Missions (SMA) thus rescued them.

Apart from this, the Society of African Missions (SMA) was more open to the consideration of local customs than the Church Missionary Society (CMS). This was as a result of the difficulties that the early missionaries faced in their work of evangelisation. As stated by Gbuji 1984:

The missionaries came face to face with new difficulties in native rites and customs. The missionary bodies did not agree on a common method of approach.

\(^{468}\) Monsignor Carlo Zappa, who was the Vicariate Apostolic of Western Nigeria, a SMA Father, was the person who opened the Asaba Mission in 1888. See Macloughlin 1982, 26, for further information.

\(^{469}\) Interview with Mrs. D. C. Odogwu, of Umuaji quarters, Asaba, August 2, 1994.

\(^{470}\) Interview with Obi Juwah, of Umuezei quarters, Asaba, December 24, 1994.
and so the Church made a strong statement to protect the values of pagan cultures. She warned the early missionaries: in no way spend any effort nor present any argument to change their rites, their customs and their way of life, unless these are flagrantly opposed to religion and good morals.471

Because of this statement from the Catholic Church, which was consistent with the so called “social-ethical” policy that the Catholics had been applying for many hundred years, the early Catholic missionaries were more open to the adaptation of the local customs of the people they came in contact with than the Church Missionary Society (CMS). The non-Catholic mission (CMS) did not have any written statement regarding their method of evangelisation as of that time. As a result of this, the Society of African Mission (SMA) was more successful in winning converts in Asaba than the Church Missionary Society (CMS), which came many years before them.

The Society of African Missions (SMA) also started out in Asaba with some advantages, which the Church Missionary Society (CMS) did not enjoy. The most significant among these was the official patronage.

When the Church Missionary Society started in Asaba in 1875, Britain as a political and economic power had no place in that town. Relations between the British and the Asaba people were regulated according to a goodwill agreement, and negotiations between the British representatives and the local chiefs. Most of the time, a state of understanding prevailed, not by the application of force, but by a realisation by both parties that there was something to be gained from peaceful co-existence.

In the year 1884, i.e. four years before the arrival of the SMA Fathers in Asaba, Consul Hewett concluded a treaty with the kings of that town.

This treaty was concluded before the Berlin conference of 1884-85, certainly at a time when Britain still did not have an effective control of the Niger. There was therefore no means of guaranteeing that this clause of the treaty would be observed.472

In spite of this, after the conquest of Asaba, Britain began to exercise some political control over Asaba. At the same time, Sir James Marshall, who gave the order for the conquest of Asaba, invited the SMA Fathers to come and establish themselves in the town. He was a high court judge and an employee of the Royal Niger Company. It was said that by 1886, he had already acquired great influence in West Africa,473 a circumstance that, perhaps, induced the company to request him to establish a regular judicial system at the company’s headquarters in Asaba. Sir James has also been described as a good Catholic. By the time of his arrival at the Lower Niger, the Holy Ghost

471 Gbuji 1984, 7.  
472 SMA 14/80302, Asaba, Zappa to superior, October 4, 1888.  
473 SMA 14//80302, Asaba, Zappa to superior, October 4, 1888.
Fathers had established themselves in Onitsha, and he demonstrated his adherence to the Catholic faith by crossing the Niger river every Sunday to take part in divine worship in Onitsha.\textsuperscript{474} During the same period he requested that a Catholic mission be started in Asaba. In a letter, which he wrote to Father Poitier at Lokoja, he told him firmly that he would put himself at the disposal of the Fathers.\textsuperscript{475} Monsignor Zappa, one of the first Roman Catholic missionaries to work in Asaba, also pointed out that Sir James presented himself as a good Roman Catholic, and maintained that the Roman Catholic Mission gained from the presence of the Royal Niger Company, and the forceful stoppage of human sacrifices, by establishing a mission station at Asaba.\textsuperscript{476}

In the month of May 1888, Monsignor Zappa and Father Jules Poitier\textsuperscript{477} answered the call of Sir James by travelling from Lokoja to Asaba to examine the area. According to Macloughlin,

> Asaba was then in the newly created Prefect Apostolic of Upper Niger, which was the whole of Nigeria. And subsequently Monsignor Zappa was appointed by the Holy See as the first Prefect Apostolic to head the Prefect Apostolic of the Upper Niger created in 1884 with Asaba as its headquarters.\textsuperscript{478}

On the 17th of May 1888, on their arrival to Asaba, they both received a very warm welcome from Sir James Marshall and V.N. Kane.\textsuperscript{479} They gave them a place for their missionary work opposite the Niger. Monsignor Zappa stayed and continued with the missionary work, while Father Jules Poitier went back to Lokoja in order to close the stations there.

The Catholic team led by Monsignor Zappa set to work. Later, they were joined by Rev. Father Strub Burr, Rev. Father George Kranght and Father Frigerio. With the few workers, they penetrated the Asaba inland to seek converts.

When the SMA fathers had arrived, they invited the Lady of Apostles Sisters, who joined later to help in the work of evangelism. Rev. Sister Isidore led the sisters from France. As Monsignor Zappa and his team were struggling to attract male converts, the Rev. Sisters were equally active with the women. Another SMA Father who worked in Asaba was Father J. B. Germanati, a Frenchman. Most of his missionary life was spent in the northern part of western Igboland among the Etsako, and later among the Igbara. Until 1902, he was stationed for short periods at Ibusa, Issele-Uku and Illah. During his stay at Asaba, he was in charge of the parish, and in 1918 he returned

\textsuperscript{474} CMS G3/43/1888/77, “Johnson to Lang”, July 5, 1888.  
\textsuperscript{475} Ekwu 1967, 214.  
\textsuperscript{476} SMA 14/80302, Asaba, Zappa to superior, October 4, 1888.  
\textsuperscript{477} Father Jules Poitier SMA was the first Prefect Apostolic of Western Nigeria.  
See Macloughlin 1982, 26 for further information.  
\textsuperscript{478} See Macloughlin 1982, 26 and Akus 1994, 129.  
\textsuperscript{479} SMA 14/80302, Asaba, Zappa to superior, October 4, 1888.
to Lokoja. In the same year, Sir James left Asaba, but was succeeded by another strong Catholic, Judge V.N. Kane. During the period of his stay in the town, he continued with his policy of helping and protecting the Catholics in the area. A short period after his arrival, the Catholics built a house for the Fathers and a convent for the Sisters.

**Figure 11.** The building that housed the SMA Fathers in 1888 in Asaba. Photo: Victoria Ibewuike

Despite the patronage, the Catholics gained very much from the devoted ministry of Monsignor Zappa, who assisted the Society of African Missions in the same way as Bishop Crowther did for the Church Missionary Society on the Niger. The only differences between them was that Bishop Crowther spent two or three months every year in his diocese, while Monsignor Zappa stayed permanently on the Niger, apart from an occasional leave of absence abroad. For many years after his death, many western Igbo people still remembered him as Father Ozokpokpo. This was a kind of expression formed by the natives to represent Monsignor Zappa's tireless steps, which paced up and down the streets of Asaba. As we shall see in due course, the history of the Catholic Mission in Asaba and its hinterland could be written around the life and work of Monsignor Zappa.

481 CMS CA3/ 04/ 2793 copy of Mr. Consul T. L. Mcleod's letter to the Bishop of Oxford, asking for an appointment of a white bishop of Lokoja, dated 24 February 1868. Part of the letter reads: “I find that the Native Mission here (Lokoja) is in complete failure. The old Bishop Crowther is on the Niger except for two months of the year, and in consequence, everything gets worse and worse........".
8.7.2 The early Asaba patronage

Apart from the official patronage and the significant role played by Monsignor Zappa, the Catholic Mission did not make much impact in Asaba. However, the Society of African Missions attracted many converts, although most of them were not indigenous. Some of their earliest converts were the employees of the Royal Niger Company. Others were slaves. For three years, the conditions in Asaba remained unpromising for Monsignor Zappa and his colleagues. However, in 1892, the Lokoja Mission was totally left, and Father Voigt, with the sisters and their freed slaves, came to Asaba.482

The people of Asaba disliked the sight of the white fathers, who mixed with slaves and outcasts. They regarded the fathers as men of very low extraction because of the slave boys they brought with them, and would therefore have nothing to do with them.483 The Fathers and sisters were not discouraged by this unwelcoming attitude of the people. Rather, the missionaries continued to show sympathy with the sick, needful and destitute. As noted by Sister Boniface of the Asaba mission:

> Last week we received a poor old woman who used to sleep outside because her relations didn’t want her. When I brought her to the house of our protected one she was dancing with joy. They also received children, whose mothers died when giving birth to them. Ordinarily, she wrote, they leave them to die. We are happy to take them and care for them as long as God leaves them with us.484

As indicated already, the sisters gave medical attention to the sick, the needful and the destitute. They also helped to rescue the outcasts, the twins that were cast away, and the disabled in the community. They taught them about the salvation and love of God, and some later became converts, who played a very active part in the Church.

The Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles also helped the women to grow in their Christian faith; they taught them catechism and visited them at home in order to encourage them. Apart from assisting the women, they devoted their time to the training of young girls and encouraged them in the service of God.

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483 Strub, L’Echo des Missions Africaines de Lyon, 1937, 106.
484 Ibid., 615.
Apart from these acts of charity, the Catholics adopted a number of other strategies to win converts. First, Monsignor Zappa built a center for the training of catechists. At the same time, he directed the efforts of the mission to the medical attention to the sick. In spite of these charitable acts, the bulk of the people still avoided the new religion. Only a few people were impressed by these acts of charity. Among those was Mr. Thomas Okolo, who was among the first to enter into holy matrimony in 1893. Others were the late Augustine Egbuniwe, Mr. G. O. Tolefe, Mr. Michael Jacob and Mr. J. O. Okigbo, who were all early interpreters and teachers in the Catholic Church in Asaba.

One other strategy adopted by the Catholics was the practice of “enticing away” people already known to be members of the CMS. This practice annoyed the Church Missionary Society very much, and they protested in vain against it. The Church Missionary Society accused the Catholics not only of “drawing away” their adherents, but also of accepting people known to be of low moral standards. According to the Catholics, they used the expression

487 The Church Missionary Intelligencer, 1897, 837.
“Ike gwu onye ojebe Roman”, which means, “When a man can no longer go straight he turns a Roman Catholic.”

Monsignor Zappa was also faced with a great difficulty concerning the question of language. He spoke at least three European languages, English, French and Italian, but the problem was how to communicate with the local people. He did not see education as the best way of spreading the gospel, nor did he believe in mass preaching. He preferred visiting people in their homes to discuss with them individually, impressing on them the benefits to be derived from accepting Christianity and the folly of following the traditional religion. In this way, Monsignor Zappa learned how to speak Igbo, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Edo, Igbira, Esan and Afenmai, since his work of ministry brought him close with the speakers of these languages.

Figure 13. St. Joseph Catholic Church, Asaba. The first Roman Catholic Church which was built in 1888 by the SMA. Photo: Victoria Ibewuike

However, to Monsignor Zappa, Igbo was the most significant of these languages. Because of this he took some catechists with him to France, where they studied French. Among the indigenous catechists trained by him were Jacob Nwokobia Onyemen, Wilfred and Sidi. When they came back, they assisted him in compiling a French-Igbo and Igbo-French dictionary. With the help of this dictionary and the assistance of his catechists, Monsignor

488 See Macloughlin 1982, 26, for further information on Monsignor Carol Zappa's efforts in the training of African catechists and his establishment of an African clergy.
Zappa was able to master the Igbo language. He also promoted the study of local languages in the western part of Igboland as a strategy for Catholic expansion.

In the beginning of the 1890s, the Society of African Missions had established a station in Asaba, and from there, further missionary activity into the hinterlands was carried out. As more priests came from Europe, and more catechists were trained locally, the mission made some progress in the neighbouring districts. However, in December 1899, only three stations were effectively occupied in western Igboland, apart from Asaba. These were Illah, Issele-Ukwu and Igbuzo; other missionary stations, such as Onitsha-Olona, Okpanam and Ezi were mere outposts.

With the effort of Monsignor Zappa, Asaba became the headquarters of the Vicariate of Western Nigeria in 1917. Monsignor Zappa died in Asaba in the same year,490 and “Bishop Shanahan of Onitsha, his friend and confidant for many years, performed the burial service.”491 Today, his grave is a very significant historic monument, visited by thousands of tourists in Asaba. He was succeeded in the same year by the late Bishop Thomas Broderick, an SMA father and the first Bishop of Benin, who was chosen as the first Apostolic vicar of the Vicariate.492 On January 20, 1920, Rev. Fr. Paul Emechete from Ezi in the western Igbo interior was ordained the first West African priest at the church in Asaba by Bishop Thomas Broderick.493 32 years after Emechete’s ordination, the first Asaba priest was ordained in 1952. It was the late Monsignor Patrick Governor Ugboko, who had been the first Nigerian rector of the SS Peter and Paul Major Seminary in Ibadan, which served as a training school for all the Catholic priests west of the Niger. The second Asaba indigenous person who was ordained a priest, in 1957, was Monsignor Christopher C. Chukwumah. In 1966, Rev. Father P.A.C. Isichei was ordained, in 1970 the late Rev. Father John Oko-Omu Umunna was ordained, and in 1985 Rev. Father Onwudachi. The first Asaba woman to be ordained as a Rev. Sister was Rev. Sister Nuala Edozien. This happened in 1956.

One of the most enduring contributions of Bishop Broderick was the founding of St. Thomas's Teacher Training College Ibusa in 1928. The late G.N. Tolefe was the only Nigerian tutor in that institution under the principalship of the Very Rev. Father V.P.V. Barnicle. Other outstanding priests of that period were the Very Rev. Fathers Eugene Strub, and Charles Burr. Father Strub was famous for his piety, devotion to music and charity towards orphans and the elderly.

491 Ibid., 27.
492 Akus 1994, 131.
493 See Akus 1994, 130; Macloughlin 1982, 27.
St. Joseph Primary School in Asaba was the first school built by the SMA Fathers. This school was later renamed Zappa Primary School, when, in 1979, the government took over all schools in Nigeria. It was at the first Roman Catholic Church, which was built some years after the arrival of the SMA Fathers, that the first batch of Christians attended service. It was later abandoned, and a second one was built. It was in the second church building that bishop Leo Taylor was consecrated a Bishop in 1934.\textsuperscript{494} Presently, the Asaba parish is part of the Issele-Ukwu Diocese in Nigeria, where the bishop Rev. Michael Elue lives. Asaba parish is in ecclesiastical terms under the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Benin.

\textit{Figure 14.} Bishop Michael Elue. The bishop of Issele-Uku diocese. Photo: Victoria Ibewuike.

\textsuperscript{494}Akus 1994, 130.
8.8 Conclusion

As we have seen, after the abolition of slave trade in 1807 by the British government, the other European and American nations passed laws forbidding their citizens from engaging in this trade. There was then an agreement by the various European nations involved in this trade to open up the interior of Africa for trade, Christianity and “good government.” It was as a result of this that the various European nations started to send their representatives as explorers to the interior of Africa, which later led to the introduction of legitimate trade, Christianity and colonialism.
Thus we can see that the transactions within the slave trade and the legitimate trade (palm oil trade) were carried out by both the Europeans and the Nigerian chiefs. This trade was carried out by both parties because of the benefit implied in the trade. For the European nations involved in the slave trade, it was a way of tapping the rich resources of Nigeria for their own private benefits, and for their fellow Nigerian chiefs engaged in this trade, it was motivated by their own selfish interests at the expense of their people.

But with the introduction of the palm oil trade, after the abolition of the slave trade, the attention of most European nations involved in the slave trade was shifted to the palm oil trade, which led to the Niger expeditions of 1832 to 1857 and the subsequent competition by the various European firms for trade in the lower Niger, which later led to the introduction of Christianity and colonial rule in Nigeria.

With the introduction of Christianity, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1875 came to Asaba, and in 1888 the Society of African Mission came. With the arrival of these two missions, there was serious competition among them as regards the winning of converts. But the Society of African Missions (SMA) was more successful in winning converts than the Church Missionary Society, because it was more open to the consideration of local customs of the people. For example, they allowed the women in the Catholic Church to organise themselves in single-sex organisations as in the traditional society, when compared to their CMS counterpart, where people were organised into mixed organisations.

Also, when the SMA fathers came to Asaba, they invited the Our Lady of Apostles sisters. When they arrived, the SMA fathers started to work with the women in Asaba through the Rev. Sisters. This was in a way a pragmatic adaptation of the Roman Catholic “social ethics,” which must probably have contributed to the greater success of the Roman Catholic mission in Asaba.

Further, when Christianity was introduced, there was a resistance to the mission by the natives. This applied particularly to the first mission, which was headed by the Church Mission Society (CMS). The first converts then were the poor, outcasts and slaves, who were not important people in the society, and were not interested in a tradition that made them dispensed and marginal. Because of this, they became the first converts and the first to be educated, and to emerge in the first “independent” government in the country. Since the slave-born women had no influence in the traditional female organisations, they thus had their condition changed in a different way than the freeborn women.
CHAPTER 9
Colonial Nigeria

9.1 The British conquest of Nigeria

The British conquest of Nigeria was a result of the long-standing contact between the European nations and the Nigerian people. By the mid-nineteenth century, the British take-over of Nigeria was not yet conceived of because of fear of tropical diseases and the high cost of expansion. But in 1849, John Beecroft was appointed by the British government as consul for the West Africa coast, in order to consolidate the legal trade. In the year 1880, there were British colonies only in Lagos and the Niger Delta, but by 1905, the British government had taken control of the whole country. This was a result of the scramble for colonies by various European nations in order to control the economic resources of Africa.495

The Nigeria conquest by the British took place in two phases. The first, southern phase, lasted from 1850 to 1897, while the second, northern phase, lasted from the beginning of last century to 1914. The methods used by the British government to achieve their purpose were diplomacy and force, which the indigenous rulers resisted in a negative way, knowing the implications of conquest496 from the previous experience which they had heard about from the other parts of the country.

In 1885, at the Berlin Conference, several European powers tried to resolve their problems over the issue of the protectorate. At this conference, Britain claimed to have a sphere of influence in the Niger Basin. This was “acknowledged formally, but it was stipulated, here as elsewhere, that only effective occupation would secure full international recognition.”497

With the appointment of John Beecroft in 1849 as consul for the Bights of Benin and Biafra, the British government established a permanent contact in Nigeria.498 In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, possible rivalry with other European firms, such as German and French companies, were avoided by the British in order to control the area. At this point, the Royal Niger Company established a commercial empire in Nigeria. Consul Hewett, who

495 Falola 1999, 53.
496 Ibid., 54.
497 Chapin Metz 1992, 29.
was in charge of the mission at that time, travelled to different parts of the country signing the so-called protection treaties with different chiefs. With the help of the Royal Niger Company's military arm, the British succeeded in controlling most of the country, with strong resistance from different chiefs.\textsuperscript{499}

In 1897, using Asaba as a base, the Royal Niger Company used its charter to penetrate the northern part of Nigeria, where it attacked and conquered Ilorin and Nupe, and concluded treaties with the Sultan of Sokoto and the Emir of Gwandu. From there, the British government consolidated its power and extended northwards, conquering one town after another.\textsuperscript{500} At this point, the British government also established the West African Frontier Force, a kind of colonial army, which had its headquarters at Jebba.\textsuperscript{501}

At this time, the various indigenous authorities and the people of Nigeria reacted to the colonial conquest by fighting to defend their sovereignty,\textsuperscript{502} and this led to various forms of resistance in different parts of the country, such as the Ekumeku resistance of 1902-1905 at Asaba, which was directed against the Royal Niger Company, and which forced them to leave the town.\textsuperscript{503}

9.1.1 The establishment of colonial rule

“The colonial era formally began in Nigeria in 1914; after many years of British intervention in the area. The year 1914 is outstanding in the history of Nigeria because it was in that year that the name “Nigeria” came to be adopted after the amalgamation of the southern and the northern provinces. “By this amalgamation, a new era began; ethnic groups that were completely independent of one another were all merged together. New rules and regulations were introduced, and a new political system emerged.”\textsuperscript{504} This unification of Nigeria was carried out by Lord Frederick Lugard.\textsuperscript{505} After the unification of Nigeria, the colonial administration slowly imposed its political ideals on various parts of the country, and the result of that was the introduction of the so-called system of Indirect Rule.

\textsuperscript{499} Falola 1999, 54-58.
\textsuperscript{500} Ibid., 59.
\textsuperscript{501} For further information on the West Africa Frontier Force, see Falola 1999, 59; Ohadike 1991, 79.
\textsuperscript{502} Falola 1999, 60.
\textsuperscript{504} Uchendu 1993, 32.
\textsuperscript{505} Akus 1994, 27; Falola 1999, 68; Chapin Metz 1992, 34.
9.1.2 The British indirect rule in Nigeria

The British colonial policy in Nigeria was thus that of indirect rule. It was a system of local government administration, which enabled the British to govern Nigeria with the help of indigenous rulers and institutions.\textsuperscript{506} The architect of this policy was also Lord Frederick Lugard, who had seen how it worked in Sudan and India, and assumed it would be the same in Nigeria. According to Falola, the reasoning behind this policy was that it would enable the colonial power to use fewer personnel to govern the territory with a small amount of finance, and also to consolidate power and overcome the problems of communication. The British also felt that they were culturally different from the indigenous people, and that the best way to govern them was to use their own indigenous institutions. Through this system of administration, new instructions and regulations were announced to the people through their local chiefs.\textsuperscript{507}

This system was first applied in the northern part of Nigeria with the emirs as representatives of “the rulers,” but from the year 1914 to 1916, it was extended to the southern part of Nigeria. In Igboland, the British administration tried to create paramount chiefs, and also to tax the people, something that had never been done before, and because of this, the British administration ran into serious problems with the indigenous people.\textsuperscript{508} Among these problems, the so-called Aba riots should be counted (see section, 10.4.2.ff.).

Through the model of indirect rule, the colonial government tried to introduce the ideas of native administration, an experience that they had derived from northern Nigeria. But in the south, perceiving what they called a situation of “ordered anarchy,” the British divided the Igbo areas into Native Courts and thus violated the village autonomy by merging into one court area certain villages, which before had had nothing to do with each other. The established courts were normally supposed to be presided over by the British officials, who could not always be present, however, because of the large number of court areas created. This insufficiency of colonial officials therefore led to the creation and appointments of warrant chiefs, who constituted the native authority. The warrant chiefs were assigned to maintain order and peace in the villages in the absence of the British officials, thereby becoming the only link between the people and the colonial powers.\textsuperscript{509} These chiefs were also offered a cap of office and warrant authority by the colonial administrative officers.\textsuperscript{510} This appointment of warrant chiefs by the British colonial administration in Igboland was against Igbo tradition, and it was

\textsuperscript{506} Isichei 1983, 380; Falola 1999, 70; Chapin Metz 1992, 31.
\textsuperscript{507} Falola 1999, 70.
\textsuperscript{508} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{509} Isichei 1973, 172.
\textsuperscript{510} Uchendu 1965, 47.
met with strong resistance from the indigenous people, especially the
women, who resisted the introduction of taxation by the colonial authority,
which led to the Aba women's riot of 1929. The warrant chiefs, who were
chosen by the district commissioner, were to represent the different village-
groups in the court area.511

The appointment of warrant chiefs was also a direct violation of the Igbo
political principles, which rejected the representation of the entire village by
one man. Seeing that the activities of the warrant chiefs were backed by the
British officials, the villagers obeyed them, when they felt they had to do so.
In some villages, some of the warrant chiefs were chosen among the lineage
heads, or among rich people, who were already village leaders. In most vil-
lages, however, the warrant chiefs were chosen among ambitious young men
who sensed the colonial period as an opportunity to enrich themselves. For
instance, as noted by Leith-Ross with regard to the kind of men that became
warrant chiefs, “wrong men were pushed forward, often by the natives them-
sew, and given an authority to which they had no right and often ultimately abused.” Even the less corrupt warrant chiefs became saboteurs and
agents of the colonial administration against their people.513 This led to a
state of mistrust, and the villagers began to avoid the use of the Native
Courts whenever possible, although, in most cases, the warrant chiefs or-
dered that certain legal cases should be brought to the court, where the of-
fenders had to be punished according to the colonial laws.

These warrant chiefs were shortsighted in that they refused to sense the
long-term devastating effect of the colonial policies on their people. They
helped the colonial administration to impose fines on individuals, who did
not comply with their orders, and also exerted their powers by collecting
taxes themselves.

Another reason why the policy of indirect rule was introduced in Nigeria
was that the British economy had suffered great devastation during World
War I, and Britain could hardly afford to finance or sustain any further con-
flict on the continent. She aimed at avoiding any military confrontation with
any of her colonies. Such confrontation, when not prevented, had only led
Britain to the loss of her most prosperous colonies, e.g. the U.S. in the
American War of independence in 1776, and it also reduced her continental
respect as a world power.514

Discussing the British indirect rule in Nigeria, Isichei maintains that the
main reason for its introduction was the high cost of white personnel in mat-
ters relating to salaries, home leave, and retiring benefits.515 She argues:

511 Uchendu 1965, 46-47; Afigbo 1972, 37; Isichei 1983, 380; Falola 1999, 72; Chapin
Metz 1992, 31-34.
512 Leith-Ross 1965, 68.
514 Ibid., 380
515 Ibid.
Even a relatively small number of white officials consumed half of Nigeria's revenue in salaries and pensions. They also consumed much of her foreign exchange. In 1936, when Nigeria's total income was 6,259,547, the amount of 1,156,000 was sent abroad as the home remittances of government officials, plus pension payments.

Isichei's observation is quite correct, but it is doubtful, however, if that was the main reason for the introduction of indirect rule in Nigeria in 1914. It might have been an important factor, but in my opinion the main reason for the introduction of indirect rule in Nigeria was that the colonial administration in Nigeria at that period needed the help of the indigenous people, in order to be able to consolidate British power in this area.

Apart from this, when the British colonial administration and the CMS mission came to Igboland, they failed to take into account that the Igbo traditional organisation was a “parallel organisation” based on the “dual-sex” principle. While the colonial administration only considered male organisational leaders for the introduction of “indirect rule,” the CMS missionaries chose the institutionational organisations for the two sexes to be present simultaneously in the same associations. This was completely different from the traditional parallel organisation, and due to the customary rule of male domination in mixed meetings; the women lost their traditional freedom of being able to express their own views. Due to the male bias of public speech rights in mixed meetings, the women became “muted.” From my point of view, I would argue that the British colonial administration and the CMS missionaries did not take note of the fact that the Igbo traditional organisation was a dual-sex organisation because both the colonial administration and the CMS missionaries were from a different cultural background. Because of this, they did not understand that the Igbo traditional organisation was a parallel organisation, where the males and the females were in two different kinds of associations.

9.2 Asaba and the Ekumeku Resistance

The Ekumeko resistance was a resistance movement carried out by the Asaba people against the missionaries and the British administrators of the Royal Niger Company. This resistance led to the conquest of Asaba in 1898 by the Royal Niger Company. After this, the workers of the Royal Niger Company and the missionaries were forced to leave Asaba, but they came back later. The immediate causes of the resistance were the missionaries'...
interference with local customs and their preaching against human sacrifice and slavery, which by Asaba chiefs was seen as a way of inciting slaves into rebellion against them. The second cause of the resistance was political; the British administration in Nigeria at that time wanted to establish their government in Asaba, as in other parts of Nigeria, and the only way to do it was to conquer the town.518 During this war, people representing several ethnic groups in the western part of the Igbo area fought against the British soldiers. Most of the towns were burned, many people were killed, and some of the chiefs were captured by the soldiers of the Royal Niger Company and put in prison.519

In 1902, there was another Ekumeku uprising. This time, the members were fully organised with bows and arrows, spears and guns, against the merchants of the Royal Niger Company and the colonial administration. Many of the slaves and new converts, who were seen with the missionaries and the workers of the Royal Niger Company, were either killed or driven away by the free-born indigenous people, and some of the mission churches and buildings were destroyed by these guerrilla fighters.520

It was very difficult for the colonial soldiers to identify the members of this guerrilla movement, since most of the members of the resistance movement were trained not to disclose their identity.521 This resistance continued until it was later suppressed by the British.

Again, in 1908-1909, a man known as Nwabuzo from Ogwashi-Ukwu, one of the western Igbo towns, re-organised the Ekumeku. His intention was to capture one Igbozuo man, who was seen as the agent of the colonial government, and kill him. When the colonial administration, which believed that the guerrilla movement had been suppressed, heard about the death of this man, the fighting erupted again. This battle continued for eight months before it stopped. Some of the ringleaders were captured during the war and taken as prisoners, while some fled.522

The resistance continued until 1909-1910, when it was destroyed by the colonial administration. “To ensure total surveillance, the whites moved part of their administration to Ogwashi-Ukwu in 1910 to stop the occasional hit and run attacks from suspected members of Ekumeku and the headquarters was permanently located at Ogwashi-Ukwu in 1911.”523

With this move by the colonial government, the Ekumeku resistance movement was finally suppressed by the colonial administration.

521 Akus 1994, 40.
522 Ibid., 42.
523 Ibid.
9.3 Conclusion

We can see that since the establishment of the British administration and the amalgamation of the northern and southern provinces of Nigeria in 1914, there was an introduction of indirect rule system by the British government in Nigeria, which had a great effect on the Nigerian people in general, and on the Igbo people in particular. With the introduction of this system of administration in Igboland, the colonial government appointed warrant chiefs. Most of these warrant chiefs, who were selected by the colonial administration, were chosen among men who had no title or position in the traditional system. The appointment of warrant chiefs by the colonial administration in Igboland was against Igbo tradition and was met with a strong resistance from the indigenous people.

Since most of the warrant chiefs, who were appointed by the colonial administration, were not important men in the traditional organisations and had no titles, they were not aware of the importance of the female authority represented by the women's organisations in the traditional society. Because of this, they tried to work against all kinds of traditional organisations (including those connected to the “parallel system”), and this had a great effect on the change of women's role in the traditional society.

Further, when the colonial administration and the CMS missionaries came to Igboland, the colonial administration and the CMS missionaries did not take into consideration that the Igbo traditional organisation was a parallel organisation based on the “dual-sex principle.” As a result of this, the colonial administration only considered male organisational leaders for the introduction of indirect rule, while the CMS missionaries chose to institutionalise organisations where males and females were present simultaneously in the same organisations. This was quite different from the traditional parallel organisation, and because of the customary rule of male domination in mixed meetings, the women lost their traditional freedom to express themselves and became “muted.” I have argued in this chapter that this was as a result of cultural difference between the colonial administration and the CMS missionaries, who came from a different cultural background from that of the Igbo and were ignorant of the fact that the Igbo traditional system was a dual-sex organisation.
CHAPTER 10
Combined Effects of Colonialism and Mission

10.1 Introduction
In this chapter, I will try to show how the colonial administration and the missionary activities showed to have a combined effect on Igbo society. I will also suggest how these changes affected the position of Igbo women in general and the Asaba women in particular.

10.2 The early colonial impact on Igbo society
The introduction of indirect rule by the colonial government also caused a great deal of problems in eastern Nigeria. With the introduction of this system of administration, the colonial government appointed warrant chiefs. The appointment of these chiefs “increased the power of chiefs far more than tradition allowed, thus promoting abuse of power and tyranny. Unpopular kings and chiefs could not be removed by their people, since they owed their appointments and income to the government.”524 This system of administration by the colonial government had a tremendous impact on the Igbo political system, which had been more of a direct democracy.

The appointment by the colonial administration of local staff to support the native authorities, such as messengers, court clerks, kings' and chiefs' followers, also caused a lot of problems for both the colonial government and the Igbo people.

In Falola’s words,

These people interpreted their role as that of power wielders, rather than that of public servants. They demanded respect, collected bribes, and offered services as favours. The most notorious were the court clerks, who recorded and translated proceedings from local languages to English in ways that influenced justice in favour of whichever party had greased their palms.525

524 Falola 1999, 72ff.
525 Ibid., 73.
This behaviour had a great and real impact on the Igbo people; it caused them to mistrust the colonial administration, which was regarded as collaboration with the warrant chiefs and their staff.

The use of the warrant chiefs by the colonial administration in the collection of taxes in Igbo communities destroyed the relationship that the chiefs had previously had with their people and caused a lot of protests in most parts of Igboland, resulting in lasting bitterness among the people.\textsuperscript{526}

The appointment of the warrant chiefs by the colonial government in Igbo society also caused these “chiefs” to identify with the colonial administration and turn against their people, when these were fighting for independence of the country. This had a tremendous impact on Igbo society in particular, and the Nigeria society as a whole, since it was felt that some of these chiefs should have joined their fellow Nigerians in their fight for independence, rather than collaborating with the colonial administration against their own people.\textsuperscript{527}

The introduction of portable coins and notes of various denominations by the colonial government to replace the indigenous currency (cowries)\textsuperscript{528} affected the mode of worship of traditional religion in some parts of Igboland, such as Asaba, where the former traditional currency (cowries) had been used for worship in the town.

With the establishment of colonial administration in eastern Nigeria, certain modern social amenities such as electricity and pipe-borne water were introduced in many cities. This was one of several reasons why many young people from Igboland left the villages for urban areas, which had a tremendous impact on the rural areas.\textsuperscript{529}

Further, with the introduction of good roads, which came with the colonial administration, rural-urban migration became widespread in Igboland. Many of the young Igbo people now travelled to urban centres in search of good jobs in commercial institutions and colonial offices. Some of those who migrated to the cities became self-employed in local crafts as tailors, barbers, and repairmen. This had a major effect on rural areas, as the local traditional crafts lost their attraction to young people.\textsuperscript{530}

The introduction of a new kind of native court in Igboland, and the colonial administration's use of warrant chiefs, who had no legal training, instead of Western trained lawyers, affected the means of administering justice in these courts.\textsuperscript{531} The introduction of native courts was also believed to be destructive to the traditional Igbo marriage system, as the introduction of native courts was accompanied by an enormous increase in the divorce rate.

\textsuperscript{526} Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{527} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{528} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{529} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{530} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{531} Ibid., 73-74.
in the Igbo society. Cases that according to “traditional” ideas should have been settled at home were taken to the colonial court, which had a great effect on traditional Igbo marriages and increased the rate of divorce in the society.

With the establishment of the colonial government in Igboland, the Igbo indigenous language was affected. The previous effort by the missionaries to encourage the study of the Igbo language was neglected by the colonial government. This had a tremendous effect on the study of the Igbo language, when compared to other Nigerian languages, such as Yoruba and Hausa.\(^{532}\)

The Western system of education, which came with colonialism to the Igbo society, was destructive to the indigenous Igbo education. Modern education in Igbo society was the offshoot of missionary evangelisation. Before the advent of colonialism, indigenous Igbo education was seen as the acquisition of traditional behaviour and social values in the society. It was a process that started in childhood. It was the social and cultural inculcation of the psychological and cultural heritage in the society. But with the arrival of colonialism and Western education, the Igbo indigenous system of education was affected, which had a great impact on the Igbo society. As many of the young people were no longer interested in the indigenous system of education, some of the traditional Igbo values were lost.

10.3 Indirect rule and political exclusion of women

The indirect rule system of administration is generally regarded as the major political device through which the colonies were suppressed, and particularly through which the political activities of women were arrested. As noted by Ade Ajayi, its \textit{“modus operandi”} was the maintenance of status quo of the Nigerian tradition, geared towards the sustenance of the people's political and religious allegiance to a particular class, and its attendant effect of discouraging social and political awareness and, consequently, changes. The basic idea of indirect rule was to preserve as many of the traditional institutions as possible, and to use them as agents of colonial rule, to maintain stability by discouraging social change and encourage just enough economic development to produce revenue to run the administration.\(^{533}\)

Overt encouragement of the minimisation of women's political power was not the only way of changing the role that Igbo women had played in society. Rather, the colonial authority, out of sheer ignorance of the Igbo culture, excluded women from the political sphere. Even though women had not been completely integrated into Nigerian politics, there was a contrast between the status of the Nigerian women before and after the advent of the

\(^{532}\) See Afigbo 1981, 355-384.

Europeans. Before the Europeans arrived, women not only participated in government in some communities but also controlled and led the entire population into a war. Later, the indirect system of administration operated to the advantage of the male members in the already male-dominated societies.

After World Wars I and II, Britain wanted to rebuild her devastated economy, and this was seen as a great task that men with muscular strength would accomplish. In that respect, the colonial government was thinking in terms of masculine energy, which the Nigerian men could provide. The question of the need of feminine strength was remote in terms of the colonial government’s economic needs. This is quite consonant with the prevailing English view of women as “the weaker sex.”

In southern Nigeria, women under colonialism were not given any political offices. The introduction of indirect rule by the British affected the traditional political role of women in Igbo society. The only monarch recognised by the British administration was the male monarch, who worked hand in hand with the appointed warrant chiefs. Their female counterparts were relegated to the background, and the political role of these female rulers was eliminated. In some of the Igbo villages and towns, where the women had their own political organisations, authoritative political administration was put in the hands of men. Although some of the women-chaired organisations existed during the colonial era, only a few of them concluded a treaty with the British. Even though there were some female participants in the early treaties and negotiations with the colonial government, some of whom were high-ranking chiefs, none of them was presented as the paramount chief of any kingdom, and their inclusion in the signing of a treaty was seen as just a formality, not being of political importance. They sat and listened, and made no contributions.

The introduction of native administration into the diffuse authority of Igbo society by the colonial government had two major consequences. In the first place, the appointment of warrant chiefs implied that women were not represented among the leaders.

As Mohammed observes:

The British did not take into consideration that the appointment of one man to represent the village was an abrogation of Igbo concepts. And under the arbitrary rule of the warrant chiefs (as the representatives of the British were called) women suffered most.

In the second place: the informal but stable balance between men’s and women's authority was upset. “The British tried to introduce ideas of “native

534 Mba 1982, 38.
535 Mohammed 1985, 49.
administration” into this system of diffuse authority, fluid and informal leadership, shared rights of enforcement, and a more or less stable balance of male and female power.”

As already indicated, the unification of the northern and southern parts of Nigeria in 1914 by the British made Britain a colonial master to Nigeria. In this case, for an effective administration to take place, the colonial administration had to introduce a uniform type of administrative system in Nigeria. If they had realised that the north, east and west of Nigeria had different administrative systems, the colonial government would either have encountered administrative difficulties or failed in its mission in Nigeria. Since it was not ready to accept failure, a unified system of administration was necessary. Analysing the second view, the colonial government's introduction of the native administration established a stable administrative system, in which both men and women were to enjoy a balanced political system, but the men turned around and misused the political power given to them to repress many people, mostly women. For instance, women were not allowed to have any political post during the colonial era. Although the fact that the exclusive political power was taken over by the men might have been seen as an administrative mistake already during the colonial era, the colonial administration did not explicitly alter the power balance as a means of establishing a political subjugation of Nigerian women in general, and Igbo women in particular. Even though one can argue that implicitly it was the British ideology to exclude women from politics, the Igbo men who were entrusted with political power carried out the political suppression and manipulation of Igbo women. Although the Igbo men who had administrative power (warrant chiefs) worked for the colonial government, they used their political power for their personal interest, because they did not care about the affairs of their people but only about their own personal interest, and this affected the women.

What one can argue in the case of the colonial administration in Igboland is that if the colonial government had had any interest in political equality in Igboland, it should have acted against the abuse of power by the warrant chiefs. Such an intervention, however, could have resulted in confrontations between colonial administrators and Igbo men. The colonial government could not risk a confrontation of this kind, and hence it sided with the authoritative, native, male rulers – the warrant chiefs. The effects of the failure of the colonial government to make some political intervention against the male-dominated political power can be seen on the Nigerian political scene to this day, as politics is predominantly men's affairs. Besides, the feminist ideology had not yet affected the European political or cultural ideology by the time of the British introduction of colonial administration. From the above analysis, I could conclude that both the Igbo men (warrant chiefs) and

536 Ibid.
the colonial administrators played an important role in subjugating the Igbo women from the political scene.

In view of this, the colonial government's introduction of the indirect rule system of administration did not benefit the Nigerian women in general or the Igbo women in particular. The indirect rule took away the political power of women, as no governmental responsibility was assigned to them. This naturally damaged the self-awareness and social prestige that the women had hitherto enjoyed. Moreover, cultural ideas about women's submission to men were propounded to legalise the political ostracism of women.

As indicated above, there was no central government in Igboland, and political power in the society was diffuse. There were no specialised bodies or offices, in which legitimate power was vested, and no person, regardless of his status or ritual position, had the authority to issue commands that others had an obligation to obey. In line with this diffusion of authority, the right to enforce decisions was also diffuse; there was no "state" that held a monopoly of legitimate force, and of the use of force to protect one's interests or to make sure that a group decision was carried out, which was considered legitimate for individuals and groups. Consequently, the colonial administration found it indispensable to create specialised political institutions, which commanded authority and monopolised force. In doing so, they took into account, eventually, those Igbo political institutions that were dominated by men.\(^\text{537}\) It meant that the introduction of the indirect rule system into a diffuse Igbo society exclusively empowered the men, especially the warrant chiefs. The question of women's appointments to responsible political offices by the colonial administration was impracticable.

Although the colonial introduction of the indirect rule system of administration in Igboland was meant to provide Britain with a cheap system of administration that made use of native leaders, it was oppressive to Igbo women, as it categorically favoured the interests of men over women. One of the reasons for this outcome is that the colonial officials were of course not aware of how the "dual-sex system" worked. They just assumed that women would make their voices heard in any mixed political assembly, as in England.

10.4 The Aba women's riot

In 1929, thousands of Igbo women engaged in a series of direct confrontations with the colonial administration represented by their local agents, the warrant chiefs, over the issue of taxation. Lacking the psychological feeling for human responsibilities and reactions, both the colonial government and the warrant chiefs underestimated the efficiency of women's political pow-

\(^{537}\) Van Allen 1972, 166.
ers. This became evident in the Igbo women's riot when women became convinced that they were inevitably going to face a tax imposition just as the men had for years before.538

10.4.1 Causes of the riot

Since they were not employed and had no means of extra income, the Igbo women argued that it was improper and irrational to require them to pay taxes. When they were convinced that a decision was being considered, which would make it compulsory for them to pay taxes, the women resolved to make a protest march as a public signal of their economic and political dissatisfaction. This protest became what the colonial government called the “Aba riots”, or “The Women's War”, of 1929.539

The fall of the price of palm oil in 1929, and the taxation of men in 1925, formed an increasing, resented burden on the Igbo.540 In a move to re-adjust the government's financial problems, a second-in-command to the District Officer in the Owerri province therefore decided to update the census registers by carrying out household property census.541 This action aroused the women's suspicions that they might be made to pay taxes; hence they immediately called a meeting, mikiri,542 to decide what to do, should they be asked to pay taxes.

538 See Van Allen 1976, 61; Mba 1982, 76.
539 According to Van Allen, the term “Women's War” retains the presence and the significance of women, and the word “War” in this particular context was derived from the pidgin English expression “making war,” which was an institutionalized form of punishment employed by Igbo women against an offending husband. This form of expression or protest is also known as “sitting on” or “making war on” a man. This usually involved a gathering of Igbo women at the compound of the offender on a date agreed upon. Dancing, singing insulting songs, covering the compound with different types of sticks and leaves and soiling the walls were some of the displeasing activities the women would display. I disagree with Van Allen's assertion that pestles for pounding yam would have been one of the things the women carry while “sitting on a man.” I observe that no special pestles or sticks are carried; the women, as I have seen, take hold of anything, for example, stones, sticks, palm leaves, banana leaves etc., which is within their reach. By specifying pestles for pounding yam, Van Allen makes it a rule that in such demonstrations women must carry them. However, she maintains that the concept “women's war” confirms the existence of a traditional method of resistance for Igbo women when they feel that their interest is neglected. See also Hafkin and Bay 1976 6-7.
540 Van Allen 1976, 71; Mba 1982, 73ff.
541 Ibid.
542 “Mikiri” is a pidgin English word meaning “meeting.” It originated from an attempt by illiterate Igbo women to imitate the English word “meeting.” Its Igbo version or word is “Nzuk” or “Nzuko”. Spelling, pronunciation and intonation vary from village to village (Van Allen 1971, 20ff; Green 1964, 217).
10.4.2 The start of the riot

The signal was given when, on November 23, 1929, an agent named Emeruwa of the Oloko native court area received a message from one of the warrant chiefs, Okugo, to enter the compound of a married Oloko woman, Mrs. Nwanyeruwa, and count her goats and sheep. Annoyed with the agent Emeruwa, Nwanyeruwa asked him whether his mother was also counted. This resulted in a clash between Mr. Emeruwa and Madam Nwanyeruwa. During the fight, both of them seized each other's throat.\(^{543}\) Madam Nwanyeruwa's report to the Oloko women convinced them that, sooner or later, the women would have to pay taxes. A message was therefore sent to all the neighbouring villages, calling to an assembly of all the women in the Owerri province. A few days later, the women staged a protest march at the District Office, and after several days of demonstrations, they obtained a written assurance that they were not to be taxed. This protest led to the arrest of the warrant chief Okugo, who was eventually accused of indirectly inflicting physical assaults on Madam Nwanyeruwa and of spreading false news of women-taxation. He was eventually sentenced to two year's imprisonment.\(^{544}\)

The victorious news spread through the market places, and women in sixteen other native court areas also attempted to destroy the position of their warrant chiefs and to liquidate the native administration in the same process. This method was adopted by women throughout other native court areas in Igboland to get rid of the native courts and their warrant chiefs, although they were not as successful as in Oloko.\(^{545}\)

In many of the native court areas where riots were registered, the women took matters in their own hands, burning down most of the native court buildings and in most cases releasing the prisoners from jail. The major administrative buildings in Aba, from which the riot obtained its name, were almost completely destroyed. Many government security units, such as the police, the army and the boy scouts, were called in to put down the rebellion. About 50-60 women died in the riots.\(^{546}\) The Igbo were made to pay for the damages through increased taxation.\(^{547}\) The riots lasted for about four weeks, before order was subsequently restored, although minor disturbances continued into 1930. In all, the rebellion extended to well over 6,000 square miles within the Owerri and Calabar provinces, whose populations were estimated to be over two million.\(^{548}\)

\(^{543}\) Van Allen 1976, 72; Mba 1982, 77.
\(^{544}\) Mba 1982, 77.
\(^{545}\) Ibid.
\(^{546}\) See Okonjo 1976, 46; Mab 1982, 77; Van Allen 1971, 4, 5ff.
\(^{548}\) Van Allen 1976, 60; 1971, 4.
10.4.3 The results of the Aba “Women's riots”

The results of the Aba Women's riots will be considered in three dimensions, namely their political effects on the colonial government, their socio-political effects on Igbo women, and their socio-political effects on Igbo men.

10.4.3.1 Political effects on the colonial government

Although the women from a military point of view were the losers in the Aba riots, yet these served as a warning to the colonial government that importing European ideas and supporting patriarchy within their colonies might lead to social and political disturbances, in which the colonial government might eventually end up on the losing side. But from a social point of view, we could say that the women won the war because they showed their power, which the colonial administration had underestimated in their plans to tax the women.

The dismissal and imprisonment of many warrant chiefs proved that women, although regarded as politically not very powerful, could cause the government to dismantle its official system of administration and create a condition where the government could seem to be at war with itself. This is illustrated by the imprisonment of the warrant chiefs, which could be interpreted as the imprisonment of the government itself, in favour of the women's demand, which was: No taxation without employment.

The re-organisation of the government policy, three years after the disturbances, was not an easy task for the government. The riots might have been avoided, had the government taken time to study the rural economic problems of the women before its consideration of introducing women's taxation. The warrant chiefs were not controlled by the colonial officials, who only gave them blind support without finding out the details about their relationship with the rural people. This meant that the colonial interests were not linked to the people's welfare but to economic expansion. The women lost the war from a legal point of view, yet it served as a warning to the colonial administration.

10.4.3.2 Socio-political effects on Igbo women

Three years after the disturbances, there followed a colonial reformation of the Igbo political system, which was mainly directed towards the disadvantage of women. In the first place, the dismissal and the imprisonment of the warrant chief Okugo was a colonial political manoeuvre undertaken to cool down the angry women. If the women would have seized the opportunity to demand their political rights, and to make a direct challenge to the male-dominated administration, they would possibly have forced the colonial administration to recognise their traditional authority, but instead, the women

549 Lexikon 1975, 4987.
allowed themselves to be deceived by the mere imprisonment of the warrant chief who was considered as the main instigator of the conflict. The colonial officials should have known that the riots were not directed against the warrant chiefs in particular, but that they were rather a demonstration for the removal of women's taxation and the recognition of women's equal political rights.

The reformation of the Igbo political system was a political retaliatory measure directed at pushing women almost entirely out of the Igbo political scene. Its result was thus a further concentration of the social and political powers in the hands of men.

The 1933 reforms were also supposed to have looked into the failures of the government to consider native administration. This led to an increase of the Native Court areas, to a confirmation of traditional boundaries, and to the replacement of the warrant chiefs with “mass benches,” which allowed a number of judges to sit at a time. In most cases, villages were allowed to decide how many judges they would like to send. This gave women the chance of expelling any warrant chief suspected of being corrupt, and thus provided women with personal and property security. However, the outlet for women's collective actions, which was their real base of political sovereignty, was destroyed. This “base” was constituted of the organisation of meetings, called mikiri. That the women lost their “base” for political action was not only due to the creation of a native administration, in which the men exclusively controlled all political power, but also husbands were reluctant to allow their wives to take part in any women's meetings, for fear of another plot which again might lead to loss of lives. As noted by Allen and Sylvia Leith-Ross, the reform made it impossible for any collective women's assembly to be held, and thus the mikiri (meetings), which served as a solidarity group, became an illegal organisation. The 1901 British declaration that all jury institutions were illegal, except the native courts, was, however, reformed in 1933, according to a decision that made the native administrative local government effective and meaningful. After that, the mikiri (meetings) lost vitality. Bretton argues that the mikiri was weakened to the extent that nothing very important about it was heard again, except some reports about the women's market organisation, which existed as a pressure group for minor economic interests.

The reform did not only weaken the mikiri, but also made it impossible for women to compete with men for any leadership in the reformed native administration. As individuals, the women lacked the financial resources that men possessed. Even various studies conducted among the Igbo in the 1930s showed that only one woman was reported to have been sent as a judge to

552 Van Allen 1971, 32.
the native court, and this was only possible because her patrilineage financed her to take the title, which was regarded as necessary for this job. 553

From the time the native administration took over the village responsibilities after the reform, the women were kept out of politics. Political discussions concerning any village matters were exclusively the concern of the selected members. Although men who were not members were also excluded, yet it was an all-male interest that their own village should be represented by men, rather than by women. Women therefore became the political victims of colonial oppression.

10.4.3.3 Socio-political effects on Igbo men

If we look at the economic and political effects of the Aba women's riots on Igbo men, we could see that men were not badly affected, except those whose wives lost their lives in the riots. Of course, there were also certain men who lost their political power – the warrant chiefs, who lost their jobs. But in general the Aba riots did not negatively affect the men. Although the men were indirectly made to pay for the damages caused by their wives through increased taxation, the organisation of the social and political structures of the community was handed over to them, thus strengthening the roles of patriarchy in society.

On the other hand, women's socio-economic and political setbacks in society resulted in economic burdens on the men, whose small income could hardly sustain them and their extended families. In this difficult economic situation, the colonial government was the winner, as it was the employer who determined wages and salaries, as well as prices.

In the opinion of some of the colonial officers, the Igbo men organised the Aba women's riots and directed them secretly. 554 This suspicion shows that the colonial government really underestimated the women's political ability, and at the same time mistrusted the Igbo men. Such mistrust should be regarded as temporary. After all, it was the Igbo men who guided the colonial interest in the absence of colonial officials. Further, since one of the results of the Aba riots was that the women's organisation for political action lost importance, one can therefore conclude that it was the men who had the major profit of Aba women's riots. But on the other hand – socially, we could also say that the women won the war because of the manner in which they demonstrated their strength during the war.

553 Ibid., 28.
554 Van Allen 1976, 74.
10.5 The missions and education

With the arrival of colonial administration came Christian religion and education. Long before the missionaries arrived, the Igbo had their own system of education and medium of instruction. All Igbo children were taught appropriate moral behaviour, which enabled them to differentiate right from wrong, good from bad. Their educational and religious practices were in accordance with their cultural world-view. However, with the establishment of mission schools, the main focus was on writing, reading and arithmetics, and on training people who would work for the colonial government as clerks, rather than on training people who would have professional skills to manage an industrial, technological society.555 The mission's philosophy of education was also focused on the conversion of people to Christianity. The mission schools were thus established as a means of spreading the gospel and not just as a medium of instruction. The missionaries built many schools and established guidelines regarding the methods of teaching in these schools. They also gave grants to private institutions for the development of their schools.556

In the mission schools, Igbo girls were only allowed to learn “European domestic skills and the Bible, often in the vernacular.”557 The girls were trained mainly for Christian marriage and motherhood, not for job purposes or citizenship. The main aim was to make them Christian mothers and wives, not future political leaders.558

Under colonial administration, in order to attend mission schools, Igbo people had to profess belief in Christianity and abandon their traditional religion.559

10.5.1 The continued impact of Western education

Traditionally, the training and education of Asaba children and other Igbo children was carried out informally. The age grades, initiation schools and secret societies were institutions used in the education of the youths.560 However, the main “education” consisted in the teachings within the family and in socialisation through interaction. In the process of socialisation, great emphasis was placed on transferring to the young members of the tribe an understanding of the cultural values held in common by the group, and often reproduced in proverbs, in order to produce a homogeneous and cohesive

555 Falola 1999, 77.
556 Ibid.
557 Ibid.
558 Van Allen 1976, 76.
559 Ibid.
560 Among these are such institutions as age grades, initiation schools and secret societies, which were responsible for part of the training of the young.
society. Since the Igbo did not possess a written language, knowledge was handed down orally from the old to the young, mothers being primarily responsible for the education of their daughters, and fathers for that of their sons. There were other family members, such as grandparents or uncles and aunts, who contributed their share. But the moral responsibility lay with the parents. Nevertheless, as the extended family was the main social and economic unit, the older generation kept an eye on the parents of their grandchildren in order to assure that the parents did not neglect their duties. For an ill-brought-up child reflected not only on the parents, but also on the larger family.

With the advent of the colonial powers and the missionaries, and the subsequent introduction of modern, literary education, basic changes took place in the manner in which education was carried out and in the content of the instruction. Since the new education was not restricted to a particular class of people, but theoretically at least, open to all, it resulted in a social disequilibrium. New kinds of differentiation emerged, as a result of the amount of education received. All previous teaching had rather been administered for social cohesion.

10.6 Women and the Churches

If we look to the Old and New Testaments, and to the life of the Church as a whole, women have played powerful roles and accomplished tasks of outstanding value in the Church.

In the Old Testament, there were many women of status who played significant roles in the religious life; for instance women such as Deborah, Miriam, and Huldah were in direct personal contact with Yahweh. Also in the New Testament, especially in the Acts of the Apostles, there is evidence of the active role of women in the nascent Church in the account of the gathering of the twelve, how women were involved in the birth of the Church and the ways in which they played a very significant role in the life of the incipient Church. The Gospel narratives also give instances of Jesus' encounters with women, and how they were eyewitnesses to his resurrection.

Again, we should not “forget the great number of women who have consecrated themselves to the Lord for the exercise of charity or for the mis-

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561 Among the Asaba, a child's paternal uncle has traditionally taken over a large part of this responsibility since, according to the Asaba kinship system, he is the legal guardian of his brother's children.

562 Women and the Priesthood, Declaration inter insigniores on the Question of the Admission of women to the Ministerial Priesthood 1976, 3.

563 See the Acts of the Apostles for further information on this.
sions, and the Christian wives, who have had a profound influence on their families, particularly for the passing of the faith to their children.564

Presently, a considerable number of Christian communities are gaining from the commitment of women in apostolic work. Some of these women are appointed to take part in different councils, which are established for pastoral reflection,565 while some are fully involved in all church activities in their various parishes.

For some years, different Christian communities have also been admitting women into priesthood on equal basis with men.566 This has raised questions and petitions regarding the ordination of women to priesthood among different Christian groups – among these the Roman Catholic Church, which does not support the ordination of women.567

The Catholic Church has never felt that priestly or Episcopal ordination can be validly conferred on women. From the writings of the Church, one could find undeniable influence of prejudice against women, but nevertheless it should be noted that this prejudice has had hardly any influence on their pastoral activity, and still less on their spiritual direction.

10.7 Modernisation, migration and urbanisation

The modernisation and enlightenment, which came as a result of progress in education and growing political awareness in Nigeria, had a great deal of impact on Nigerian society. With the spread of Western education, there were improvements in various aspects of life, and an increased political awareness among people. Further, there was a great influx of people from the rural areas to the urban centres in search of job opportunities and better prospects. As people moved from the rural areas to the urban, there was rapid growth in the population in the urban centres. But in the beginning, most of the moves were seasonal or temporary, as a sign of attachment to family, tribe and ancestry, and also because of the suffering of social and legal disabilities faced by immigrant settlers.568

Damachi’s assumption that urbanisation in Nigeria was a result of modernisation, which came with colonialism, is, however, doubtful. Seasonal migration had been typical of Nigeria for centuries before the arrival of the Europeans. Towns such as Umuahia in eastern Nigeria and Warri in southern Nigeria had been urban centres for a long period of time.569

564 *Women and the Priesthood, Declaration inter insigniores on the Question of the Admission of women to the Ministerial Priesthood* 1976, 4.
565 Ibid.
566 Ibid.
567 Ibid., 4-5.
568 Damachi 1972, 54.

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As a large number of people moved to a small number of rapidly growing cities in Nigeria, the fabric of life changed massively in urban and rural places in unforeseen ways. With the new Western-style kind of urbanisation and improved means of transportation, which had been made possible due to improvement of roads and availability of vehicles, Nigeria became an increasingly urbanised society. According to Falola:

With cities acting as centers of interaction and acculturation, urbanisation contributed to the development of national feelings. Political and national ideas grew and spread in the cities. Urban dwellers carried with them these ideas to their villages and ethnic communities, thus connecting the city with the countryside. The new infrastructure aided easier movement of people and integration of different parts of the country. Thousands of Yoruba and Igbo moved to the North, with many of them becoming members of political parties outside their own home areas. The spread of Western education, especially in the south, created a population segment that could read and write and follow the discourse on nationalism and development.

As society became increasingly urban, the growth and movement of people in the urban areas in Nigeria increased, and with it came an increase in crime rates and a high rate of prostitution among women. About the northern part of Nigeria, Chapin Metz writes as follows:

the great urban centers of Kano, Katsina, Zaria, Sokoto, the early Borno capitals (Gazargamo and Kuka), and other cities served as entrepots to the Saharan and trans-Saharan trade, and as central citadels and political capitals for the expanding states of the northern savanna. They attracted large numbers of traders and migrants from their own hinterlands and generally also included “stranger quarters” for migrants of other regions and nations. In the south, the rise of the Yoruba expansionist city states and of Benin and others was stimulated by trade to the coast and by competition among these growing urban centers for the control of their hinterlands and of the trade from the interior to the Atlantic (including the slave trade). The activities of European traders also attracted people to such coastal cities as Lagos, Badagri, Brass, and Bonny, and later Calabar and Port Harcourt.

As Damachi wrote:

According to the census of 1953, nearly three-fourths of the inhabitants of Lagos were from the contiguous Western Region of Nigeria. (However, over a twenty-year period, people who had come to Lagos from the Eastern Region increased five times as compared with the doubling of those from the Western Region).

570 Chapin Metz 1992, 130.
571 Falola 1999, 83.
573 Damachi 1972, 54.
In their efforts to add new sections to existing cities in Nigeria, the colonial administration built new urban centres in places where there had been no urban centres before. One of the most significant of these was Kaduna, the former capital of the colonial administration in northern Nigeria, and Jos in the middle belt, a major tin mining town on the plateau and a recreational town for the Nigerian elite and expatriates.574

Other additions made by the colonial government were the segregated Government Reserved Areas (GRA), which were made up of European-style housing, a hospital or nursing station, and recreational, educational and religious facilities for the colonial administrators and other important Europeans, who mainly belonged to the trading community. These areas were segregated from the indigenous Nigerian areas because of the European ambition to control sanitation and the spread of malaria.575

Thus, there were two kinds of cities: (a) the old trading towns like Ibadan, Port Harcourt etc., and (b) modern cities, in the Western style, like Lagos. The change was connected to the European city centres.

10.7.1 The impact of the Second World War on Nigerian women

The Second World War, which began in September 1939, had a great impact on Nigerian women. During the war, about 100,000 Nigerian soldiers were recruited to fight. Most of those who took part in the war were exposed to propaganda on liberty, equality, and freedom. At the end of the war, most of the soldiers came back to Nigeria. The interaction they had had with their European counterparts during the war, and contact with European soldiers based in Nigeria, affected the respect that many Nigerians had previously had for Europeans.576 This applies especially to the Nigerian women, who were able to interact with the soldiers, and were able to see that there were no differences between the whites and the blacks.

For many women, the outbreak of the war also marked the beginning of endless problems. For some, problems began when their husbands voluntarily joined the army, or were forced to do so through conscription. Most of the soldiers' wives went through great anxieties during the war, since most of them knew that not all of the men who went to war would come back, and some did not know if their husbands were still alive or dead. For some women, the war led to the loss of the family's “breadwinner.” For the women so affected, this forced them to start playing their husband's role without real preparation or means to do so. At the end of the war, some women also met with hostility from their husband's relations, who treated them badly after the death of their husbands. Because of this, some left their marital families and

574 Chapin Metz 1992, 133.
575 Ibid.
went to their natal homes. Most women who lost their husbands in the war had no alternative means of earning a living, and some of them faced very serious hardship.

When the Second World War spread to North Africa, the Middle East and India, Nigeria became an important post for the British government and its allies for shipping troops and supplies of food to those areas. In Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu, Jos, Kano and Maiduguri, airports and military camps were built to link the towns. More than 100,000 soldiers passed through these West Africa routes. As a result of this, many cities grew, and the wages of the service servants were increased. Resources were also contributed from Nigeria in the form of raw materials and funds. More supplies of rubber and tin were requested by the British government and its allies as a result of the loss of Southeast Asia, and more export commodities such as cassava starch. This wartime scarcity caused economic prosperity in Nigeria, but did not last for a long period before hardship set in.\footnote{This had a big effect on Nigerian women, as some of them lost their jobs and businesses during the period of hardship and economic decline.}

10.8 Conclusion

Thus we can see that with the introduction of indirect rule in Igbo society, the socio-political and religious role of women in traditional Igbo society was affected. With the introduction of the colonial administration, the Igbo women were excluded from the political scene, and this had a tremendous effect on their political participation in the traditional society.

Furthermore, with this exclusion of women from traditional politics, the “dual-sex” political organisation of Igbo women in the traditional society was affected. It was no longer recognised by the recently emerged men, who by now created their own, new, independent government as warrant chiefs.

In addition to this, with the introduction of Western education, which came with Christianity and colonialism, Igbo women were taught Christian religious studies in the schools. This new system of instruction by the missionaries had a tremendous effect on Igbo women. The teaching of Christian religious studies to the women affected their former beliefs, and this had a great effect on their former role in the traditional society.

Also, the establishment of colonial administration in Igboland caused a change in women's economic and political power in Igbo society. The Igbo women were excluded from politics, and as a result of this they showed their feelings, for instance in the Aba riots, where they protested against the colonial administration.

\footnote{Ibid., 88.}
Finally, we could also see this in the effects of the Second World War on the Igbo women in particular, and on the Nigerian society at large, where some of the women who lost their husbands during the war started to take on the roles of husbands in their homes, which was not the normal way in Igbo society.
CHAPTER 11
Nigeria 1956 to 1970

11.1 The Growth of Nationalism

Nationalism had its origins in the nineteenth century. The resistance wars in different areas were a great inspiration for the twentieth century nationalist movements. In the early years, therefore, nationalism in Africa was expressed as a feeling of pan-African consciousness and awareness, implying that Africans should feel that they were one.\textsuperscript{578}

Nationalism in Nigeria was a result of the colonial rule. At the beginning of the colonial era, awareness grew among people that they were citizens of one nation, and a desire for freedom from the colonial government became a paramount expression of nationalism. This was a result of the discontent generated by the colonial policies among the elite, who first requested reforms and later independence from the colonial administration.\textsuperscript{579}

Some of the issues that upset people in the domain of the colonial policies in Nigeria were racism and the destruction of traditional values during the colonial era. The civil servants protested against the racial discrimination, especially in connection with appointments and promotions in offices. Some of them were also upset because of the privileges enjoyed by the colonial officers. For the Nigerian business people, the establishment of the colonial administration affected their businesses; most of them went out of business due to the establishment of foreign companies, and the only way for them to regain control of their trade was to be identified with anti-European movements.\textsuperscript{580}

The late 1920's and 1930's economic depression in Europe also brought economic hardship, unemployment and retrenchment in the civil service in Nigeria. This period of hardship helped the nationalists in their efforts to criticise and condemn the colonial administration, and to use the opportunity to stimulate national consciousness among people and gain support from the masses.\textsuperscript{581}

\textsuperscript{578} Falola 1999, 81-82.
\textsuperscript{579} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{580} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{581} Ibid., 82-83.
The growth of nationalist activities was also stimulated by some of the changes during that era, such as the introduction of Western education, urbanisation and transportation. With the introduction of Western education by the missionaries, many Nigerians were able to read and write, and able to understand and follow the discourse on nationalism and development. The education of many Nigerians helped to produce new leaders with new visions, ideas and ambitions in society. Apart from this, other factors, such as urbanisation and improved means of transportation, contributed to the growth of nationalist activities. The growth of urban centres contributed to an easy interaction and acculturation among the people in the big cities. This contributed to the development of a national consciousness among people. With the improved means of transportation, people in the cities were able to travel to the countryside and communicate these ideas.582

The establishment of locally owned newspapers and presses by people such as Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, who established the West African Pilot in 1937 in Lagos, and the Nigerian Youth Movement, which established a daily newspaper called the Daily Service, contributed as well to the spread of new ideas. Newspapers and magazine publications influenced people's opinions about the events of the time, and also contributed to the awakening of political consciousness and the emergence of trade unions. Through these newspaper publications, nationalist ideas were able to find an outlet to the public, and the nationalist ideology was promoted all over the country.583 As noted by Falola:

Azikiwe contributed to the rise of militant nationalism and combative journalism. Drawing on his experience in the United States, he saw the struggles in Nigeria as between blacks and whites and called for a united front against the British. His newspaper was modelled after American yellow journalism and expressed a deep commitment to race matters. Using a highly provocative style that shocked colonial officers, he lambasted the British constantly. He popularized journalism by establishing provincial dailies and using a wide variety of outlets for distribution, which enabled nationalist ideas to spread to the hinterland.584

The Tribal Improvement Unions, which came into existence almost simultaneously with the Nigerian-owned press, also contributed to the awakening anti-colonialist feelings. After the introduction of the unions, indigenous people were able to act as “pressure groups” against the colonial administration in order to demand the attention of the British government to the social needs of their people, and to provide new facilities such as maternity wards, hospitals, dispensaries and better roads. But later, these tribal unions started

582 See Falola 1999, 83, and also Olusanya 1973, 27.
583 Ibid.
584 Falola 1999, 87.
to act as propagandists for the nationalist movement in the demand for self-government in the country.\footnote{Arikpo 1967, 59-60.}

Apart from the internal factors, some external factors were also responsible for the growth of nationalism. The formation of the West African National Congress in 1920, which held their congress in Accra, Ghana, also stimulated the nationalist activities. With the formation of this organisation, two political parties emerged in Lagos between 1920 and 1922: the Nigerian National Democratic Party and the Peoples Union, which were constituted of most of the educated elite. In 1923, these two parties competed in elections for the new legislative council, which was then introduced.\footnote{See Arikpo 1967, 57-58, and also Falola 1999, 83-84.} The establishment of this organisation, which also created more awareness in the nationalist movement, was inspired by the climate of idealism which was created by the First World War and by two militant Negro organisations that existed in America at that time, the Garvey Movement and the Pan-African Movement, which was led by W.E.B. Du Bois.\footnote{Olusanya 1973, 29-30.}

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 also stimulated political awareness among Nigerians. With the outbreak of war, anti-colonial political propaganda in Nigeria stopped for a while, as the nationalist leaders supported the British war efforts and encouraged Nigerians to join the army. The “Win the War-campaigns” was organised and encouraged by nationalists, and fund-raising was introduced to encourage people to donate money for the war. The leaders also assured the Nigerians that the country’s prospects of self-government under the British colonial administration were better than under German administration. Many Nigerians were then encouraged to enrol in the West African Frontier Force that took part in the campaigns in East and North Africa, India and Burma. With the services of Nigerian soldiers abroad, their political outlook was broadened, and the war propaganda of the Western nations also stimulated discussions among the soldiers about self-determination.\footnote{Arikpo 1967, 60.} The ideas created by the war, and the increasing nationalist activities in some other countries, such as India and Ireland, also quickened the political activities in Nigeria. Attacks by nationalists on some of the practices of the British administration became the order of the day.\footnote{Olusanya 1973, 30.}

The rise of the Soviet Union and the increasing influence of socialism and communism also helped in providing ideas of freedom and emancipation to the leaders in Africa.\footnote{Falola 1999, 87.}
11.2 Igbo women and their roles in the Nigerian political parties 1951-1965

After the colonial era, Igbo women participated actively in the political life of Nigeria. Throughout the 1950's, during the nationalist movement, and after October 1, 1960, when Nigeria gained her independence, Igbo women played significant roles in the Nigerian political parties, especially in the NCNC, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons. The NCNC was first launched in 1944 at a meeting of the Nigeria Union of Students, with its first president, Herbert Macaulay, and its general secretary, Nnamdi Azikiwe. After the death of Herbert Macaulay in 1946, Nnamdi Azikiwe became president. The NCNC was seen as an Igbo political party, because the Igbo elite and businessmen mainly dominated its leadership.

The women in the party had women's associations and organisations, which were exclusively for women. Some of the women in the party were assigned socio-political functions such as settling party disputes caused by nominations, cases of disobedience, corruption, and also settling any existing local council disturbances between the party members. During the 1959 Federal election in Nigeria, most of the Igbo women in NCNC, such as the late Mrs. Flora Azikiwe and Mrs. Mokelu, were elected as committee members to look into the disputes that took place during the election.

In 1954 and 1959, the NCNC national executive council increased the membership of women in the party. As noted by Sklar, in 1957, six female members of the National Executive Council of the NCNC resented the women's associations. The resentment of these women meant an open disagreement among the women themselves. This kind of disagreement strengthened the power of the male members of the National Executive Council, who seized the opportunity of the women's lack of unity to decrease the number of women in the National Executive Council.

In 1966, "Mrs. Nzimiro with some other women who were members of this party complained to the NCNC National Executive Council that two women representatives were not enough to represent the Eastern Women's Associations." This complaint was rejected by the convention, which insisted on maintaining only two women representatives from each region on the National Executive Council. In spite of this discrimination against the women organisations, the eastern region conferences of the NCNC, which

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591 The political party NCNC, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons was later renamed as the National Council of Nigerian Citizens.
593 Sklar 1963, 71.
594 Mba 1982, 236.
595 Ibid., 239.
596 Ibid., 247.
597 Ibid., 237.
598 Ibid.
was composed of the regional and federal legislators, could not function effectively without a reasonable representation of women. This shows the importance of the women as far as NCNC was concerned. Although the leadership of the NCNC political wings was predominantly in the hands of men, the overall NCNC political activities were to some extent paralysed because of the lack of active participation of female members. The eastern working committee of the NCNC, which was the strongest NCNC political wing then in eastern Nigeria, sensed this danger of the women's political exclusion, and in 1957 added three female members to its executive members. In 1958, again, its women executives increased by the admission of more women members into the executive council. The western working committee in 1958 also appointed Mrs. Kuti as the treasurer of the party.

The eastern working committee and the western working committee were assigned other socio-political party functions concerning the management of the ad hoc committee, which often took on important assignments, such as settling party disputes caused by nominations, cases of disobedience, corruption, and also settling any existing local council disturbances or misunderstandings between the party members. The presence of women in this committee was considered important, because it was believed that women “were more trustworthy, loyal, disciplined and less corrupt than men.” During the 1959 federal election, for example, about 104 “disputed contests” were recorded and, as a result, the national executive council set up three appeal committees, one in the east, one in the west and one in Lagos, to look into the disputes. None of these committees worked without a female member. Mrs. Nzimiro was in the western committee, Mrs. Fashina was in the eastern committee, and Mrs. Iheukumere was in the Lagos committee. In a similar development, Mrs. Nzimiro and Mrs. Obua were included in the five-member committee that was appointed to inquire into the disputes that erupted in the Enugu branch of the eastern working committee, and in another situation Mrs. Fashina was one of the chosen members of the committee that was assigned to nominate seven candidates for the Ibadan section of the NCNC.

There were other instances of active political participation of women within the NCNC. In the 1950s, for instance, three major political parties – the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), the Northern People's Congress (NPC), and the Action Group (AG) – sent delegates to

599 Ibid.
600 Ibid., 238.
601 Ibid.
602 Ibid.
603 Ibid.
604 Ibid.
605 Ibid.
606 Ibid.
607 Ibid.
different constitutional conferences held in Britain and Nigeria between the Nigerian and the British government. Mrs. Ekpo Young of the NCNC political wing was one of the advisors to the NCNC delegates in the 1953 constitutional conference also held in London. Before her departure, she said: “I will not compromise with anybody in London as far as the political and social emancipation of women is concerned.” She also represented the NCNC in many other constitutional conferences held in 1958, and thus convincingly endorsed the important political roles played by the NCNC women. One admirable aspect of the NCNC's political policy on women was its flexibility. In 1961, for instance, female provincial, organising secretaries were for the first time employed by the NCNC secretariat to take over the responsibilities concerning women. They were allowed to send their reports directly to the regional headquarters and to the NCNC women's association, and thus were independent of the male Provincial or Divisional organising Secretaries. This situation signifies a step forward to bridge the political inequality between men and women. Although the women received slightly lower salaries than the men, the women were given cars and car allowances on the same terms as men. These privileges started becoming more significant when, in 1963, 12 female Provincial Secretaries were appointed only in the eastern region. These appointments were made by the old but active women in the women's association of the NCNC.

In 1961, three women were nominated, Mrs. Ekpo, Mrs. Mokelu and Mrs. Young, to stand for eastern region elections. Because of their popularity in their respective urban areas, these women were offered some political offices.

We can thus see that women’s authority was appreciated by the first generation of politically independent men, although this applied within the political parties, especially within the NCNC, which was regarded as an “Igbo party.” The women were represented mainly because they were thought to be particularly efficient in settling rivalry between men.

11.3 Church and state after independence

After the coup d'état of 1966 in Nigeria, which claimed the lives of many Nigerians, such as Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Chief Samuel Akintola, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, and others, and the assassination of Major-General

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608 Ibid.
609 Ibid.
610 Ibid.
611 See Mba 1982, 239, for their names and offices held.
612 Mba 1982, 238.
Aguiyi-Ironsi and Lieutenant-Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi, General Yakubu Gowon became the head of state. After the Nigerian civil war in 1970, General Murtala Mohammed took over the government on July 29, 1975, but was assassinated on February 13, 1976.

After his death, the Federal military government during the Obasanjo administration took over all mission-owned schools in the country in 1979. This caused a major clash between Church and state, and created a lot of problems between the government and the churches, because most of the mission schools were taken over by the government without any appropriate compensation to the churches. At the same time, most Nigerians were against this action, since most of them felt that with the government takeover of schools, the standard of education in Nigeria would fall.

Again, during the military rule of General Ibrahim Babangida from 1985-1992, and also the dictatorship government of General Sanni Abacha, who died on June 8, 1998, there were several crises between Church and government in the country. The Nigerian churches were opposed to the move by the then military administrations to join the OIC, the Organisation of Islamic Countries, as this was seen by the Church as a tactic by the Nigerian government to Islamise the country. This caused a lot of problems between the Church and the government, which denied this allegation and accused the churches of false allegations. But this issue continued between the Church and various Nigerian governments, which were seen by the Christians to support the Muslim Hausa-Fulani ethnic group from the northern part of the country, despite government denials.

Most churches in Nigeria were also against the corrupt military administration of General Ibrahim Babangida. During this period, most churches in the country joined the various trade unions and student organisations in demanding the handover of the government to civilian, democratic government. The Nigerian government at the time was not happy about the demand. The government even arranged for the arrest and imprisonment of some of the Church leaders, who publicly preached against the government.

In 1987, there was a religious uprising in Kaduna, in which more than 100 churches and Christian institutions in the northern part of Nigeria, especially in Zaria, Kaduna and Kafanchan, were burnt and many Christians killed by...
The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), one of the major Christian associations in the country, accused the government of not taking any action on similar issues in the past, thus causing the recurrence of this immediate crisis, and called on the government to punish those responsible for this religious crisis.617

In the mid-1980s, Nigeria also had an enormous problem with illegal immigrants from Ghana, who came to Nigeria during the national crisis in Ghana. The Nigerian military government at the time ordered the expulsion of the refugees from Nigeria, similarly to what had happened in Ghana in the late 1960s. Most of the Nigerian churches were opposed to the government's action and some of the churches called on the government to reconsider their decision, but the appeal was ignored.

Thus, as we have seen, there were several crises between the Church and the government in Nigeria, especially in their move to join the OIC, the Organization of Islamic Countries.

11.4 Igbo women in politics after independence

As already mentioned, after Nigeria achieved statehood in 1960, many Igbo women played active roles in Nigerian politics. In the First Republic in Nigeria, Igbo women such as the late Mrs. Flora Azikiwe, Mrs. Nzimiro, Mrs. Adanna Okpara, Mrs. Mokelu, and Mrs. Wogu were active members of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), which was later renamed the National Council of Nigerian Citizens. These women were appointed to various committees in the party, such as the Eastern Working Committee (EWC), and some of them were also members of the women's association of the party.618

During the Second Republic 1979-1983, Igbo women were also involved in Nigerian politics. Mrs. Uche Offia-Nwali of the Nigeria People's Party (NPP)619 was appointed to the post of State Commissioner for Social Welfare, Youth and Culture in Anambra State. Mrs. Florence G. Esmodi, also of the NPP, represented Onitsha north/west in the House of Assembly, and Mrs. Victoria Nnenna Akanwa, also of the NPP, was councillor for the Ipu East/West Constituency in the Ukwa Local Government Area of Nigeria.620 Mrs. J.C. Eze was a member of the House of Representatives, Anambra north Uzo-Uwani Nnewi, and Mrs. V.O. Nnaji was also a member of the

616 See Kaduna Religious Riot '87, A catalogue of Events, by CAN Kaduna Publicity committee.
617 Ibid., 74.
618 See Mba 1982, 235-258, for further information on this.
619 NPP is the acronym for the Nigeria People's Party.
Apart from Igbo women being appointed to active positions in different political parties in the country, this administration was the first administration in Nigeria to offer women ministerial posts at the federal level as ministers in the country.\footnote{Ojigbo 1980, 313-326.}

In 1990-1993, during the transition program of General Ibrahim Babangida, women in Nigeria at large, as well as Igbo women in particular, were elected to positions in the government. The two Nigerian political parties, the National Republic Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP), both had female representatives. In the state assembly elections of December 1991, 27 women won seats in the state houses of assembly nationwide. In the National Assembly elections of July 1992, one woman was elected, although none was chosen as a state governor.\footnote{See Alhaji Shehu Shagari, “On Women in Nigeria,” in: Afrika Journal No. 2, March/April 1982, 37.} Three of the female members of the state houses of assembly were from Imo state, one from Anambra state, Hon. Ifeoma Chinwuba, and three from Delta state, all Igbo-speaking states.\footnote{Osinulu & Mba 1996, 112.}

In 1999, during the transition to democracy under General Abdulsalami Abubakar, the six political parties in Nigeria – Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), National Democratic Party (NDP), United Nigeria Peoples Party (UNPP), and All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) – had Igbo women among their representatives, who competed during the election. Some of those women were elected in the state Houses of Assembly, while some were members of the House of Representatives, and others were appointed as state commissioners from their various states.

But one important thing that should be noted about Nigerian politics is that despite the number of women participating in politics, their percentage is smaller, compared to their male counterparts, and to their female counterparts in other countries, such as the USA.\footnote{Ibid., 123-124.}

### 11.5 The role of Igbo women in the Biafra war

As indicated above, on January 15, 1966, there was a military coup in Nigeria, which put an end to the Igbo's relation to the NCNC, as all political parties along with their women's branches were banned.\footnote{Ibid., 112.} On 30 May 1967, the eastern region broke away from the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and was declared independent by Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu. On the 6th of July
1967, the Nigeria civil war broke out, and ended in January 1970. During this war, more than one million Igbo, both men, women and children, were killed by the federal troops.

The Hausa killed many Igbo, who lived in the northern part of the country, in September and October 1966, and there was a mass exodus of Igbo back to the east, both from the north and other parts of the country. Some Igbo men sent their wives and children back at the beginning of the war, with the intention of following them later, but they were trapped and killed by Nigerian soldiers.

The Asaba people as well as other Igbo suffered very much during the civil war. Many people, both young and old, were killed during the war, and Asaba was turned into a battlefield between the Nigerian and Biafran soldiers. Many houses and properties were destroyed and the town was levelled to the ground. Almost all the families in Asaba lost loved ones; in some families all the male members were killed. Most of the elderly Asaba people, who survived the war, had been abroad during the civil war.

During this war, many Asaba young men, who were not killed, were conscripted to the Nigerian and Biafran armies. Young girls and married women were either forced into relationships or raped by federal troops, and some women were forced into marriage against their will. Most of the Asaba girls at that time were put into hiding, in order to be protected from the Nigerian soldiers.

These killings in Asaba were the result of hostility of both Nigerian and Biafran soldiers against the western Igbo, because the eastern Igbo considered themselves to be the real Biafrans. The western Igbo, including the Asaba people, were considered by both Nigerian and Biafran soldiers as traitors who harboured enemies, and so, both warring parties – Nigerians and Biafrans alike – killed many western Igbo. They were accused by the Nigerians of harbouring Biafran soldiers, while the Biafrans accused them of being loyal to the Nigerian troops by giving them vital information concerning the whereabouts and activities of Biafran soldiers. They were believed to reveal secret hiding places to the Nigerian troops in exchange for food. Due to this, “some local men were openly shot by Biafran soldiers for harbouring Nigerian soldiers or giving them information.”

Igbo women, including Asaba women, fought very hard during the war. They demonstrated against the killings of Igbo and against the engagement of the Soviet Union in the civil war. The women's organisations and networks in Igboland helped to collect and distribute food to the soldiers. The

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630 Isichei 1969, 426.
631 Emecheta 1994, 221.
632 Van Allen 1976, 84; Bley & Harding 1997, 135.
local civilian-defence militia units were joined by Igbo women, and, in May, 1969, the women made a request to the senior Biafran army officials for the formation of a “Women's Front” that would join the infantry. During this war, many of the Igbo women lost their lives, while some lost their husbands, children and relatives.

In addition to this, women worked as Red Cross volunteers; some of them were in the refugee camps distributing food and clothes to the refugees, while others worked in hospitals, health centers and sick bays, treating wounded soldiers and sick civilians.

Some women acted as spies, while some collected information from the enemy troops and passed this information on to the Biafran army. Igbo women were also employed by the Biafran army to prepare food for the soldiers, and when it became impossible to pay these employed cooks, due to lack of funds from the Biafran government, most of the women from different parts of the community volunteered to cook for the soldiers.

Igbo women also engaged in what was called attack trade and known in Igbo as “ahia attack.” In this kind of trade, women crossed the frontlines between the two fighting forces to sell goods. The women bought food items that they knew to be scarce in the Biafran area, such as salt, from the Nigerian soldiers, and sold to the Biafran army and civilians, and then bought other items from the Biafrans and sold to Nigerian soldiers. It was a very dangerous trade. Many of the women who engaged in this trade were either killed by the soldiers on either side as saboteurs, or assaulted by them.

11.5.1 Igbo women in the Biafran army

During the Nigerian–Biafran war, some Igbo women fought in the Biafran army. Some women were recruited to the civilian defence militia and promoted to officer cadres, while some were recruited into the Intelligence and Propaganda Directorates. Several held responsible positions in the Biafran army, and fought during the civil war. At the war fronts, women were active in the medical corps. They were also involved in wartime administration.

In the militia, women were trained by ex-servicemen in the use of guns and other weapons. According to Madiebo, the main tasks of this militia were:

- to provide a ready source of manpower reinforcement for the regular army; to assist with military administration immediately behind the frontlines; to gar-

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633 Van Allen 1976, 84; Bley & Harding 1997, 133.
635 Van Allen 1976, 84.
637 Ibid., 143-147.
638 See Bley & Harding 1997, 133; Van Allen 1976, 84.
Most women who were recruited into this unit performed in a way that was very much appreciated by the people in general during the war. Women were also recruited in the Biafran organisation of freedom fighters (Boff); these were soldiers who operated on their own on enemy territory without any kind of benefit from the Biafran government. As indicated above, some of the women who worked in this unit collected information about the enemy for the Biafran army. Some would even go out of their way to befriend Nigerian soldiers in order to get relevant information from them. These units reported directly to General Ojukwu and like the National Liberation Front in Vietnam, they had both a political and military role; to act as underground administrators behind the Nigerian lines and to raid the Federal communication lines.

Some women were also recruited to the artillery unit and fought alongside their male comrades at the war fronts, while others, who were recruited, assisted in mobilizing civilians to join the Biafran army.

Thus, Igbo women played a very active role on the Biafran side during the Nigerian-Biafran war. However, the western Igbo women were treated with mistrust from both sides.

### 11.5.2 Starvation as a weapon

About one million Igbo died as a result of starvation and disease during the Nigerian civil war, and most of the victims were children. This food scarcity was caused by the embargo that the Nigerian government placed on the Biafrans, and also by the war itself. During the war, the Nigerian government saw starvation as a means of defeating the Biafrans, and so they blocked food and other essential supplies from reaching the people. They saw this as an appropriate tool to bring about an end to the civil war. For instance, in 1969, when many Igbo were dying from hunger, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the then Vice-Chairman of Nigeria's Federal Executive Council, saw starvation as a justifiable means to an end. He said, “All is fair in war, and starvation is one of the weapons of war. I don't see why we should feed our enemies fat, only to fight us harder.”

Because of the food scarcity, there was malnutrition such as kwashiorkor (a severe disease that befalls people whose diet does not have enough pro-
tein in all of Biafra. Many Igbo died of kwashiorkor, especially pregnant women, nursing mothers and growing children. At the initial stage of this disease, most Igbo did not know that it was malnutrition connected with lack of protein, but thought it was malaria, and in many cases treated it as malaria. It was much later that they knew it was not, and by then some had lost their children and wives as a result of this disease. Many Igbo women at that time, who were still within childbearing age, decided to stop giving birth, many by avoidance of sex. The men, if available at all, realised the seriousness of the situation. The effects of kwashiorkor and other diseases were devastating to the people, and many women could not feed their hungry children, even though they often went without food themselves for the sake of the children. As a result of this, Igbo people died in large numbers between 1967 to mid-1968, when relief operations started in Biafra. With the help of relief organisations, such as the Red Cross, the food situation became better, although it was still not enough, but at least people were able to get some food for their families.

The Nigerian blockade of food made life very miserable for the Igbo and drastically reduced their interest in the war. As a result of this, the Biafran government urged self-reliance in terms of food supply, manufacturing of military equipment and other necessary things. In a drive for self-reliance, older Igbo women started farming during the war. These women later became the main providers of foodstuffs to the Biafran army, and to civilians as well, apart from the Red Cross and other relief organisations. At this time, most of the young women and men of Biafra had gone to the war front to fight Nigerian soldiers, so it was the old women who were left to farm and to feed the nation. These women took joy in carrying out this farming work, and in distributing the harvest to various sections of the society.

11.6 The Churches and relief work in Biafra

In May 1968, after the collapse of Port Harcourt, there was a huge famine in Biafra. 32 Catholic and Protestant church organisations from 28 countries took part in something called the Joint Church Aid (JCA), which was formed to get humanitarian and relief supplies to Biafra. During the whole period of the war, the JCA supplied 60,000 tons of food and medicines to the victims of the Biafra war.

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646 Ibid., 115.
647 Ibid.
648 Interview with Mrs. C. A. Nnajiofor, Asaba, September 14, 1994, one of the Igbo women who fought during the Biafra war.
A relief organisation was also formed by the Irish Holy Ghost Fathers; it was named Africa Concern. It assisted in giving relief to the people of Biafra. Other organisations that assisted in the relief operation to Biafra was the charitable organisation of the Roman Catholic Church (CARITAS), and the World Council of Churches and the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM), which were part of the organisations that formed the Joint Church Aid. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which had established their organisation in Nigeria long before the civil war, also played an active part in the relief operation. This organisation set up outposts in many schools and colleges during the war, and from there food and clothes were distributed to the people. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) also sent about 41,000 tons of relief aid to Biafra during the war. Trained volunteers were sent by this organisation to hospitals, health centres, sick bays and refugee camps to help with first aid, and to assist in taking care of the young, old and other people who were affected by the war.

Apart from these relief organisations, there were individuals who also organised relief operations in Biafra, such as the Swedish count Carl-Gustaf von Rosen, who organised an airborne relief campaign called “Von Rosen aid”, and “bombed” Biafra with food.

On July 1968, Henri Jaggi, a Swiss representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Biafra, and Dr. Herman Middelkoop, a Dutch representative of the World Council of Churches, worked out figures stating that 11 million people in Biafra were in need of urgent help.

In August 1968, in order to meet the urgent demand for relief supplies to Biafra due to the high death toll from starvation, a large-scale airlift was organised and run by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Joint Church Aid, as these organisations supplied relief items to the war victims. By the end of 1968, the problems of the relief operations to Biafra became more severe. “As it was assumed that the population of the embattled territory in December 1968 was around 5 million, it was feared that if the death rate was maintained, they would all be dead in less than a year.”

Despite the fact that the Federal Military Government of Nigeria accepted the relief flights by the ICRC to Biafra, they were critical of the JCA airlifts,

651 Cervenka 1971, 156.
654 Bley & Harding 1997, 134.
655 Cervenka 1971, 155.
656 Ibid., 156.
657 Ibid..
which were suspected of flying in arms and ammunition to the Biafran army. On July 19 1968,

...at the meeting with the representatives of the international relief agencies operating in Nigeria, Major-General Yakubu Gowon emphasized that political interference would not be tolerated from any relief organization. In this connection he referred specifically to two organisations, OXFAM and CARITAS, charging them with paying for space for relief supplies on the same aircraft as were flying arms and ammunition to the rebels. The federal authorities also became increasingly convinced that relief flights were being used as a cover for arm flights. The two certainly became associated in the minds of many Nigerians, who strongly believed that some of the relief planes actually carried arms as well.

As a result of this accusation, the federal government of Nigeria demanded that relief flights to Biafra be supervised by the Nigerians, something that was refused by the JCA and other relief organisations. This led to a serious problem between the Nigerian government and the leaders of these organisations, which continued until the end of the civil war.

The refusal by the humanitarian organisations to give up their relief work caused the Nigerian authorities to refuse unsupervised air flights to Biafra, which was argued by the government as a defensive action on their side, in order to be able to defeat the Biafrans. It was also believed by the federal authorities that, if these relief flights were allowed into the country without supervision, as had been requested, relief would be brought in by day, and arms at night. Because of this, no agreement was reached between the humanitarian societies and the Nigerian government.

The problems between the international relief organisations and the Nigerian government came to a head on June 5, 1969, when a Red Cross DC7 plane was shot down 30 miles southwest of Calabar by Nigerian Air Force planes. In Geneva, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) gave a talk on “what it called an 'unexpected and inexplicable' action” on this issue. In their response concerning this tragic event, the federal authorities pointed out that the humanitarian organisations had been warned for a long time that this might happen, and now told the ICRC to operate daylight flights, or make use of the land corridor in their relief operation to Biafra.

Ten days after the Federal Military Government's response to the above issue, the ICRC West African co-ordinator Dr. Lindt was asked by the Federal Military Government to leave Nigeria, accused of having been involved

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659 Cervenka 1971, 155.
661 Ibid.
662 Cervenka 1971, 157-158.
663 Ibid., 158.
in the politics of Nigeria, which was against his organisation's ethics. On June 30, 1969, the Nigerian government terminated the ICRC relief operation in Nigeria and asked the Nigerian National Commission for Rehabilitation to take control of all relief operations in Nigeria.

After a meeting on this issue with the Federal Military Government and the President of the ICRC, Chief Anthony Enahoro, on July 12, 1969, the ICRC suspended all its relief flights to Biafra. As a result of this, the JCA relief flight supplies to Biafra were the only supplies to reach the people in 1969, and this was not enough for the minimal needs of the people. This reduction of relief supplies as a result of the ICRC suspension was one of the factors that later led to the final collapse of Biafra.

11.7 The effects of the Nigerian civil war on Igbo women

The Nigerian civil war, which ended in 1970, had long-lasting effects on Igbo women. For some women, the war led to the loss of their husbands, which then forced them to play the role of breadwinners without real preparation and adequate means for it. Most of the widows also faced hostility from their husband's relatives after the death of their husbands. Some of them were accused of being responsible for the death of their husbands, and were badly treated by their husbands' families. There were also widows who were left alone to take care of their children, without any assistance from their husbands' relatives.

Some women who had married men outside their own towns, from other areas in Igboland, suffered much during this war. For some of them this was the first opportunity they had ever had to live together with their husband's family and relatives. But many of those women were discriminated against by the relatives of their deceased husbands and called all sort of names, and some were told by the husbands' relatives to go back to their own towns.

Many Igbo women lost their lives during the war, while others lost loved ones: children, parents, and relatives. This had a significant effect on them. Most of those who survived led unhappy lives after the war. Further, during the war, some women and young girls were forced into unwanted marriages in order to avoid violence by the soldiers, and some were raped and assaulted by both federal troops and Biafran soldiers.
Most of the young Igbo girls, who were in school before the war, had their education arrested because of the civil war, and some, who went back to school after the civil war, were far behind their age-mates in other parts of the country. After the war, some girls did not go back to school but got married instead, while others, who had lost their parents during the war and had no one to help them with their education, had to drop out of school. All this had a tremendous effect on the education of girls in the Igbo society.

Igbo women who were married to soldiers, or mothers of soldiers, suffered much during the war. Most of them went through great anxieties and high tension, since they feared that their husbands or sons might be killed during the war. After the war, many women lost their property, while, in some cases, property was forcibly taken away by federal troops at the end of the war. Many women suffered as a result of this, since they had no alternative means of making a living after the civil war.

The civil war also led to loss of morals among some women in Igbo society, since some of those who had lost their husbands had to go into prostitution and other anti-social behaviour in order to make money to take care of their families.

11.8 Conclusion

It is thus obvious that the Nigerian politicians in the new, independent Nigeria, who were the leaders in the political parties, were now aware of the importance of women's organisations in the country, but they only paid lip service to this (by accepting a few representatives of the women in the government). Yet, the women were obviously very brave and active during the civil war, but this time in individual capacities, which points to a great deal of courage on the part of the Igbo women. The Igbo women on the Biafran side were not content to be passive onlookers during the civil war. They made great contributions, inside or outside the army. It should be especially noted that the old women played an important role as providers of food, since they started to cultivate agricultural products for civilians and soldiers in the Biafran army as well.

Another point worth mentioning is that one of the effects of the war was that the education of young Igbo women was arrested in many cases. However, we do not yet know how this has affected the lack of female representation in contemporary Nigerian politics and administration.

671 Ibid., 139.
672 Ibid., 153.
12.1 After the civil war: Reconstruction and reconciliation

After the civil war in Nigeria, which ended on January 13, 1970, the Second National Development Plan, which was launched in 1970-74, was based on the reconstruction of the damages caused by the civil war. The cost of the damages caused by the war was estimated to be more than 600 million naira (or 300 million pounds). Most of the damages were in the eastern part of the country, where the civil war had raged.673

Large amounts of financial resources and manpower were therefore needed by the government to carry out the relief and rehabilitation activities that took place. But as noted by Nafziger:

...there were important political limits on mobilizing resources for reconstruction of war affected areas. Despite offers of massive foreign assistance, resources were lacking in 1970-72, as the Federal government, fearing economic and political dependency on developed countries, insisted that reconstruction should be primarily a Nigerian effort.674

In May 1970, the Nigerian government made a currency exchange, and everybody who had been affected by the war was asked to deposit their money with the Federal government. People who deposited old Nigerian or Biafran currency received a sum of N40 by the government regardless of the amount deposited. This was to solve the problem of cash shortage that prevailed at the end of the war.675

In the towns and villages, houses were rebuilt after the war, and most of the houses, which had lost roofs, doors and windows, were renovated. In some places, community labour was used by the people in the reconstruction process.676 But in the cities, money was allocated by the Federal Government to the state and to the local governments for the reconstruction of destroyed government offices, schools, hospitals, roads and bridges.

674 Ibid., 177.
675 Nafziger 1983, 177; Bley & Harding 1997, 179.
Most employees in the public sector and the University were called back by the Federal government at the end of the war. Most of them were given back their former positions and were paid salary advances, while some received gratuities and pensions. In the private sector as well, people were re-employed by their employers, and some were relocated to other parts of the country. 677

Some of the young people, whose education had been interrupted by the civil war, went back to school to continue their studies. However, most of the young people from the eastern part of the country were far behind their mates in other parts of the country. 678 And, as already indicated, there were many dropouts among the Igbo girls.

After the war, the federal and state authorities in Nigeria also tried to effectuate reconciliation between the populations, but it was a very difficult task. The problem of reintegrating the Igbo and other people from the eastern states into the national mainstream continued until 1979. According to Nafziger:

During the political crises a number of Easterners employed in other regional or federal positions were replaced. Even where they later were rehired, they often lost ground to employees who took their places during the war. Also, much of the vacuum in trade and transport, from the exodus of self-employed Easterners to their communal homelands, was filled by other Nigerians during the war. Since then discrimination additionally limited the return of Ibo traders and workers to areas outside of Iboland. 679

As a result of this, the Federal government of Nigeria under the administration of Murtala Mohammed, on February 3, 1976, “announced a policy of paying a flat compensation for rent arrears to the pre war owners of abandoned property, mostly Ibos,” 680 and with this money some Igbo were able to buy abandoned houses or to rebuild their old houses.

12.2 Creation of new states and local government areas

The issue of the creation of new states has been a big problem in Nigerian politics. Since the period of colonialism, this issue had been raised because of fears of the ethnic minorities throughout the country. Especially, there was fear of domination by majority groups such as the Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani. The Nigerian constitutional experiences after 1963 in operating the republican constitution of four regions showed that the imbalance

677 Ibid., 181.
678 Ibid.
679 Nafziger 1983, 177.
680 Ibid., 177-178.
between the regions was the main reason for the political instability of the First Republic, which led to the civil war.681

In 1967, before the civil war, the former four regions were replaced by the creation of twelve states, but the demand for the creation of more states in the Federation continued, as different groups in Nigeria saw it as an opportunity to achieve a rapid development and benefit from revenues distributed by the government.682

After the civil war ended in 1970, there was again great demand in the country for the creation of more states and boundary adjustments. Because of this, the Federal government of Nigeria in 1975 set up a panel, known as the Justice Irikefe Panel, for the creation of states and also for boundary adjustments. Based on the recommendations of this panel, seven more states were created in 1976, and the former Nigerian 12-state structure was changed to one of 19 states, but this did not satisfy the expectations of many Nigerians.683

During the Second Republic 1979-83, the creation of more states was still on the top of the agenda in Nigerian politics. There were still many calls from the people for the creation of more states. On the eve of the fall of the Second Republic, the public made around 38 requests to the government for the creation of additional states. Some of these requests were believed to be motivated mainly by partisan political interests. As a consequence, additional states were created; the 19 states were turned into 21 states, with two more states created by the Federal government.684 Also in August 27, 1991, nine more states were created and the number of states became 30.

On October 1, 1996, in response to a request for additional states, the Nigerian government created six more states. Thus, the total number of states in the country is presently 36 states with an autonomous Federal capital territory called Abuja. Apart from creating states, the Federal government also created more local government areas.

12.3 Economic prosperity and decline

After the civil war, the production of crude and refined oil was restored in Nigeria. Shell-B.P. technicians were called in to repair the destroyed oil fields, pipelines and refineries that had been damaged during the civil war.685

In the 1970's, there was an oil boom in Nigeria, during which the country witnessed a massive economic growth. The gross domestic product growth rate in Nigeria was estimated to be 10.0 percent per annum during 1970-71

682 Falola 1999, xvii
684 Ibid., 173 ff.
and 1977-78, to be compared to 4.3 percent 1960-1961 and 1965-1966. During this period, Nigeria had five times the largest gross national product (GNP) in sub-Saharan, black Africa, and its GNP was estimated by the World Bank in 1978 to be bigger than that of South Africa.\textsuperscript{686}

The volume of crude petroleum production in Nigeria increased from 5,000 barrels daily in 1958 to 415,000 in 1966, and by 1974 it had increased five times to 2,256,000 barrels daily, which was 450 times the rate of 1958.\textsuperscript{687} Crude oil prices in Nigeria went up from $3.8 to $14.7 per barrel from October 1973 to January 1974, and the oil revenues from 1 billion naira (US $700 million) to 4 billion naira, (US $2.8 billion) as a result of the increase in oil prices by the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which Nigeria joined in 1971.\textsuperscript{688}

At this time, Nigeria witnessed the most rapid economic growth in its history, as public expenditures, imports, exports, and investments increased. The revenues received during this boom made the country the 30th wealthiest nation in the world, and also an industrial and regional power.\textsuperscript{689} During this period, the Nigerian currency became very strong and received the greatest level of international recognition in the world, and there was a lot of foreign investment in the country. The foreign manufacturing companies owned about 63 percent of the investments in the country, while the government owned 27 percent and the general public 10 percent at that time.\textsuperscript{690} The Nigerian industrial output increased by 275 percent between 1969 and 1979.\textsuperscript{691}

From 1975, the prices of oil fell as a result of the slump in world demand, and by 1976 the oil boom had ended. The oil production continued in the country, however, since oil is one of the main sources of revenue for the nation.\textsuperscript{692}

12.4 Nationalisation of schools and educational system

The post-civil war period in Nigeria witnessed a great advance in the educational scale of the country. The first was at the primary level, with the introduction in 1970 of the national program for Universal Primary Education (UPE) by the Federal government.\textsuperscript{693}

\textsuperscript{686} Ibid., 178-181.
\textsuperscript{687} Ibid., 182.
\textsuperscript{688} Falola 1999, 138.
\textsuperscript{689} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{690} Ibid., 139-140.
\textsuperscript{691} Nafziger 1983, 181.
\textsuperscript{692} Falola 1999, 138; Nafziger 1983, 185.
\textsuperscript{693} Kirk-Green & Rimmer 1981, 50.
The introduction of this program in 1970 was followed by the subsidising of costs of tuition in primary, secondary and post-secondary schools, and other educational institutions in the country. This action by the government later led to the nationalisation of private and missionary schools in the country, which, finally, in 1979, caused the government to take over all schools in Nigeria.\footnote{Amucheazi 1986, 197-199}

From this time, education was no more a privilege for a few individuals but a right for all citizens. There were several million pupils in primary schools, and by the mid-1980's there were 15 million six-year-olds in schools staffed with 300,000 teachers.\footnote{Kirk-Green & Rimmer 1981, 52.}

In 1975-80, the government allocated a sum of 636.03 million naira (US $42.402 million) for the construction of schools in the country,\footnote{Report of the Political Bureau, March, 1987, 66.} and seven new universities were introduced: the universities of Jos, Calabar, Maiduguri, Sokoto, Port Harcourt, Ilorin and Bayero.\footnote{Falola 1999, 140; Kirk-Green & Rimmer 1981, 52.} With the exception of the Ife and Ahmadu Bello universities, the old universities in the country were converted into federal institutions.\footnote{Ibid.}

Due to this large increase in the number of universities in Nigeria, the intake of students (both males and females) increased from 10,000 in 1970 to 60,000 in 1980, and by the mid-1980's the number had risen to 100,000. This increase in the enrolment of students to the Nigerian universities brought the number of students in the universities, as of that time, to a total of 400,000 with 4,000 University lecturers. 11 new high schools were also opened by the government to help to prepare the students for the University. In 1977, free tuition was introduced by the Federal government in all institutions of learning in the country.\footnote{Ibid.} This increase in the intake of students into the Nigerian universities also helped increase the number of girls admitted into the universities and high schools at that period.

This expansion of the educational system by the government led to the collapse of the standard of education in most institutions of learning, as most of the institutions were without qualified teachers and adequate educational facilities.

As a result of this, most of the privileged Nigerians established strings of elite private schools for their own children, or sent their children abroad to study. This meant that they did not care about the quality of education in public schools and universities, even when these schools were under their care.\footnote{Report of the Political Bureau, March 1987, 66.}
12.5 Church developments since 1970

The period since the end of the civil war in Nigeria in 1970 has been characterised by renewed expansion of the Church and by a certain vitality in Christianity. This was a result of the increase in the number of matured youths between 1970 and 1980. The increases in the number of primary education facilities in all rural areas, and of secondary education facilities in urban areas, have had a deep effect on the multifarious expressions of Christian religiosity in Nigeria.701 “The vivacious growth of charismatic movements, affecting all Churches since 1970, has been particularly striking.”702

The Catholic Church in Nigeria has experienced a tremendous development since the 1970's. In 1973, there were 84 ordinations in the Catholic Church in Nigeria, out of 200 people ordained for Africa, and 53 of those were from the four dioceses in Igboland. Out of 3,650 Africans, who were in training in 1974, more than 800 were from Nigeria. In 1975, out of a total of 6 million Catholics, about 5 million were from the eastern part of the country.703

In Onitsha Archdiocese, also in the eastern part of Nigeria, there was a tremendous growth in all aspects of the Church's apostolate. From 1965 to 1980, the parishes increased from 27 to 36, local clergy from 9 to 75, local professed sisters from 143 to 329, and junior seminarians from 270 to 777. There was also a great expansion in the apostolate of the Church after the civil war in 1970. Cardinal Francis Arinze, who took over after the death of Archbishop Charles Heerey C.S.Sp. in February 1967, established different pastoral councils in the parish and diocese. From that period, there was a great increase in the number of Parish Councils, Laity Councils, Catholic Women's Organisations, St. Theresa Women's Societies and Catholic Youth Organisations in the diocese. Various commissions, directorates and advisory councils were also established at this time, such as the Liturgical Music Commission, the Church History Commission, the Medical Advisory Council, the Vocations' Directorate, the Building Commission, and the Directorate for Catechetics and Social Services.704 A new secretariat was also established to take care of the activities of these commissions, while various religious congregations, such as the Immaculate Heart Sisters, Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus, Daughters of Divine Love, Clarissan Missionary Sisters, Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy, and Little Sisters of Jesus, had established houses in this Archdiocese. Since 1971, with the help of Cardinal Arinze, the Archdiocese had also begun the publication and circulation of Lenten Pastoral and pamphlets on various problems concerning pastoral

701 Sundkler & Steed 2000, 955.
702 Ibid.
703 Ibid., 955-956.
704 Nwosu 1982, 45-47.
Women are members of these associations and institutions, which were created in the Church, and they also play active roles in these associations, for instance organisations such as the St. Theresa Women’s Society in the Church, which was created to correspond to the traditional dual-sex system in the traditional society.

The third main area of Church growth in eastern Nigeria was the Owerri Diocese. Since the establishment of this Vicariate in 1948, it had made tremendous progress and had given birth to other new dioceses since the 1970's, such as the Orlu diocese, established in 1980, and the Okigwe diocese, established in 1981. With the assistance of the first bishop, Dr. J. B. Whelan, a new modern cathedral was also built in that diocese – the Maria Assumpta Cathedral, which was opened on November 28, 1980. In 1970, there were 50 parishes in the diocese; in 1980 they had increased to 62. In 1970, there were 29 native clergy, and in 1980, they were 129. The number of senior seminaries in 1970 was 51, and in 1980, they were 138. Junior seminaries were 384 in 1970, and in 1980, they were 708, and the total number of baptized Catholics in that diocese as of 1980 was 1,154,235.

Despite the fact that the growth rate of Catholics in the Ogoja diocese, which was headed by bishop Dr. Joseph Ukpo, was small, the number of Catholics had increased since the end of the civil war in 1970, with around 3,000 baptisms and 100 weddings yearly. The Sisters of the Handmaids of the Holy Child had also made tremendous progress in their vocations in this diocese, and at this time, the congregation had 31 indigenous professed sisters and aspirants.

In the Umuahia diocese, which was founded on the 23 of June 1958, out of the Owerri Diocese, there had been a very impressive growth, despite the presence of the Presbyterians and Methodists. In 1974, the reverend sisters in this diocese had established two hospitals, five maternity hospitals and one orphanage.

The Enugu diocese, which was created out of the Onitsha Archdiocese on the 12 of November 1962, with Bishop John Cross Anyogu as its first bishop (he died on the 4 of July, 1967, shortly before the Nigerian civil war), had also witnessed some growth. After the civil war, on the 17 of March 1970, Bishop G. M. P. Okoye C.S.Sp. was appointed bishop of the diocese, but died on the 17 March 1977, a few years after his appointment. After this, Rt. Rev. Michael Eneja, who was ordained Bishop on February 2, 1978, took over the leadership of the diocese, and subsequently there was tremendous growth in the diocese. In 1965 this diocese had 22 parishes, but at the pre-
sent time, it has 38 parishes with 492,486 members, and also houses the Inter-diocesan Seminary for Theology, presently in Enugu.

Two new dioceses were also created in the eastern part of Nigeria: the Abakaliki diocese, which was created in 1973, and the Awka diocese created in 1977. The creation of these dioceses showed the rapid growth of the Catholic Church in the eastern part of Nigeria. In 1939, the Abakaliki diocese consisted of 92 Christian families, but, by 1978, the number had grown to 8,475. This demonstrates the growth and development of the Catholic Church in these new dioceses.

In Jos, Makurdi and Kaduna dioceses in the northern part of Nigeria, there were 650,000 Catholics in 1975. The number of Nigerian bishops serving in the northern part of Nigeria increased from 8 to 17 from 1967 to 1973, and the priests from 108 to 306, which was a very rapid growth for Africa.

With the introduction of new movements in the Catholic Church in Nigeria, such as the Catholic Charismatic Movement, there have also been very active and militant evangelical ventures in the Catholic Church. Some of the members of this movement engage in street preaching, while others preach on buses. Some organize crusades, or distribute tracts and pamphlets on the streets, while some preach in media houses. It is believed by some in the Catholic Church in Nigeria that through the radical evangelism of this movement, hardened sinners have been converted in most Catholic churches, and it is also said that this movement has led many Christians, especially Catholics, to studying the Scriptures. According to Ojene, it

...has provided an answer to many Catholics who were lured to other Christian sects in search of better study of the Bible, in search of more moving songs. Today many of the songs which many people purport that send them to worship in secret-prayer houses are popular in the Catholic Church.

Among the Christians at large in Nigeria there has also been a positive development. The creation of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has brought unity and co-operation among the different Christian denominations in the country. Since the formation of this organisation, Christians have united in times of trouble to fight their common enemies, and so this organisation has fostered co-operation among the churches in Nigeria. For instance, during the 1987 Religious Riot in Kaduna state, this organisation fought for the interests of the Christians in that state against the Muslims.

Tremendous growth and developments have also taken place in the Protestant churches in Nigeria. Since the 1970's, the numbers of Protestant

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710 Ibid., 50.
711 Ibid., 51.
714 Ibid.
715 Ibid., 22.
churches have increased all over the country. The number of Protestant churches presently in the country is more than ten times the number before 1970. The number of people joining Protestant churches has increased over the past few years. In Igboland in particular, the number of Igbo people who are members of these churches has increased. In the “missionary statistics for the world, including Africa the continuous growth of Protestant missionaries is shown, in 1903, the number of missionaries was 15,288, in 1911, 21,307, in 1925, 29,186, in 1952, 35,533, in 1958, 38,606 and in 1963, 42,952.”716 The same is applicable to the increase in the number of Protestant clergy in Nigeria in general and in Igboland in particular.

The number of Protestant schools has also increased over the years; there are a number of Protestant primary and secondary schools in all states in the country. Most of these schools are now run by the state government.

There has also been an enormous growth among the African Independent churches in Nigeria. The numbers of these churches have increased greatly, most especially in the western part of Nigeria, in such places as Lagos, Ibadan, Ife, Ondo, etc. which are Yoruba-speaking parts of the country. Some of these churches are known as Aladura churches. Examples of these churches in Nigeria are the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, which was founded in 1925 by Christianah Abiodun Akinsowon and Moses Orimolade, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), founded by Josiah Olunowo Oshitelu in 1931, the Celestial Church of Christ, which was started in 1947 by Mr S.B.J. Oschaffa in Dahomey, now known as Republic of Benin,717 and the Christ Apostolic Church. These churches are seen as prophet-healing churches, and they believe very much in the power of prayer, (aladura in Yoruba).

As Omoyajowo wrote:

The Aladura churches are those indigenous churches, which began to emerge in Nigeria from the second decade in this century. They are quite different from the traditional or mission-oriented churches and those, which broke away from them. There are churches, which began as indigenous churches, founded by indigenous persons and run under indigenous leadership. They have always regarded themselves as independent especially of European or foreign domination and, therefore, had no manifest cause to look forward to the political independence of this country to foster their growth, expansion and influence. Their development since the attainment of independence has however been highly significant: in their growth, their ecumenical position, their sociological outlook, and their attitude to both society and state.718

He also pointed out that “churches belonging to the Aladura group have expanded phenomenally since independence. Statistics are not available, but from general observations one can safely conclude that the churches are

718 Ibid., 96.
expanding more rapidly in post-independent Nigeria than in the days before independence.”719 The increase in the growth of churches such as the Christ Apostolic Church has been very remarkable. In the past five years, the Church has established 15 churches in Ibadan, and there has also been an enormous growth among churches such as the Cherubim and Seraphim and the Church of the Lord Aladura.720 One important development, which must be noted among these churches, was the rapid appearance of the Celestial Church of Christ, which is one of the most popular among the African Independence churches in Nigeria.721 This Church has attracted a number of people since its foundation. There are many more women in these churches than men. Some of them are prophetesses, while some are members of various fellowships known as bands. Some of the reasons for the large number of women in these churches are to be found in the “gynaecological problems faced by women during pregnancy and child birth and also because of family problems.”722 Some of these African Independent churches have also spread to Igboland. In places like Asaba, there are very few of these churches, because of the large number of Catholics and Anglicans in this area.

In Nigeria today, there is hardly any street that you can pass without seeing two to three churches on the same street; this also confirms the great increase in the number of churches all over the country.

Thus, when Igboland had been reconstructed after the civil war in 1970, it followed a general organisational pattern for other parts of Nigeria. This applies to the creation of the new states and local government areas, and the nationalisation of schools in the country. It also applies to the development of Christianity, in the Catholic Church and in other churches as well. There has been a tremendous growth of the churches in Nigeria during the last decades. This development concerns all kinds of churches alike, and all parts of Nigeria. Since the early 1970’s, the Catholic Church in Nigeria has witnessed a tremendous growth. There has also been an enormous growth among the Catholic churches in Igboland.

According to the statistical data of the Catholic churches in Nigeria, the greatest growth occurred in Igboland.723 There has also been a great increase in the number of dioceses, priests, religious sisters and brothers.

Apart from the Catholic Church, there has also been a tremendous growth of the Protestant churches in Nigeria. There has been a great increase in the number of Protestant missionaries in the country. Presently, there are many Protestant churches all over Nigeria. Most of the Igbo people are either Catholics or Protestants, while some of them belong to the Anglican

719 Ibid.
720 Ibid.
721 Ibid.
723 See Makozi and Ojo 1982, 100.
churches. The rest are either Christian from other denominations or traditionalists.

Further, there has also been an enormous growth among the African Independent churches in Nigeria. The number of these churches has increased over the past few years, especially among the Yoruba-speaking people. But due to the great increase in the numbers of these churches, they have also spread to the eastern and northern parts of the country.

12.6 Summary and Conclusion of Part Two

During the slave trade, the transactions implied in the trade were, like those implied in the legitimate trade, carried out by the Europeans and the Nigerian chiefs, motivated by the benefits it gave to both parties. For nations involved in the slave trade, it was a way of tapping the rich resources of Nigeria for their own private benefits, and for the Nigerian chiefs, it was motivated by their own selfish interests at the expense of their people. But with the introduction of legitimate trade, the attention of the European countries involved in the trade was shifted from the slave trade to legitimate trade, which led to the Niger expeditions of 1832-1857 and the subsequent competition for trade in the lower Niger delta among the European countries, which finally led to the introduction of colonialism and Christianity in Nigeria.

Furthermore, when Christianity was introduced in Asaba, there was a resistance to the mission by the freeborn, indigenous people. Because of this, the first converts were the poor, outcasts and slaves, who were not important people in the society, and who were not interested in a tradition that made them marginal and dispensable. As a result of this, they became the first to be converted to Christianity and to be educated. Because they were educated, they emerged in the first “independent” government in Nigeria. But since these former slaves did not want to keep the traditional society’s hierarchical organisation, they paid no attention to the women's organisations in the traditional society, and this affected the role of the freeborn women.

The amalgamation of northern and southern Nigeria in 1914, and the establishment of the British administration, led to a change in the structure of the Nigerian society. With the introduction of indirect rule, a new political situation was created in Nigeria, which had a tremendous effect on the Nigerian people, especially the Igbo. With the introduction of this system of administration in Igboland, warrant chiefs were appointed by the colonial administration. Most of these warrant chiefs were chosen among men, who had no position or title in the traditional society. Since most of the men who were appointed as warrant chiefs by the colonial government were not important men in the traditional organisations and had no titles, they were not aware of the importance of the female authority that was represented by the various women's organisations in the traditional Igbo society. They tried to work
against all kinds of traditional organisations (including those connected to the “parallel system”), because they themselves were not part of that system, and this had a tremendous effect on the role of Igbo women in the traditional society.

Apart from this, the British colonial government and the mission failed to take into account the fact that the Igbo traditional organisation was a “parallel organisation” based on the “dual-sex” principle. While the colonial government only considered the male organisational leaders for the introduction of “indirect rule,” the CMS missionaries preferred the institutional organisations for both sexes to be present simultaneously in the same organisation. This was completely different from the traditional parallel organisation, and due to the customary rule of domination of men in mixed meetings, the traditional freedom of the freeborn women was lost, especially their freedom of being able to express their own views in meetings. This made them “muted.”

With the introduction of indirect rule, the socio-political and religious role of women in Igbo society was affected as well. In the new system of administration, the Igbo women were excluded from the political scene and this had a great effect on their political participation in the society.

In addition to this, with the introduction of Western education, which came with Christianity and colonialism, Igbo women were taught Christian religious studies in the schools. Since the new education in the church was focused on European traditional virtues in housekeeping, this education affected the Igbo women's former beliefs and roles in their own traditional society.

When the new independent government was introduced in Nigeria, the Nigerian politicians became aware of the importance of the women's organisations in the country, but they only paid lip service to this (by accepting a few representatives of the women in the government, which could be interpreted as taking some women as a kind of hostage). Yet, women were very brave and active during the civil war, but this time in individual capacities. When compared to their fellow Nigerian women in other parts of the country, Igbo women showed a lot of courage and were not content to be passive onlookers during the war.

Finally, the reconstruction of Igboland in 1970 followed a general organisational pattern for other parts of Nigeria, as well as the creation of new states and local government areas and the nationalisation of schools in the country. With the nationalisation of schools, there was an increase in the intake of female students into the Nigerian universities, which later helped in the education of more women who assisted in the reconstruction process, and in the new states and local government areas. Some of them now work as commissioners, doctors, lawyers, accountants etc. in these states.

In part three of this book, I will relate my data from parts one and two to a new group of data which deals with the contemporary Catholic organisations such as the Catholic Women's Organisations, the Christian Mothers etc. This
will enable me to make a critical evaluation and comparison between the Christian organisations, which were introduced by the missionaries, and the traditional organisations.
PART THREE:
WOMEN’S CHANGED ROLE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
CHAPTER 13
Church and Women: Established Catholic Women’s Organisations

13.1 Introduction
In this part I am going to describe the established Catholic women's organisations in Asaba. I will concentrate on women’s changing roles in the Catholic Church, and show how this change corresponded to a change of women's socio-political role in the society outside the Church. I will also analyse the various roles that women play in the Church.

Most of the organisations in this chapter are single-sex organisations, which are also referred to in this thesis as “dual-sex” organisations. This is because most of the organisations introduced by the missionaries in the Catholic Church in Igboland were single-sex organisations. They were modelled on female organisations in Europe. Only a few mixed organisations were introduced. When the mixed organisations were started in Igboland, they seem to have been born out of a realisation that women had great importance in the traditional society. Thus on their arrival in Igboland, the missionaries followed what they believed was an indigenous pattern in their organisation of the societies in the Catholic Church.

As already mentioned in this book, when the Catholic missionaries came to Igboland, the first people they recruited to the Church were (just as the case had been earlier, with the Anglican mission, the Church Missionary Society) the slaves, the outcasts and the disabled, who were rejected in traditional society. Because of this, the first set of people who became Christians in Igboland were people with slave origin, and among the active people in the Church today, some are of slave origin. Since the slaves were not happy with their position in the traditional society, where they were excluded from the male title societies and from their female counterparts in the traditional dual-sex system, they quickly accepted Christianity. So some of the women in the organisations presented in this section are of slave origin, while some are freeborn. Those of slave origin are there because of their status in the traditional society. They, or their mothers, accepted Christianity immediately, just like their male counterparts. This is one of the reasons why some women both in the Catholic Church and the CMS seem to be so happy with the women’s organisations in the Church.
13.2 The Catholic Women's Organisation

13.2.1 Historical background

Since the inception of Catholic missionary activity in Eastern Nigeria, the uplifting and improvement of the status of women in the Catholic Church has been one of the main preoccupations of the missionaries. The missionaries have tried to achieve this in different ways. In particular, they tried to build schools in the early stages, when it was thought to be an abomination to send women to school. Despite opposition, they engaged themselves in the education of women in Igbo society.\(^{724}\)

Apart from their ambitions to teach school children the basic skills of literacy, the Catholic missionaries made various attempts to teach Igbo women fundamental household skills, such as needlework and the making of tablecloths, which the European middle class women were used to. They also organised pre-marriage centres, courses and instructions for women. Igbo women were also encouraged by the missionaries to participate effectively in the affairs of the Church.\(^{725}\) But all these ideas were alien to Igbo women, who were used to decision-making via single-sex organisations in Igbo society.

The first attempt by the missionaries to organise the Igbo women into a group according to the dual-sex principle was made in 1961, when the women's wing of the Eastern Nigeria Catholic Council (ENCC) was formed. This organisation was started in 1957 as a lay organisation with male and female members. After some time, it was thought that it would be better to establish a women's wing of this organisation so that the services of the Catholic women would be effectively utilised in the Church.\(^{726}\) On May 5\(^{th}\), 1964, the first Council of Catholic Women's organisation was inaugurated in eastern Nigeria.

At Onitsha Archdiocese, Archbishop Heerey played a vital role in uniting all these women and women's societies in the diocese in one organisation. In 1962, the first step was taken to the training of women for leading roles when the Women's African Committee of the African-American Institute offered to sponsor a woman for training in leadership at Columbia University. The archbishop then recommended Mrs. V.V.I. Okoye for leadership training in America. When she came back in 1963 after her studies, Archbishop Heerey entrusted the leadership of the women in the archdiocese into her hands, with Mother Mary Magdalene, H.R.S., and Sister Mary Consolata, I.H.M., as assistants. With the help of other female leaders in the archdiocese, she was able to tour different church stations and parishes, all the while instructing the Catholic Women's Societies about leadership tech-

\(^{724}\) Adigwe & Okoye 1980, 8.
\(^{725}\) Ibid.
\(^{726}\) Ibid.
niques, fund-raising projects, and the ways to lead a good Christian life. After her visit to the church stations and parishes, the Onitsha Archdiocese Council of Catholic Women's Organisation was established in 1964, and later changed its name to the Catholic Women's Organisation (CWO). Presently, this organisation is a nation-wide organisation in the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Women's Organisation is the most dynamic organisation in the Catholic Church. It enrolls all married women in the Catholic Church, and it exists on all church levels, from the local church to the diocese. Membership in this organisation is open to every Catholic woman who has attained the age of eighteen, regardless of her educational, marital, financial, tribal, and social background. It is an association for “sincere, committed and hard-working women.” This is at present a very strong organisation in the Catholic Church. It is very powerful, and neither the parish priest at the parish level, nor the bishop at the diocesan level, can neglect the opinion of the Catholic Women's Organisation.

According to the magazine Catholic Life, the aim of this organisation was to organise, unify and co-ordinate all the activities of the Catholic women for the welfare of the church and community, and to see that women participated as much as they could in the Church's activities.

According to the council's constitution of (1964), the objectives of this organisation were:

1. to provide a channel through which Catholic action may be brought into the current life of the people; to maintain a vigilant watch on the forces that endanger the society's well-being or threaten the fundamental Christian foundations of the country; to acquaint Catholic organisations for women throughout the Archdiocese with national legislation of interest to them as Catholics and as citizens; to study and promote Christian social principles; to provide seminars and conventions for the discussion of common problems and through publicising these deliberations, to place the Catholic attitude before the general public; to assist, through affiliation with the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations, in world-wide dissemination of Catholic principles of social action; to provide representation at meetings of national and international character where matters concerning women are under discussion.

In this organisation, there are four major committees to co-ordinate the activities of the women. The Spiritual Development Committee is in charge of planning retreats, seminars, memorial masses, and the preparation of Spiritual Bouquet. The Seminary Food Apostolate Committee supplies food to

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728 Metuh and Ejizu 1985, 154.
729 The Catholic Women's Organisation magazine, Lagos ecclesiastical province, August 1993, 11.
the seminaries (this project was started by the CWO in 1973, to assist the seminaries). The Organisation and Development Committee is in charge of exploring ways of improving the CWO constitution, suggesting activities, innovations and planning. This committee recommends areas of need, and makes sure that these are discussed at the general meetings. It explores, recommends, and puts the proposals through the appropriate channels. It also plans the various CWO celebrations.\textsuperscript{732} The finance committee is responsible for the finance of the association; it puts the finances in order, ready for publishing, and for internal and external auditors. The finances of the organisation are under the supervision of the diocesan secretariat. To emphasise the higher goals of the lay apostolate, the CWO created a special status, or cadre, within its organisation, called “Life Membership,”\textsuperscript{733} which was first started in the Onitsha Archdiocese, from where it spread to other dioceses in Nigeria.\textsuperscript{734} The Life Membership Committee\textsuperscript{735} is also a committee of CWO. It is not autonomous but is entirely under CWO, bound to observe the rules and regulations of the diocesan Catholic Women's Organisation. When someone is made a CWO life member, it does not mean that she is a member of the committee for life; rather, in the CWO context, it means that the individual has promised that throughout her life, she will struggle to be exceptionally good and exemplary in the practice and devotion of her Catholic faith.\textsuperscript{736}

Since the establishment of this organisation in all Catholic dioceses in Nigeria, the committees belonging to the CWO have come together to form one body at the ecclesiastical province level, and they have also united with similar bodies in the country.\textsuperscript{737} This organisation has made great progress in most ecclesiastical provinces in recent years. For instance, they have helped to unite all Catholic women in the Catholic Church nationwide.

In order to fight for the civil rights of women in Nigeria, the CWO joined other women's organisations in 1981 to oppose the move by the Nigerian government to legalise abortion in the country.\textsuperscript{738} This is consistent with the Catholic Church’s stand against abortion.

However, as we can see, the CWO is an organisation that has become important as a channel for female voices in the church. But, as we shall see, the same does not apply to all the single-sex organisations within the Catholic Church in Nigeria.

\textsuperscript{732} Interview with Mrs P. S. Okotcha, of Umuonaji quarters, Asaba, July 15, 1994.
\textsuperscript{733} See Nwosu 1985, 352 and Nwagbogu 1975, 21.
\textsuperscript{734} Nwosu 1985, 352.
\textsuperscript{735} For further information on the meaning of the life membership of CWO, see Nwosu 1985, 352-353.
\textsuperscript{736} Interview with a group within the Catholic Women's Organisation, Asaba, July 10, 1994.
\textsuperscript{737} Nwosu 1985, 352.
\textsuperscript{738} Ibid.
13.2.2 The Asaba Catholic Women's Organisation

In Asaba, a similar Catholic Women's Organisation was founded in 1965. The Asaba Catholic Women's Organisation is open to all baptised Catholic women. It is an organisation that co-ordinates the activities of other women's organisations in the church, as well as all church associations, and has approximately 380 members. Only women are members of this organisation. Some of these women are teachers, nurses, businesswomen etc. Most of the women are recruited from the Church to join the organisation. Some of them are from Asaba, while some are from nearby towns. The Asaba Catholic Women's Organisation is the only forum Asaba Catholic women have to make their wishes known to the Episcopal conference of Nigeria and the papacy. Like any other organisation, the Catholic Women's Organisation in Asaba has all the officers necessary to run its affairs.

The spiritual growth of the members is of paramount importance to this organisation. Its meetings are opened with prayers and spiritual talks, often given by the sister advisor of the organisation. The meetings of the organisation are mainly for the members, with the spiritual director and a sister advisor, who is usually present. The members of this organisation discuss their affairs during the meetings, and at the end of their discussions, they seek advice from the spiritual director of the organisation, who is a priest. During such meetings, scriptural passages are read and questions are raised that are discussed by all the members. Talks are given by invited guests on various topics such as the Catholic woman, the women’s role in the formation and development of human life, the Catholic women in a changing Nigeria, etc. Reports of activities carried out by the organisation during the current period are written by the secretary of the organisation. Sometimes, during such meetings, the women organise workshops, during which various lectures and addresses are discussed.

Pilgrimages are also undertaken by the members at the parish level, and interesting places, such as the Marian Shrine in Lagos, are visited. During the CWO week, which is celebrated annually in Asaba, the Catholic Women's Organisation in all parishes commences the ceremony with a one-day retreat. Lectures are also given, and visitations are made to the underprivileged. This celebration normally ends with a thanksgiving Eucharistic celebration by the parish priest. The Mother's Day celebration in the parish is marked by works of charity, such as visiting homes for aged, disabled and orphans, and by the donation of food and clothes.

The women are also actively involved in the Pastoral Parish Council, the Parish Laity Council, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal group, the Legion

of Mary, St. Anthony’s Guild, St. Jude’s Society, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the Diocesan/Parish Renewal team. Some also work as churchwardens or choristers, while others are members of the welfare committees in the parish.

The Asaba Catholic Women’s Organisation also takes part in special celebrations in the Church, such as calling to professions, ordinations, the CWO week and the national meetings of the organisation. Its sources of finance are mainly the monthly dues paid by the members, enrolment fees, donations and levies.

The CWO Asaba branch has links with other Christian women's organisations within the Church. By virtue of its age and experience, it relates to Christian Mothers in prayers as partners in pursuit of a common cause. Further, it has links with Catholic Men's Organisation, and with the Christian Fathers.

Thus we have seen the activities of the Asaba Catholic Women’s Organisation and its relation with other organisations in the Church. The local Asaba branch of the Catholic Women’s Organisation focuses more on Christian virtues than on providing a channel for women’s voice in any other matters. Nevertheless, we must also note that the Catholic Church has adapted to the local tradition of having separate organisations for men and for women. In this respect, the Catholic Church distinguishes itself from the CMS in Asaba, which does not have any separate organisations for the sexes. This is in agreement with the difference of social-ethical policies in general between the two Churches. Whereas the Catholic Church has an adaptation to local customs on its agenda, the CMS has no such policy.

**Functions of the Asaba Catholic Women's Organisation**

This organisation functions on the parish level, bringing to the grass roots the activities and functions of the organisation on diocesan and national levels. According to the members, it “raises the moral standard of living among Christians, especially for girls,” and assists women involved in Church activities. It deepens the understanding and participation of Catholic women in liturgy, and serves as a medium through which the women act as a unit on matters of public interest.

It assists at the mass of thanksgiving arranged at the beginning of each year to thank God for the past year and to ask him to bless the activities of the New Year. During bazaars, the organisation cooks and sells food and runs Sunday classes for children.

Every year, members of the CWO Asaba branch organise masses in the Catholic parishes for the repose of the souls of their departed members, husbands, children and relations. It encourages parents to allow their children to work for the glory of God, and counsels parents whose children are going into religious vocations.
The Catholic Women's Organisation in Asaba is also involved in training programs for the young people in the parish. The organisation has involved itself in both national and international affairs. Members of the organisation give support to the other local Churches in the diocese; some of the women in the parish go to other local Churches to give pre-marriage courses and counselling for those preparing to marry and those who want to regularise their marriages. It provides spiritual, moral, and material support for widows in the parishes, and for needful children, and also arranges counselling sessions for distressed spouses in the parishes.

The Catholic women cater for the Catholic Youth Corps deployed in the town, keeping in touch with the Youth Corps and featuring in all their activities. During the Catholic Corps Week, CWO organises a party for the Youth Corps marking the occasion, and talks, such as the Catholic Youth Corpers and Marriage, are given on such occasions by the parish president of CWO as part of the activities of the week. The women also donate cash to enable them to acquire materials for their secretariat. This organisation is also in charge of the Catholic Girls' Associations at the parish level, and also a member of the diocesan executive for the Girls' Association. It also assists in adult education projects, leadership training skills and youth development programs.

In most ceremonies in the Church, the Catholic Women's Organisation in Asaba plans ahead for the success of the ceremony, and also provides e.g. food and drink for the occasion. The women also plan for the welcoming and send-offs of parish priests, and for the reception of bishops.

The organisation also runs projects that provide social services, alone or in co-operation with the religious sisters. It also gives maximum support to the sisters in the running of the schools in the parish. Thus, we can see the significant roles, which the Catholic Women's Organisation plays in Asaba. However, this organisation is not involved in politics outside the Church.

13.2.3 Structure and activities of the Catholic Women's Organisation at diocesan and national levels

The Catholic Women's Organisation existed prior to 1975 in the southern part of Nigeria as an umbrella organisation for the co-ordination of the activities of women's associations within the Catholic Church. Eventually, the northern part of the country became involved in the association as well, and, consequently, a more incorporating and fitting name was sought. The National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW) was decided on, after an inaugural national convention in Jos in 1975.741

741 Interview with Mrs. Lohor, the diocesan president of the Catholic Women's Organisation, Jos, August 23, 1994.
The meetings of the National Council of Catholic Women usually start with a mass, officiated by the national chaplain. At the meetings, general introductions of the members are made, with a welcome address by the president.

On the national level, issues concerning all Catholic women's organisations at parish and diocesan levels are discussed, such as evangelisation, the spiritual formation of members, vocations, the review of the constitution, the CWO week, the annual world day of prayer and educational issues.

The organisation also uses its meetings to advise each diocese and parish through their delegates to organise programs for youths during the holidays. At such meetings, international conferences, to be attended by the organisation, are announced, along with the dates and the topics to be discussed at the conferences, and the delegates to represent the organisation at such meetings are elected. Annual reports to the Bishops' conference are also discussed at these meetings.

The national executive organisation of this association consists of all elected national officers, all provincial presidents, secretaries and diocesan presidents of the association. The NCCW co-ordinates the activities of CWO in all dioceses and parishes and other religious societies affiliated to them.742 The national president, in consultation with the national chaplain and sister advisers as well as the national executive members, gives directives to the members.743 The national president co-ordinates the activities in all the dioceses, conducts seminars, distributes assignments, and makes sure that the aims of the council are achieved. The national chaplain supervises the work of CWO. According to the president of the Council of Catholic Women's Organisation, the sister advisers give "a woman's touch" and inspiration to the NCCW.744 According to the National Council's own publication, the officers are as dedicated and devoted as if they were full-time paid officials,745 and they play a very active role in the organisation.

According to my observations during my fieldwork in 1994, there are many women who do not participate in the activities of this association. Some of them do not attend meetings regularly, while some are not ever present at the monthly meetings. This is because, in the Church, the women are not fined and this makes some women negligent in attendance at meetings, when compared to the traditional dual-sex organisations, such as the Umuada, where women were fined if they were absent from meetings regularly.

743 Interview with Mrs. M. N. Egenti, Ibadan, December 5, 1994. She was the publicity secretary of the National Council of Catholic Women's Organisation and also the diocesan secretary of the Catholic Women's Organisation in Ibadan diocese.
744 Interview with Chief Mrs. P. Kuye, Lagos, October 9, 1994. She was then the president of the National Council of Catholic Women's Organisation.
Apart from this, most of the organisational duties at the parish level are left to the president and the vice-president of the organisation, while the other executive members of the organisation seem to be more interested in their own private businesses. This affects the organisation of this association, because most of the duties of the association are carried out only by the president and her assistant.

In addition to this, the president of the Catholic Women's Organisation has not been changed for the past eight years. It was the same president whom I interviewed during my fieldwork in 1994, who was still the president of the Catholic Women's organisation in Asaba parish in the year 2003. She is old and no longer active in the activities of the organisation, and this has had a great effect on the organisation itself, because some of the activities of the organisation are no longer conducted in the parish in the way they are supposed to be. One reason for this is that the system in the organisation works according to the traditional model, where there are no time limits for people in office.

For example, during my fieldwork in November 2002, it was very difficult to conduct an effective interview with the president, since she tended to forget some of the questions she was asked, and sometimes repeated her answers several times. That made it very difficult to get correct information from her. Because of that I had to re-conduct the same interview with Mrs. Theresa O. Nzekwu, the former diocesan president of the Catholic Women's Organisation in Issele-Uku diocese.

Thus we have seen here the two pictures presented together in this section – that of the Catholic Women's Organisation and my own personal observations with respect to this association. According to the official organisational structure, it all looks well, but according to my personal observations, the organisation does not function in accordance with its by-laws. The members are not represented accurately, since there are no annual elections for the appointment of new official members.
13.3 St. Theresa Women's Society

The St. Theresa Women's Society is another organisation of women in the Catholic Church. This organisation was founded in 1960. It has about 362 members in Asaba.746 Most of the members of this organisation are teachers, nurses, businesswomen, etc., just as in the CWO. The members of this organisation are mainly Igbo from different states, such as Imo, Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Delta, and Ebonyi states. Some of the women in this organisation are recruited from the other organisations in the Church. The women in this group see their participation in the Church as an act of service to God, who will in turn bless them and answer their prayers. It is a very strong women's organisation in the Church, and the majority of the women in the Catholic Church in Asaba are members. Membership in this organisation is

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746 Interview with Mrs. B. Egesie, of Umuonaji quarters, Asaba, August 7, 1994. She is a member of St. Theresa Women’s Society.
open to all women who are married, that is, wedded in the Catholic Church, and who are also practising Catholic members.

The aims and objectives of this organisation, as put forward by its members, are to serve God, to represent their interests, to improve their living conditions, and to enhance development. Another aim is that the members show a spirit of love and unity among themselves, and work for the progress and welfare of the Church.

This organisation holds meetings twice every month and most of the members attend. Among the members of the executive committee we find the spiritual director, and the rev. sister is their advisor. Meetings are held more regularly when necessary. At the meetings, the women discuss the affairs of their organisation, while both the spiritual director and the rev. sister advise them on these issues. During the annual general meeting of the organisation, a pontifical high mass is celebrated by the bishop of the diocese, assisted by the spiritual director to mark the day. During special occasions, like the Feast of the Annunciation, the members pay visits to the poor, hospitals, orphanages, children's clinics and welfare centres, and presents are given out. They hold seminars and lectures on the parish level during the year.

The women mobilise themselves to keep the church and its premises clean, contribute to the development of the Church, the upkeep of priests and catechists, and the training of priests and reverend sisters.

Their fellowship organisation is very powerful. They use it as a strategy for strengthening their female influence and power and for gaining security. Among the members, there are those whose role it is to pray for the Church and the nation as a whole. They help in the evangelisation in the Church, and they organise annual national conferences, where Catholic women from each state in Nigeria are assembled for five days of leadership training. The organisation also serves as a good social outlet for relieving stress. The organisation is so powerful that some women even register themselves as members without the consent of their husbands. Some men have recognised the power that this organisation gives their wives, and the great influence it has on their political, social and religious life, and, in moments of serious quarrels or crisis in their homes, they turn to the organisation for help in disciplining their wives.747

One of the intriguing things discovered about St. Theresa Women’s Society is that, despite the power they possess as a group, the women have not made a radical move to fight against the discrimination levelled against them as individuals in their family settings. Probably, the women's desire to comply with societal and biblical norms (e.g. St. Paul's advice to married women never to revolt against their husbands, and always to be submissive to them,

747 Interview with Mrs. J. Ibe, of Ugboromanta quarters, Asaba, June 4, 1994.
These women form co-operative organisations, which offer them the opportunity for collecting a loan to be paid back with a little interest at the end of each month.

St. Theresa Women's Society thus brings women together. Through this organisation in the Catholic Church, women are able to offer one another support in times of need and financial help. The women have registered as a group in this society, which helps them to buy goods at subsidised prices. Apart from the church activities, the women who are members of this organisation help themselves.

The women generally confirm that this organisation has had a tremendous impact on their economical, social, political and religious life. Economically, the organisation helps in raising the economic status of the woman, enabling her to manage her home more effectively through the help she has received in terms of getting loans, buying goods at subsidised prices, modern farming, and the various crafts learned, etc. Since this association offers many similarities with the women's traditional, co-operative societies, it works well to promote the interests of women.

Politically, the woman is recognised by this organisation. She has the right to vote and to be elected, and even though no woman has campaigned for a political post, most women in the parish have gone out to vote for candidates of their choice. Other strategies used by women for acquiring power are hard work, economic independence, education, politics, and children. These strategies often create tension between men and women.

In the religious circles, a woman who is a member of this organisation is recognised as a dynamic force in the building of the Church. She is seen as a teacher of faith and transmitter of religious and moral values and principles. To a certain degree, she participates in the leadership of the Church. For instance, there are about ten women holding leadership positions in the church, out of a church congregation of 800 people.

Socially, the organisation gives the women some sense of belonging in the society. The organisation serves as a source of power for the women, although the power does not liberate a woman fully from the control of her husband. It creates in him a new awareness in dealing with her, simply because she belongs to a powerful organisation. This has served as an incentive for women to become members of various organisations, even without the consent of their husbands. Most men have failed to exercise full control over their wives as a result of their membership in St. Theresa Women's Society, e.g., they have not been able to stop them from attending meetings. Finally, the power enjoyed by women through their membership in St. Theresa

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Col. 3: 18) could be responsible for their unwillingness to protest against anything that will hinder the promotion of their rights in their family setting, or on an individual level.

748 Col. 3: 18
Women's Society has helped to strengthen their loyalty and commitment to the organisation. Women have also used the organisation as a strategy for brainstorming about their role. These achievements have not arrived without challenges and difficulties. A talk with some female officials has brought to light the following, as the problems faced by women in their struggle to discover and promote their roles, and to take their place comfortably in the home and in society: some men stop their wives from attending the organisational meetings. As a result, some women are faced with having to choose between their marriage and the women's organisation, if they insist on attending organisational meetings. Some women who are members of this organisation, are left with the responsibility of caring for the family single-handed. Thus they work so hard to meet the family's needs that they have little or no energy left for organisational meetings and functions. In certain situations, men take on more wives so as to curtail the power of the women within the home.749

We can thus assume that the St. Theresa Women's Society fulfil many of the duties of women's organisations in the traditional Igbo society. Like these “traditional” organisations, it works as a co-operative society with several economic functions. Further, it serves as a single-sex center for women's voices in politics.

We may thus say that the Igbo women have found a substitute within the Catholic Church for their former organisations, and we may also say that the Catholic Church has been successful in adapting to the local customs, at least as far as the creation of St. Theresa Women's Society in Asaba is concerned. How the members themselves feel about this organisation will be treated below, in this chapter.

During the course of my first fieldwork, some of the women interviewed complained about not having enough say in the affairs of the organisation. They said that, despite the fact that they are members of the organisation, most of the decisions concerning the organisation are being taken only by the executive members of the organisation. Another point of criticism was that some of the members of this organisation do not contribute financially during some special occasions in the Church.

Apart from this, some of the women interviewed also recalled their experience during one of their annual celebrations. They claimed that the turnout of the members was very low as compared to other organisations.

A major criticism directed against this organisation by some of the members was also the lack of co-operation among some of the members. This might be as a result of frustration among the members, due to lack of full involvement in the affairs of the organisation.

749 Interview with some female officials of St. Theresa Women's Society, Asaba, October 13, 1994.
Thus we have seen how powerful this organisation is, and the support it gives to women both spiritually, socially, economically and politically, in the Church and in society at large, despite the negative aspect of lack of cooperation among the members. Further, some of the women in this organisation are freeborn, while some are of slave origin, but even the slave women may have significant positions in the secular society nowadays, provided that they have an education.

One similarity between the way in which this organisation works and the way in which the traditional female organisations, such as the co-operative societies, used to operate is that this organisation offers loans to its members to be paid back with a little interest at the end of each month, just as the co-operative societies in the traditional society. Further, being a member of St. Theresa Women's Society makes it possible for a woman to buy goods at subsidised prices, just as it used to be for the women in the co-operative societies in the traditional society.

13.4 The Christian Mothers

Before the Christian era in Nigeria, there had been organisations and cooperation among women, especially "mothers." This is evidenced by the various women's organisations we have in Nigeria. The history of the Church also shows that in every generation, Christian Mothers have always worked for the good of the Church and the community.

Membership in this organisation is open only to Catholic women, who have wedded in the Catholic Church. Most of the women in this organisation are about forty years and above. Some of them are also members of the Catholic Women's Organisation. Some of the members are recruited from other organisations and societies within the Church. There are no male members in this organisation. The women in this organisation are from different parts of the country; some are Igbo, while some are Yoruba, Itsekiri, and Edo. This organisation is seen by the members of the Christian Mothers’ organisation as the life of the Church, and through their association, some members of the Christian Mothers organisation interact with the other organisations in the parish to bring peace and progress in the Church.750

According to the organisational constitution of 1982, the aims and objectives of this organisation are:

- to unite all the Christian women in the parish for more unified work in the church; to live and practice the Catholic faith, everywhere and always; to participate actively in church matters, especially in the promotion of vocations to

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750 Interview with Mrs. Veronica Chizoo Ibeuuike, Umuoke, October 6, 1994. She was the former secretary and financial secretary, Catholic Women's Organisation, Christ the King parish.
the priesthood and religious life; to perform works of charity and mercy towards members and all of humanity; to impart Christian education to children and to build up Christian homes; to show a spirit of love and oneness among all the women in the parish; to see to the progress and welfare as well as smooth running of the church; to encourage the spiritual development of members; to give moral and financial support to the sick.\footnote{The Christian Mothers Organisation Constitution 1982, 13.}

Most of those objectives are just general Christian aims, and would never further the Igbo women’s role in the modern society.

In the Catholic Church in Asaba, the organisation called “the Christian Mothers” has a membership of 150 out of a Church membership of approximately 800. The executive members of the organisation are elected on the basis of regular attendance and active participation in the Church. They are the president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and a few committee members. The monthly dues for this organisation are 30 \textit{Naira} per member (1 \textit{kronor} is equivalent to 18 \textit{naira}) and the sources of finance for the organisation are registration fees, monthly dues, levies and donations.\footnote{Funds from membership dues and individual donations are spent on Church requisites such as table covers for the altars or napkins for communion services, funeral donations for members and financial assistance to members in need. In 1994, during my first fieldwork, the organisation purchased a small organ for the church at a cost of two thousand \textit{naira}.} This organisation holds its monthly meetings on Sundays, and, out of the 150 members, approximately 70 are present at the meetings.

The meetings of this organisation are strictly for members. No men are allowed to be present at such meetings, apart from the male advisor of the organisation. The only occasions when male members from other organisations, such as the Catholic Men's Organisation, Christian Fathers, etc., are invited, are during special celebrations such as Mother's day. On such occasions, men are invited to give seminars to the women on different topics, such as the role of the parent in a Christian home, the importance of the love of God between husbands and wives, etc. During these meetings, the women sit and listen to the invited speakers, and ask no questions, which is quite different from when they are alone in their single-sex meetings, where they ask questions after the discussion of scriptural passages. The atmosphere at the single-sex meetings is slightly informal with people coming and going. Nevertheless, there is a formal pattern of proceedings being followed. The meeting is declared open by the president, and the minutes of the previous meetings are read, and the motto of the organisation is then recited. After that, scriptures are read for about half an hour. The spiritual director asks questions to see whether the members of the organisation have understood the scriptural passages. In the meetings, discussions are sometimes held on topics such as the new marriage or inheritance laws, Christian home and family life, obedience to the Church, women's work in the Church, welfare of the Church and of the women, co-operation in Sun-
day school for children, the manner and the benefit of fasting, child welfare and training.

This organisation, just like the Catholic Women's Organisation, has links with some other organisations in the Church, such as St. Bridget's Women's Society, St. Anne Women's Society and St. Joseph Women's Marriage Society.

According to the organisational brochure of 1994, some of the functions of this organisation are as follows:

- It assists in the promotion of the good image of motherhood in all Catholic churches. It also assists in the training of seminarians and aspirants in the Catholic Church. It participates in all church activities at the diocesan and parish levels. It assists in the teaching of catechism and moral instructions in the schools. It helps in the visitation of the sick and those in prison. It performs a socialising function by watching over the conduct of the young girls in the parish. It conducts training centers, to which local people send promising young members for leadership training. It helps in the holding of annual or bi-annual social activities to improve the spirit of members in the parish. It assists in the conducting of pre-marriage and married couples courses and the care of unmarried mothers. It helps in promotion of primary health care in families, especially in the rural areas, and Catholic school education. It assists in the visitation of absentee or lukewarm members in the various women's organisations in the Catholic Church. It assists in the cleaning of the church before the service on Sundays.753

According to one of the members, Mrs. Okogwue, they assist in the coordination of the activities of the various Catholic women's groups in the diocese.754 They also organise Block Rosary crusades in the villages, and weekly visits to pagans and apostate Christians. Every year the members hold a general convention, seminars and retreats in the parish, which help to improve their spiritual lives.755 Their functions also include teaching prayers to the children in the villages and visiting sick and poor people.

The Christian Mothers visit other Catholic women in remote areas as a sign of love and solidarity. During these visits, they encourage the women to be good wives and mothers and remind them of their responsibilities as good Catholics. They also encourage them to live up to the moral expectations of their Catholic doctrine. On the parish level, the mothers also pull their weight, for example the women donated nearly 2,000 naira towards erecting the new parish church, paid for the flooring of the church and provided shutters for the doors and windows, renovated the Rev. Father's house and contributed food items to the Rev. Father and Rev. Sisters in the parish.756 The organisation also gives financial help to their fellow women in the villages

754 Interview with Mrs. M. O. Okogwue, Asaba, November 1, 1994.
that are suffering in one way or another. The members attend special occasions in the diocese, such as the laying of foundation stones, dedications of churches, bazaars etc.

Apart from the general programs for human development and spiritual formation, this organisation undertakes certain other projects, such as livestock projects and rural development projects. They also organise dances, which they display whenever there is any special event in the church.

According to my own observation, on the other hand, the members see themselves as superior when compared to the members of other women organisations, because all of the members of this organisation are wedded in the Catholic Church. Many of the women who are not members, feel the superiority of the “Christian Mothers” when they are compared to members of other women's organisations, such as the Catholic Women's Organisation, which enrolls all married and baptised women in the Catholic Church, no matter how they were married. For example, members of the Christian Mothers in Asaba do not like to attend the organisational activities of the CWO, even when invited. In this context, we should note that a Church wedding is regarded as a status symbol in many African societies.

From the above discussion, we have seen the different roles which the organisation called “Christian Mothers” plays in the Catholic Church, and how it differs from the role played by its counterpart in the traditional society in issues such as life-cycle rituals in birth and naming ceremonies, marriage and funeral rites. The differences are as follows: Unlike the women in the traditional society, who played significant roles in life-cycle rituals, such as birth and naming ceremonies, marriage, death and funeral rites, the Christian Mothers assist in the training of seminarians and aspirants, in the teaching of catechism and moral instructions in the schools, the visitation of the sick and those in prison, in the conducting of pre-marriage and married couples courses, and in the care of unmarried mothers.

Thus, instead of being active in traditional life cycle rituals, the members of “the Christian Mothers” rather participate as assistants to a man, who officiates in the new kinds of life cycle rituals that have been introduced by the Catholic Church. This is a more passive role than before, and corresponds to European ideas of women's roles in life cycle rituals, rather than to the traditional Igbo ideas of the women's active role in such rituals.

The members of the organisation called Christian Mothers are certainly doing many things that are praiseworthy from a Christian point of view, but, as shown above, many women who are not members feel inferior to the members. The reason for this feeling of inferiority may be the fact that the members of this organisation have to be wedded in the church. Since such a wedding is a sign of prestige, those who have married in the traditional way may feel inferior, regardless of what the wedded members say or how they behave.
Finally, the organisation “the Christian Mothers” does not fit into the traditional Igbo values but rather promotes European virtues.

13.5 Catholic nuns in Igbo society

In this section, I will discuss the various congregations of Catholic nuns that work in Igboland and the different roles they play in the Church and in the society.

13.5.1 The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles

As already indicated, the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles was the first congregation that came to Asaba in 1888.757 The Rev. Father Augustine Planque, SMA, founded this congregation in 1876. It is an international congregation with about 1,050 sisters. According to Sister Carmel Cox, the aim of this congregation is “evangelisation and the welfare of women and children, especially in Africa.”758

On their arrival in Asaba, the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles started to work among women and children.759 The sisters’ apostolate was that of teaching in primary schools760 and in home training centres. They also did routine visiting of the sick in hospitals and visited homes. The congregation has made remarkable achievements in schools and hospitals in the diocese. In the field of education, the congregation has had the most outstanding impact on Asaba society. But, on the other hand, their contribution in the field of education has also affected the previous position of Asaba women in the traditional society, where they played important roles in issues such as life-cycle rituals.

The Catholic Church puts great emphasis on the education of women in order to prepare them for the roles they are to play, both in the family and in the Church. In Asaba, primary and post-primary institutions for girls were set up. In 1895, the congregation started a convent school for girls in Asaba, which was named Our Lady Queen of the Apostles, and to ensure a close supervision of this school, a boarding house was established for the girls.761 At present, Our Lady of Apostles has sisters who run, among other things, the Regina Mundi primary school in Asaba. In this school, academic excellence is effectively combined with the moral and cultural development of students. The role of the Our Lady of Apostles Sisters in this sphere has revolutionised Asaba society. The education of women, with its concomitant

757 Akus 1994, 129.
758 Interview with Sister Carmel Cox, Ibadan, December 16, 1994.
760 Ibid.
761 Ibid., 130.
result of lifting women from their traditional domestic status, has had far-reaching effects on Asaba society today. With education, women became increasingly aware of their dignity, their potential and their right to aspire to leadership roles. It is to the credit of the Church, but more particularly to the Our Lady of Apostles sisters, that the Asaba women have achieved a considerable measure of liberation. It is this that has made possible the participation of Asaba women in all fields of endeavour in the society today. The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles have not only trained a large number of women to work in schools in Nigeria, but have also attracted a great number of girls in Nigeria to join the congregation. This congregation has really played a prominent role in the formation of indigenous sisters in Nigeria. Thus, we can see that the arrival of missionaries in Asaba affected the previous roles of Asaba women in traditional society, as they now play new roles in the Church and in society, which are different from their former roles.

Apart from this, the congregation Our Lady of Apostles Sisters from Nigeria is at present carrying out its missionary work in different colleges and institutions in the country and abroad. The congregation has established Regional Houses in Ibadan, Lagos, Asaba and Agbor. It also has houses in countries such as France, Italy and USA.

Catholic schools run by this congregation have thus been established in many parts of the country. These exist side by side with government schools and various private schools, but the degree of commitment, dedication and care manifested by Our Lady of Apostles Sisters in the field of education in Nigeria stands out in sharp contrast to the carefree and “officious” attitudes that characterise most government-owned schools in the country.

The Our Lady of Apostles Sisters’ engagement in schoolwork does not limit their services to the people.762 The many schools run by the sisters bear testimony to the mission of this congregation among the suffering poor of the society. In addition, the sisters are in charge of a number of motherless babies' homes, orphanages and homes for the handicapped.763

It is also worth mentioning that this congregation has contributed to solve one of the apparently most difficult problems of present-day Nigeria, namely the problem of family planning. They have taught the women about family planning and also assisted in the teaching of sex education to women in the rural areas.

The congregation also helps the priest in charge of the parish to see that things go well in the church, and assists in the evangelisation of the people by living according to the gospel values and preaching the Bible. It also

helps to prepare young girls for Christian marriages, and to conduct adult education classes in needlework and cookery.\textsuperscript{764}

In the local churches in Nigeria, this congregation joins the local Churchwomen in their pastoral ministry of the Church.\textsuperscript{765} It gives various talks to these women on spiritual matters, health, legal rights, political issues, etc. This has generally improved the ways of living and helped to create awareness among women, expanded their knowledge and enabled them to be self-reliant. Most of the women told me, in 1994, that the presence of the “sisters” had had a great impact on their lifestyle. The companionship and work among them had been an “eye opener” for the women, causing them to discover more and more the dignity and worth of women, their feminine potential and how to use it for the development of themselves and that of their families, and the community at large.\textsuperscript{766} The congregation has made achievements, and it has helped to bring back many people to God through the efforts of the sisters and their examples in the Church and in the society.

13.5.2 The Society of the Holy Child Jesus

The Society of the Holy Child Jesus (SHCJ) was founded in 1846 in England by Cornelia Connelly, an American woman born in Philadelphia, USA.\textsuperscript{767} The society is an international congregation with about 700 sisters. During the time of the formation of this congregation, Catholic education for girls and young women was greatly needed in England.\textsuperscript{768} Sister Cornelia had earlier been interested in establishing schools. She did this, she said, after reflecting upon “the wants of the age and the means of spiritual mercy to be exercised.”\textsuperscript{769} After some time, Cornelia established houses in different parts of the world: in the United States, France, Chile, Ghana, Ireland, Italy, Nigeria and Wales. Since the Vatican Council II, the society has answered the Church’s call to bring the gospel to new areas. In addition to their work in education, the Holy Child Sisters serve in a variety of other domains, such as pastoral and spiritual.\textsuperscript{770}

This congregation came to Nigeria on the invitation of Bishop Joseph Shanahan after the collapse of the French Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny venture in Eastern Nigeria in 1919. The bishop went to Europe appealing to

\textsuperscript{764} Akus 1994, 130.
\textsuperscript{765} Interview with Sister Felicia Michael Dunka, Ibadan, July 30, 1994.
\textsuperscript{766} Interview with Sister Kathleen Teresa Sweeney, Ibadan, September 8, 1994.
\textsuperscript{767} See Cooke 1980, 16-18, and One Call, Many Voices. Society of the Holy Child Jesus, a pamphlet, 1.
\textsuperscript{768} See One Call, Many Voices. Society of the Holy Child Jesus, a pamphlet, 1; Cook 1980, 16-17.
\textsuperscript{769} One Call, Many Voices. Society of the Holy Child Jesus, a pamphlet, 1.
\textsuperscript{770} Ibidem.
different English-speaking congregations of women to come to his aid. In 1929, Sr. Mary Charles Walker, of the Irish Sisters of Charity, took temporary leave from her congregation, with ecclesiastical permission, to answer the call of the bishop. Writing to her superiors in Ireland in October 1929, Sr. Mary Charles Walker stated:

I have always felt that the chief work of nuns here must be to train native sisters. We never could have enough European nuns for the enormous work that must be faced if this continent is to be really converted... we can never really understand the native mind as they themselves do.

As mentioned above, “the Society of the Holy Child Jesus sent nuns to help Sister Walker, who, until 1930, was working alone in the Convent Schools, Calabar. In September of the same year (1930), Reverend Mother Mary Genevieve sailed for Nigeria, and, in October she was followed by Bishop Shanahan with the first band of SHCJ missionaries.”

With the help of Sr. Mary Charles Walker, the pioneering task of attracting vocations to religious life began in 1931, when she took the first four foundation members of the congregation as aspirants. In 1934, Sr. Charles Walker travelled to England and came back after one year to join the congregation. On April 21, 1940, the first four aspirants made their first religious profession. The two foundation members of this congregation were Mother St. John and Mother Ignatia. The first superior of this congregation was Rev. Mother M. Fidelis, and the Assistant General as of 1933 was Rev. Mother Mary Genevieve.

As already indicated, the pioneer missionary of this congregation, Sister Mary Charles Walker, single-handedly ran a school in Calabar of about three hundred students. When the Holy Child Sisters arrived from England, they relieved her of her schoolwork because of her ill health, and she was forced to have a break for some time. Later, she came back to Africa to work in Zambia, where she died in February 1966, at the age of 86.

Since the Nigerian civil war, which ended in 1970, there has been a great increase in vocations for this congregation. With the help of the Superior General, Mother Marie Theresa Akwe, and the able leadership of one of its

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771 See Cooke 1980, 22-31, for further information on Sister Mary Charles Walker, of the Irish Sisters of Charity.
772 “Father Lutz of Onitsha” in The Leader, 28 October 1959, 3.
773 Nwosu 1982, 47; Eke 1985, 316.
774 Okon 1985, 198-199.
775 Eke 1985, 316.
776 Ibid., 317.
777 Ibid., 317.
779 Ibid.
members, Mother Mary Gertrude, the number of members of the congregation of the Holy Child Jesus has grown in Nigeria.\textsuperscript{780} Currently, the juniorates in Ogoja, Calabar and Ikot Ekpene dioceses send girls every year for training in Ogoja and Ikot Ekpene, the two noviciates. Today, the congregation has produced sisters, who work in various fields as doctors, teachers, nurses, catechists, etc., among different groups of people in different dioceses.\textsuperscript{781} At present, the Holy Child Sisters have houses in Onitsha, Owerri, Umuahia, Okigwe, Port Harcourt, Ikot Ekpene, Calabar, Ogoja, Issele-Uku, Abakaliki, Idah, Ondo, Lagos, Abuja, Lokoja and Jos.\textsuperscript{782}

Like other congregations, it has links with other organisations in the Catholic Church, especially women's organisations. It also has relations with other congregations in the country, such as the Daughters of Charity Sisters, Holy Ghost Sisters, Little Sisters of the Poor, Little Sisters of Jesus, Medical Missionaries of Mary, Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate, the Sisters of Charity, Our Lady of Fatima Sisters, Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, etc. These congregations meet annually to discuss several issues, such as ways to help young women and men in formation to grow spiritually.

According to their own brochure, some of the functions of the congregation are pastoral, apostolic and social work. The Holy Child Sisters have “a few strategies to live out their charism of generous and spontaneous service to the people.”\textsuperscript{783} Their socio-pastoral apostolate, such as visitations of families and homes, marriage and counselling programs, retreats, attendance at various organisational meetings and functions, especially those of women, etc., help them in reaching out and rendering selfless service to various categories of people, especially women in their local settings, based on their needs.

As they are consecrated women, and sent with a certain special quality of human presence, people feel happy, honoured and blessed to have them in their homes for various reasons, such as sharing in their joys and sorrows, successes and failures, etc. They feel free to share in depth their pains, joys, disappointments, hopes, aspirations, dreams, etc. The sisters show special interest in families that are bereaved, and in those with marital problems of all sorts.

The Society of the Holy Child Jesus helps women in their organisational meetings, retreats, functions, etc., to enlighten them on health, political, social, religious and cultural issues. Topical issues discussed at such meetings include women's rights, human sexuality, liberation of women, how to live marriage as a vocation successfully, ways to resolve marital conflicts, the

\textsuperscript{780} Ibid., 318.
\textsuperscript{781} Eke 1985, 317.
\textsuperscript{782} Information taken from the Golden Jubilee brochure of the congregation of the Holy Child Jesus; see also Eke 1985, 317.
\textsuperscript{783} Information taken from the Golden Jubilee brochure of the congregation of the Holy Child Jesus, 9.
role of women in the Church and in society, etc. But it should be noted that some women in Igbo society see this in a different way, since they think that the arrival of the missionaries had not favoured them. On the other hand, women with slave ancestry are very happy to be visited by members of this organisation. They are the beneficiaries of all kinds of encouragement and financial help, in particular when it concerns education for their children.

As mentioned above, the sisters also help in the education of women at various levels, and they run primary and secondary institutions in both rural and urban areas to meet the educational needs of women and youths, respectively. Considering the low standard of education in most of the government institutions, they strive to give qualitative education to the pupils and students they serve in their institutions, and also to challenge them to make the best of the opportunities offered to them. This congregation helps to keep peace and justice in the Church and in society, by preaching to the people the importance and need of those things.

In the local churches, where the sisters work, they relate and interact with the local churchwomen at the grass root level, listen to their various problems, and advise them. This exposes the sisters to a better understanding of these women's cultural positions in their homes and in society at large. Through their work with local women (freeborn and descendants of slaves), the sisters try to foster awareness in them by teaching them their legal rights in society, and also by giving information and lectures on issues like income generation projects, family planning, marriage and counselling programs.

Thus we have seen the activities of the Holy Child Sisters, and the various ways in which they claim to help women by their organisational meetings, retreats and functions. We have also described their contribution in the training and education of girls in Igbo society. This assistance is welcomed by women of slave ancestry, but despised by freeborn women, who feel that their role in traditional society in issues like naming ceremonies, marriage and funeral rites, have been taken over by the Church.

The means used by the Catholic sisters to provide assistance might be seen as a way to reach the indigenous people. And, of course, the poorest layers of the population have always been happy to receive this attention. So it could be interpreted as a strategy used by the missionaries in bringing Christianity to the local people. With the introduction of Western education, they were able to convince indigenous people to become Christians.

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784 Interview with Sister Mary Idowu Akinwale, Lagos, May 16, 1994.
The Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

The Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was founded in 1937 by Archbishop Charles Heerey. It is a group of indigenous, religious women brought together from different parts of Nigeria to share a common charism of proclamation of “the good news” through giving “dedicated and generous” service to God's people in various fields of life.

This congregation is a result of the inspiration that the founder, Archbishop Charles Heerey, received in the 1930s, when he was in Lourdes on a pilgrimage. “As he was praying at Lourdes, he was thinking of the needs of the women of Nigeria and of his diocese in particular, he got an inspiration: found a congregation of indigenous women and call it the congregation of the sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.”

He came back from the pilgrimage and founded this congregation with two sisters for the “uplifting of women.”

Despite the fact that missionary congregations had existed in the diocese for years, Archbishop Charles Heerey saw the need for indigenous sisters to work hand in hand with the priests in evangelisation, and more so to reach out in a more effective manner to women. It is this charism that has spurred this congregation in its ministry of education, prayer, medical, social, pastoral and missionary works, and any other apostolate undertaking, to meet the needs of the time. As sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, their “charism” puts before them the challenge “to grow in generosity” in their dealing with Jesus, and in the service of his people.

When the founder, Archbishop Heerey, was about to die, he handed over the congregation to Cardinal F. A. Arinze, who was then archbishop of Onitsha, with the permission of the pope in Rome. From then on, Cardinal F. A. Arinze became the patron of the congregation.

With the assistance of a few Holy Rosary Sisters, the first community was founded in Ihiala in 1944, and was transferred to Nkpor in 1972. Until 1953, Holy Rosary Sisters filled the offices of Mother General and Novice Mistress, in accordance with the constitution. In March 1953, with a view towards training the sisters in the administration and government of the congregation, a general council was formed. It consisted of three Holy Rosary Sisters and two professed members of the congregation as general council.

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787 Okon 1985, 183.
788 Interview with Sister Bernadine Nkeiruka Aladi, Onitsha, October 13, 1994.
789 A historical sketch of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Nigeria 1974, 6; see also Eke 1985, 320.
790 Interview with Sister Mary Justin Uzoh, Onitsha, December 12, 1994.
792 Interview with Sister Mary Donald Emeh, Ife, October 26, 1994.
793 See Eke 1985, 320, and A historical sketch of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Nigeria, 1974, 6.
lors. In 1956, two Holy Rosary Sister Councillors were replaced by two other professed members of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, with the Holy Rosary Sister Mother General, Rev. Mother Mary Conleth Mchugh as President of the council. In August 1957, the congregation became autonomous with the election of its first superior general in the person of Rev. Mother Mary Bernadetta Anyogu, the first pioneer member of the congregation. The second indigenous superior general was Rev. Mother Mary Joseph Uzoigwe.794

At Urualla, on 6 January 1946, the two pioneer members, Sister Mary Benedetta Anyogu and Sister Mary Magdalen Oranu, took their first religious vows,795 and on the same day, four more postulants were received into the Noviciate.796 The congregation made rapid progress, and by 1957, there were four sisters with final vows, 38 sisters with temporary vows, 15 novices, 50 postulants and 23 aspirants.797

After the Nigerian-Biafran war, the Immaculate Heart Sisters rebuilt most of the convents and hospitals that had been run by the Holy Rosary Sisters before the civil war, with the help of Mother Mary Joseph Uzoigwe, who was a dynamic leader. A training program was launched for the congregation, which helped in the training of medical doctors, nurses, teachers and social workers.798

At present, this congregation has spread all over Nigeria with communities in Ihiala, Nsukka, Nkalagu, Uwani, Amaigbo, Ife, etc. Most of the sisters in the congregation are members of different organisations in the Catholic Church; some are members of the Parish Council, St. Jude's Society and the Charismatic Movement.

Among the many duties that the congregation performs, visits and teachings in the villages are the most important in attracting women to God. The congregation helps in the promotion of Christian education of girls in Igbo-land and in the “uplifting” of women in society. In Church, the members of the congregation take part in the teaching of catechism, and also in the sharing of Holy Communion during mass. The Immaculate Heart Sisters also take part in home visitations and care for the sick, poor, aged and unprivileged in the society.799 The congregation also engages in training women and girls for marriage and other sacraments, the education of children, and the care of orphans.800

794 A historical sketch of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Nigeria, 1974, 23.
796 A historical sketch…….1974, 26-27.
797 Okon 1985, 184.
798 Eke 1985, 321.
799 Interview with Sister Mary Donald Emeh, Ife, October 26, 1994.
During the Nigerian civil war, these indigenous sisters assisted in carrying out charitable work, especially by alleviating the sufferings of the people by giving them comfort. They also teach the women about health care and preventive medicines. In times of crisis, such as famine, epidemics, physical disaster, or mass distress of any kind, this congregation assists women.\textsuperscript{801} Since most of this work is “charity work” for the poor and destitute, those who appreciate it most are women of slave ancestry.

Beside its other apostolic work, the congregation now runs the archdiocesan bookshop, the Queen of Rosary Secondary School, the Immaculate Heart Nursery and Primary School, Holy Angels Nursery and Primary School in Onitsha, the Immaculate Heart Hospital in Nkpor-Agu, the St. Charles Bonomes Hospital in Onitsha, the Madonna Retreat Conference Centre in Nkpor, and the Queen Bakery and Domestic Centre in Nkpor.\textsuperscript{802} Thus we have seen how this congregation was founded and the significant role it performs in the field of evangelisation in Igbo society, especially when compared with the other congregations, such as the Holy Child Sisters and the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles, whose charism is mainly based on education. In the case of the congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, however, it is the work of charity that is important, regardless of any idea of “betterment” or “development” of the people who are invited. Since charity is the most important work of this organisation, it goes without saying that their work is particularly appreciated by the poor, and by those who are despised by other people in Igbo society.

13.5.3 The Congregation of Daughters of Divine Love

The Congregation of Daughters of Divine Love is an indigenous congregation that was founded by Bishop Godfrey Mary Paul Okoye on July 16, 1969, during the Nigerian civil war.\textsuperscript{803} Following the example of Archbishop Charles Heerey, he founded a congregation of sisters in his diocese to assist in the apostolate of the Church.\textsuperscript{804} The founder, Bishop Godfrey Mary Paul Okoye, was ordained a priest in 1947, a gift he appreciated, cherished and held dear all his life. He later became a bishop, and worked in two dioceses, the Port Harcourt and Enugu dioceses, from 1961 to 1977, when he died. His “desire was to found a community of religious women who would live out, bear witness and propagate the infinite love of God for mankind, especially as manifested in the Incarnation.”\textsuperscript{805}

\textsuperscript{801} Interview with Sister Mary John Philip, Ife, November 18, 1994.
\textsuperscript{802} Interview with Father Damian O. Eze, MSP., Uppsala, May 20, 2001.
\textsuperscript{804} Eke 1985, 321.
\textsuperscript{805} Ibid., 322.
Endowed with tremendous physical and intellectual energy, he worked as-
siduously in various capacities for the welfare of the church, the state and in
fact individuals. He had to his credit about twelve booklets on various church
doctrines. He was genuinely described as a man of faith, love and wisdom, a
father of the poor, an effective administrator whose courage and simplicity
were yet more alarming.806

According to his wish, the congregation should be an extension of his life
and aspiration to love God. The bishop had himself chosen the name Daugh-
ters of Divine Love, because he said that he wanted to teach the congrega-
tion about love, Divine Love. He complained that there was little love in
most congregations, and so he wanted the daughters to be built on love, and
their motto to be “Caritas Christi Urget Nos” (The love of Christ impels
us).807

The congregation started in Ukpor with four girls, Miss Philomena Udora,
now Mother Mary Ifechukwu Udora, Bernadetta Obiesie, Louisa Ayinotu
and Rose Obi. Out of these four aspirants, who started the congregation, only
one succeeded to become a sister, namely Mother Mary Ifechukwu Udora,
who became the first Superior General of the congregation. “The first set of
sisters of this congregation were professed on November 4, 1973, and by
1977,”808 the congregation of the Daughters of Divine Love had professed 82
sisters.809 Currently, this congregation has approximately 476 members. Of
these,810 142 are professed, 17 have just made their final vows, and more than
300 are aspirants in and out of their juniorate in Enugu.811

In the Congregation of Daughters of Divine Love, the General Council of
the congregation consists of five sisters: Sister M. Chigozie Obasi, Sister
Mary Paul Asoegwu, Sister M. Chilota Elochukwu, Sister M. Chidebelu
Nwigwe and Sister M. Nnamdi Osuji. The congregation gives the “sisters” a
formal and organised government in their election of the General Council.
More than half of the “sisters” in the congregation are spiritual directors of
Church organisations. Today, this congregation has established houses in
different countries: in Germany, England, Italy, America, Sierra Leone,
Kenya and Gabon.812

The apostolate of this congregation is focused on medical care, ranging
from curative to preventive health care, depending on the needs of the people
among whom they live and work. The “sisters” are also involved in pastoral

806 A Silver Jubilee Anniversary Magazine of Congregation of the Daughters of Divine
807 Ibid.
808 Eze 1985, 322.
809 Ibid.
810 A Silver Jubilee anniversary magazine of Congregation of the Daughters of Divine
811 See “Sketch history of the Daughters of Divine Love Congregation”, submitted
to the Centenary History Commission, and also Eke 1985, 322.
812 Interview with Sister Maria Trinitas Oluchi Keke, Enugu, December 19, 1994.
care and evangelisation in local station churches, and give instruction in all aspects of Christian life to the people and the catechists. The congregation also teaches young people in the schools, all the while keeping a close contact with the families of the children through this process, and encouraging them to build good Christian homes. The “sisters” also pay regular visits to prisoners, bringing them consolation and encouragement, and also to the sick and elderly. The “sisters” in this congregation are said to show the love of God to the people through their apostolic work. They also work in hospitals and schools and help in various ways in pastoral work.

The Congregation of the Daughters of Divine Love directs and encourages some of the Church societies, such as St. Vincent de Paul, the Legion of Mary, the Marian association, youth organisations, the Catholic Women's Organisations, the Parish Council and the Christian family apostolate. It also assists in preparing children for their first Holy Communion and confirmation.

In the local churches, the sisters of the congregation interact with the local Church women, teaching them ways to maintain a good Christian home. They attend their organisational meetings and advise them when the need arises. The Congregation of the Daughters of the Divine Love also organises retreats and lectures in the rural areas.

Thus we have seen how this congregation operates and the roles they play, both in the Church and in the society. But I would add that, despite the contributions of this congregation in the Church and the society, some women in Igbo society still believe that the arrival of the missionaries destroyed their cultural and traditional roles in traditional society and therefore lowered their status in society.

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813 Interview with Sister Katherine Mary Okoye, Enugu, July 2, 1994.
814 Interview with Sister Katherine Mary Okoye, Enugu, July 2, 1994.
Table 2. Different groups of congregations used for this study and the percentage of sisters in each congregation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congregations</th>
<th>Number in the groups</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our Lady of Apostles Sisters</td>
<td>1,050</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Holy Child Sisters</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Immaculate Heart Sisters</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Daughters of Divine Love Sisters</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,826</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should also be noted in this chapter, that the dual-sex organisation discussed above are not the only single-sex organisations in the Catholic Church in Asaba, but because of lack of space those are the ones I have decided to discuss.

13.6 Conclusion

From the presentations in this chapter, we can see that when the Catholic missionaries came to Igboland, they encouraged education and “uplifting” of women in Igbo society. They also encouraged Igbo women to organise themselves into organisations. It was due to this that most of these organisations, such as the Catholic Women's Organisation, the St. Theresa Women's Society, Christian Mothers and the training of the Rev. Sisters were started in the Catholic Church. This is a dual-sex structure, but if we look at this critically, we can see that the missionaries had some reasons behind the organising of women in all these associations. It may be assumed that they did that in consideration of the local customs of these women, and the missionaries (Catholic) felt it might be better for the women to be organised into single-sex organisations, as they had been previously in their community.

Further, when the missionaries came to Igboland they recruited people of slave origin, both males and females, and among the active people in the Church organisation presently, some are of slave origin. Because the slaves were not happy with their position in the traditional society, where they were excluded from the male title societies and from the female counterparts in the traditional dual-sex system, they did not appreciate the traditional society and the way it was organised. In this context, I would say that this might have been one of the reasons why some women seem to be very happy with the charity work and the egalitarian way of relating to other people that is shown by many of the members in the women's organisations in the Church.
CHAPTER 14
Mixed Organisations in the Catholic Church

14.1 Introduction

As we have seen in part one, before the coming of Christianity to western Igboland, the system of administration was a “dual-sex” political system, in which there were parallel organisations for men and women in the community. In these parallel organisations, the women had their own separate organisations, through which they made their voices heard.

Against this background, the special organisations that were exclusively for women were a success and contributed to the progress of the Catholic Church. At the same time, we may note that this was a local adaptation to existing customs, which have been part of the Catholic social ethical strategy since their missionary work began, over 100 years ago. However, outside the Catholic Church, the traditional system of administration was overruled, first by the colonial administration, and second by the Protestant mission, CMS, which arrived even before the Catholic mission, and a new organisational structure was introduced. With the introduction of this new structure, the former, traditional “dual-sex” organisation of Igbo women in Igbo society was abandoned. This had a tremendous effect on the former roles of Igbo women in traditional society. The new structure of organisation was the Western-style, “mixed” structure where men and women came together in the same association. However, the Catholic Church used this structural ideal only to a limited extent.

In this chapter, I will present the different kinds of mixed organisations that were introduced by the missionaries in the Catholic Church in Igboland, especially in Asaba, and discuss in what respects their ideals were alien to Igbo society.

14.2 The Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (C.L.C.N.)

The Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (C.L.C.N.) was inaugurated on March 16th 1973, after the approval at the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (C.B.C.N.). This organisation is made up of laymen and women in the

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815 Dodo, 1992, vi.
Catholic Church. The Laity Council was established in the Catholic Church for effective evangelisation, co-ordination, and good administration, in the interest of the Church.\textsuperscript{816} It exists at all levels in all Catholic Churches in Nigeria, thus at the national, the diocesan and the parish levels. The membership of the organisation is made up of all elected officers of all lay organisations in the Catholic Church, four representatives (male and female) from each Catholic diocese, three members of the Episcopal Commission for the Apostolate of the Laity, all provincial and diocesan chaplains, all the chairmen of the council's sub-committees, and the national executive secretary of the organisation.

According to Dodo, the main duty of this organisation is “to witness to Christ,” and this they are expected to do in their ways of living, in their family settings and their social grouping and profession.\textsuperscript{817} The organisation has also been called to take an active part in the mission of the Church, in family life, education, social, economic, political and cultural issues.\textsuperscript{818}

The aims and objectives of this organisation are, according to section 2 of the organisation's Constitution:

\begin{quote}
To promote the Apostolate of the Laity in accordance with the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People of the Second Vatican Council and the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium. To serve as animator in lay Apostolate activities. To participate in regional and world congresses of the Lay Apostolate and other relevant meetings. To continue to co-operate with the Pontifical Council for the Laity in Rome and with the Pan-African and Malagasy Councils of the Laity and to co-operate with any other committees, councils and organisations of a similar nature any where in the world. To assist the hierarchy of Nigeria with advice, suggestions and practical help. To maintain liaison with other national non-Catholic religious organisations and authorities whose objectives and activities are not inconsistent with those of the council. To do any thing whatever which the Council may consider necessary, wise or expedient to do for the promotion of its aims and objectives.\textsuperscript{819}
\end{quote}

Some of the functions of this council are, according to Dodo (1992), as follows:

\begin{quote}
It sends representatives to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), to work with the bishops and other Christian leaders in the formulation of policies, programmes for the good of all Christians in Nigeria and for the nation. It makes suggestions to the bishops and give them practical help where and when necessary. It sponsors some seminarians and encourages individual laypersons and lay associations to do the same. The Council organises con-
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{816} Ibid., 3-5.
\textsuperscript{817} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{818} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{819} The Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria Constitution, Section 2, 1987, 8.
ferences, seminars and workshops every year at national, provincial and diocesan levels to enlighten the Laity and train them for the role they are expected to play in the church and in Nigeria. It co-ordinates the various lay associations in the church by sending some officials of the council to participate in some of the activities of the associations. It gives some financial help to the national lay associations when they are hosting International conferences/seminars or going out of Nigeria to attend one. The Council sponsors some of its officers to international conferences/seminars and gives donations to some national and diocesan church project. The Council embarks on the training of its elected officers and in the running of a regular training programme for employed full-time Diocesan Laity Council Administrative Secretaries. It ensures greater co-ordination, efficiency and more fruitful participation in evangelisation. The Council creates political awareness among the laity and encourages them to participate actively in politics, to evangelise it as a clean game and permeate the temporal order.

The work of the organisation includes one week of special spiritual activities, held in the middle of March every year. It is named “National Laity Week” during this period. The activities of the organisation start on the Monday and end on the Sunday closest to the 16th of March every year, which also marks the anniversary of the inauguration of the organisation. During this week, all the Catholics in all dioceses and parishes nation-wide are expected to participate and co-operate with their parish laity councils in order to ensure the success of the week. Also, all priests and lay persons in various Catholic Churches, who for one reason or the other are not taking part in the activities of the laity week, are encouraged by the Church to do so for the growth and development of the Church and for the glory of God. This is one of the methods used by the Catholic Church for the spiritual development of their members.

Apart from this, the national chairman of this organisation goes on a nationwide tour of all the 36 Catholic dioceses in Nigeria to enlighten the members about what a laity council is, and about what kind of work it performs in the Church. During their visits, seven days are spent in each diocese to conduct a three-hour seminar every day to the members of the parish. This is done in order to enlighten the members of the dioceses about this organisation.

A programme called “mobilising the laity” for effective evangelisation is also run by the organisation in all Catholic dioceses in the country.

The organisation also assists the Church in the erection of church buildings and schools, and in the supply of manpower and building materials. The payments of yearly dues, known as YC, are compulsory for all members of the organisation. In most parishes in the country, YC implies a levy which

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820 Dodo, 1992, 15.
821 Ibid.
822 Ibid., 44.
823 Ojo 1982, 72.
has a similarity to the tax collected by the government. Different methods, including the use of societies or groups in the church, are used on Sundays for the collection of this due.\footnote{Ibid.} This is a method to ensure that the due is collected by the various parishes.

The members of this organisation are elected by the lay people in the Church. This council meets at least three times a year at the diocesan level, but sometimes, when there is an important issue to discuss, the diocesan laity council can be convened as many times as needed, at the discretion of the chairman and members of the council. But at the parish level, this organisation meets more frequently, once or twice a month, depending on the issues that come up in the parish.

The annual conferences of this organisation are rotated among the Catholic dioceses in Nigeria. Every hosting diocesan bishop allows the national chairman of the council to address the congregation briefly at the Sunday service, on the day that the Laity Council Conference is held.\footnote{Ibid., 43-44.}

The chairman of this organisation in Asaba presides over the executive and general meetings of the council. During these meetings, the male and the female members of the organisation are present, but most of the discussions, and all the public talking, is done by the male members. It is the men who decide any important issue concerning the organisation, both at diocesan and parish levels; the election of the executive members of the organisation, the appointment of members who should represent the council in any international conference, etc. The men dominate most of the decisions and talking in these meetings, while the women hardly make any contribution. This is due to ignorance of the fact that there are two different genders in such mixed meetings. This is different from the basic idea of the dual-sex organisations in the traditional society, where the women were allowed to make decisions on their own.

It may further be noted that some of the members of this organisation consider themselves to be on the same level as the pastoral council, which is the primary body responsible for the administration of the parish. They try to compete with the members of the pastoral council concerning decision-making in the Church. For example, the members of this organisation sometimes make decisions concerning other male and female organisations. This should be done according to the formal rules, instead of being done by the laity council. Yet, this concerns discussions in the Church, but the general attitude still prevails, that in mixed companies it is the men who do the talking. The women used to have separate meetings, where anyone among them could talk. Then, the women’s decision would be presented to the men through the women’s representative.
Thus we have seen how the male members of this organisation dominate the female members in the same way as in other mixed organisations, which were introduced by the CMS missionaries, and how this affected the previous role of the Igbo women in traditional society.

14.3 The Catholic Charismatic Renewal

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal was started in 1967 at Duquesne University in the United States of America. From there, it spread to other universities, parishes, convents and monasteries in the United States and Canada. This movement came to Nigeria in 1971, and, by 1974, it was already popular in many parts of the country, including Asaba. It is an organisation for both male and female members of the Catholic Church. It is Pentecostal in nature, and the members believe in the descending of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles (Act. 2). Members of this organisation see themselves to be “born again” Christians in the Catholic Church.

Most of the members of this movement in Igboland are recruited from the Catholic Church. They are from different parts of the region. Some are from Asaba, while others are from other Igbo-speaking communities, such as Ogbashi Ukwu, Agbor, Igbofu, Illah, Ebu, Onitsha, etc.

The aims and objectives of the movement are to strengthen the spiritual involvement of the individual members and to deepen their faith in Jesus Christ. This is believed to be done through active participation in prayers, sacraments, liturgy, scriptural and biblical readings, and by following the doctrine, scripture and tradition of the Catholic Church and the magisterium. Apart from this, some other objectives are to participate actively in the Church, to uphold the Church’s teachings of faith and morals, the seven sacraments, the teaching on the angels and saints, the Rosary, the divine institutions, and the teaching authority of the Church.

At the initial stage, the Vatican was opposed to the existence of this movement within the Catholic Church. However, with time, and after a series of conferences in Rome, the pope gave his approval for the introduction of the organisation in all Catholic churches. Some of the members of this movement sometimes oppose the Catholic Church, for example on issues such as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This could be as a result of the protestant doctrines of this movement.

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827 Ibid., 2.
830 Ibid., 3.
831 Onoyima 1991, 16.
Most of the members of this organisation in Asaba associate with non-Catholic bible groups, such as the Scripture Union and the Christian Union, which are organised in a protestant way.\textsuperscript{832} As pointed out above, they put emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, spiritual healing and evangelism.\textsuperscript{833}

They also appreciate bible readings and quotations from the scripture.\textsuperscript{834} Unlike the other Catholics, this group does not believe in the existence of the Virgin Mary; many of their members believe that devotion to the Blessed Virgin is sinful.

According to Ojene (1991), the contributions of this organisation in the Catholic Church are as follows:

It has done much in the field of evangelisation in all Catholic churches in Nigeria. It has led many Christians most especially Catholics to the studying of the Scriptures. The movement has provided an answer to many Catholics, who were lured to other Christian sects in search of better study of the Bible, and more moving songs. It has taught many people how to pray. It has helped its members to establish mature relationships with other Christian sects without jeopardising their faith. This organisation in the Catholic Church has helped in the reconciliation (on a personal level) of Christians from these three denominations: Protestant, Catholic and Pentecostal, and dialogue (on official level) between the Pentecostal Church and the Catholic leaders.\textsuperscript{835}

Some of the activities of the local Igbo organisation within this movement in St. Joseph parish, Asaba, are: weekly bible studies, the learning of new songs, regular seminars and a weekly leaders meeting.\textsuperscript{836} During the meetings of the organisation, the male and female members of the movement are always present at the same time. Members say prayers and sing songs. The president of the organisation, or the vice president, reads from the bible to the members. After readings, discussions are held about the scriptural readings.

During these meetings, the male members of the organisation dominate the discussions. For example, they do most of the talking and make most of the decisions, while the women do not dare to speak up because of custom and tradition. Furthermore the men make most of the suggestions about the movement, such as how the organisation should work, names of members to be appointed for the forthcoming conferences, how much should be paid as membership fees, etc.

Thus, the men do most of the talking and make most of the decisions, while the women do not speak up or make any contribution. Because of the

\textsuperscript{832} Holt 1977, 38-40.
\textsuperscript{833} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{834} Onoyima, 1991, 16.
\textsuperscript{835} Ojene 1991, 20-23.
\textsuperscript{836} Ibid., 42.
constant domination of males in these mixed meetings, the women have lost their former traditional freedom of being able to express their own voices, as they used to do in traditional society. As a result of this, the traditional prerogative of male domination in mixed companies seems to be kept alive in this organisation.

Apart from this, some of the members regard themselves as holier than their priest. They believe they can pray longer than some of the priests, and faster, and preach the scripture. Because of this, some challenge the authority of their priest in the church.

According to my impressions during my fieldwork, some of the members of this movement are very proud. They see themselves as superior to other members in the Catholic Church because of their claim to have received the gift of the Holy Spirit and ability to speak in tongues.

Further, most of the members of this organisation emphasise experience more than doctrine. They try to incorporate experiences, which are seen to be Pentecostal, into the liturgical, doctrinal, and ecclesiastical structures of the historic denominations. For instance, instead of focusing on Virgin Mary or the sacred heart of Jesus, they focus on the Holy Spirit, which is more Pentecostal than Catholic.

Another special aspect of this organisation is the challenge it poses to the Catholic orthodoxy and to the heritage of the Church. For instance, some of the members of the organisation challenge the validity of the sacraments, especially the sacraments of penance, and the infant baptism in the Church. Others have ridiculed the Eucharist and scriptural basis for the ministerial priesthood in the Catholic Church. Some of these challenges have affected the faith of some of their own members and other members of the Catholic Church.

Thus, we have seen some of the activities of the Charismatic Renewal. The organisation has contributed in the field of evangelisation in all Catholic churches. It has led many Christians, especially Catholics, to the study of the scriptures, it has taught many people how to pray, and it has also helped its members to establish a mature relationship with other Christian sects, without jeopardising their faith.

But, on the other hand, some of the members regard themselves as holier than the priests. As a result of this, they challenge the authority of the priest in the church. Some of them emphasise experience more than doctrine, and they try to incorporate experiences that are Pentecostal into the liturgical, doctrinal and ecclesiastical structures of the Catholic Church.
14.4 St. Anthony's Guild

St. Anthony's Guild is a society in the Catholic Church named after Saint Anthony of Padua. Anthony of Padua was a young man named Ferdinand. He was born in 1195 at Lisbon, in Portugal. He was educated in the Cathedral school in Lisbon. At the age of fifteen, he joined the Augustinian Order but left in 1221 to the Franciscan Order. The reason for his departure was the death of five members of the Franciscan Order, who were killed in Morocco in 1220. Because of this, he joined the Franciscan Order, with the hope of shedding his blood for the sake of Christ and becoming a martyr.

During his time he was a famous preacher, who defended the Roman Catholic faith, and a worker of miracles, and was well known throughout the world. He followed the way of Saint Francis, that is, the Franciscan way of humility, simplicity, poverty and prayer. By doing so he became a very great teacher of theology. Among his several works are *Expositio in Psalmos*, *Sermones de Tempore* and the *Sermones de Sanctis*.

In 1231, after his death at the age of 36, the voices of the children in the streets of Padua were heard crying: “Our holy father Anthony is dead.” On May 30, 1232, he was canonized a saint by Pope Gregory IX at Spoleto, in Italy. Since his death, pilgrims go to his tomb for worship because of the numerous miracles reported on his name. He is said to have come to the assistance of the faithful, who have called upon him.

The Irish Reverend Fathers introduced this devotion in the Catholic churches in Nigeria in the 1960's from Dublin. Because of this the association was affiliated to Dublin. Mr. Martin Ogunleye, one of the members of this association, was the promoter of this society in Nigeria. He was given permission from Padua to establish an association in Nigeria. Mr. Martin Ogunleye then formed promoter’s teams in all the archdioceses and dioceses in Nigeria, which enabled all the parishes in various dioceses to form associations of their own. St. Anthony's Guild was then introduced in St. Joseph Catholic Church, Asaba, in the year 1970. This association in Issele-Uku diocese, which Asaba belongs to, is divided into different zones, such as zone A, B and C. The president of the association as of that time was the late

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839 Ibid.
845 Interview with some of the members of St. Anthony's Guild, St. Joseph Catholic Church, Asaba, September 12, 2004.
846 Interview with some of the members of St. Anthony's Guild, St Joseph Catholic Church, Asaba, September 6, 2004.
Clifford Onwudinjo, followed by the late Vincent Umejei. Peter Onyido is the present promoter of the association in charge of Zone A. The association has a constitution, which is binding to every member of the society.

Membership of this association is open to all Catholics. Before a new member is admitted into the association, he or she must have attended prayer meetings every Tuesday consistently for a period of three months. According to Mrs. M. G. Okolie, the functions of the executive committee of the association are as follows:

They are responsible for the initiation of the programme of activities of the Guild. They do everything to achieve the aims and objectives of the society. They protect its funds against extravagance and misappropriation. They submit to the general meeting all measures presented for discussion and ratification.

The aims and objectives of this society, according to the members, are as follows:

Giving devotion to St. Anthony, the wonder worker of Padua. Spreading devotion to St Anthony to all Christians through prayer and teaching and by examples. Assisting orphans, the sick and the poor by praying for them and giving them alms. Co-operating in any manner with all other bodies and organisations whose aims and aspirations agree, or are identical with those of the society; and ultimately participate in all church activities both morally and financially. Giving honour and glory to God, the Holy Family, Angels and Saints by adoring, praising, worshipping and singing.

The association raises funds from subscriptions and voluntary donations by Church members for the activities of the society. The members of the association are entitled to some benefits from the society, for instance, a nine-day novena, or prayer, is held on the request of a member of the association. The society also conducts three days of evening prayers in the event of the death of a member and three days of mass, booked for such members. Apart from this, the association gives presents in cash or kind in cases of childbirth, bereavement, sickness, marriage, or extreme poverty to the members. The executive committee of the association determines the nature and amount of such presents.

847 Information got from Mr. Anthony Eluaka, the public relations officer, St. Anthony's Guild, St. Joseph parish, Asaba, August 18, 2004.
848 Interview with Mrs. M. G. Okolie, the financial secretary, St. Anthony's Guild, St. Joseph parish, Asaba, August 27, 2004.
850 Interview with Mrs. A. Okonji, the provost of St. Anthony's Guild, St. Joseph parish, Asaba, October 10, 2004.
Every year, St. Anthony’s guild conducts special prayers for the Church, nine days of novena, ending on February 15, the feast of the Blessed Tongue of St. Anthony. Then, there are 13 Tuesdays of devotion, which starts on the nearest Tuesday to the 10 of March every year, and nine days novena, which end each year on the 13 of June, the feast of St. Anthony, followed by 13 Tuesdays, or nine days of devotion before Christmas.851

I was privileged to attend the meeting of this association during my fieldwork in Nigeria in 2004. The meeting started with prayers, which were recited in both English and Igbo. Both languages were used throughout the meeting. In front of the members, there was an altar that was decorated with two lighted candles, two small flower vases, a statue of St. Anthony, as well as a framed picture of the Holy Child in the arms of St. Anthony. These lighted candles symbolise the light of Christ. The two small flower vases symbolise beauty, because Saint Anthony of Padua is seen as a wonder worker, who heals the sick, gives sight to the blind, makes the deaf hear, the lame walk and the dumb speak, which is seen as something good or beautiful. The statue of St. Anthony (and a framed picture of the Holy Child in the arms of St. Anthony), symbolises the presence of St. Anthony and Jesus Christ in the midst of the gathering. There was also a small silver bowl on the altar that contained holy water, which symbolises the blessing of Christ in the midst of the people.

There were five men and 20 women present at the meeting. The prayers were led by one of the men, while a second man was in charge of the discussion session. The members were elderly (most were above 50 years of age). After the prayers, all members went to the altar to give offerings. They all made the sign of the cross using the holy water on the altar. Thereafter, the closing prayer was said in Igbo by one of the men. After the closing prayer, one of the women sprinkled everybody present with the Holy Water on the altar.

According to my personal observations, the five men present conducted the meeting principally, even though there were 20 women present. The women mostly listened, and responded to the prayers led by the men. This pointed to my earlier argument of male domination in mixed meetings. The questions we should ask are: Where were the female members? Why was it that the meeting was conducted by the men and not by the majority in the group? The answer to this is still the issue of male domination in mixed meetings. However, the meeting was conducted in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. The meeting format was not rigid, as compared to some of the societies in the Church, like the Legion of Mary, which had a set agenda.

851 Interview with Mr. Onwueme, the assistant secretary, St. Anthony’s Guild, St Joseph parish, Asaba, September 18, 2004.
14.5 St. Jude Society

St. Jude Society is an organisation of lay Catholics, who serve the Church in almost every country of the world. This society was named after Jude Thaddeus, the son of Cleophas, who died as a martyr. The mother of Jude was Mary, who was at the foot of the cross after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and who anointed the body of Christ after his death on the cross. He was the brother of Saint James the Less, who was the nephew of Mary and Joseph, as well as an apostle and blood relative of Jesus Christ. He was an evangelist, who preached in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Persia with his friend Saint Simon. He was a healer, and during his time, he cured many of the sick people, and also performed a lot of miracles.852

After his death, he became a saint and he is worshipped in almost all Catholic churches worldwide. The international center of St Jude devotions is located in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, and thousands of people every year go on pilgrimage to this shrine.853

The devotion to St. Jude started in Nigeria in 1959. A devoted Roman Catholic, Brother Stephen Lucas from Racine in the United States, brought it to Nigeria. Since the introduction of this devotion, it has grown rapidly all over Nigeria. Currently, it has about 480 charters in various parishes all over the country. It also has a national shrine at St. Dominic's Catholic Church in Lagos, which is the headquarters of the society in Nigeria.854

According to their own programme, St. Jude Society has the aims of giving devotion to St. Jude through prayers, spreading the devotion to St. Jude to all Christians through teachings, and to continue St Jude's apostolic work on earth, by co-operating with the Catholic hierarchy in the work of spreading God's word.855 The programme of this society is included in its motto, which are prayer, action and sacrifice.856

Membership of this society is open to all Catholics. There are three types of membership, namely, the individual annual, individual perpetual and the family perpetual. One interesting thing about this society, compared to other organisations in the Catholic Church, is that membership is for either living or deceased. The deceased can be enrolled by their relatives or friends, as members of the society.857

Members of St. Jude Society are engaged in various apostolate works in the parish and in the society. They assist in taking care of young people in various organisations in the parish, help the most wretched and dejected of

853 Ibid., 2.
854 Ibid., 3.
856 Ibid., 5.
857 Interview with Fr. Jude Orazulume, the chaplain St. Jude Society, St. Theresa's parish, Okwe, September 14, 2004.
the population by giving alms to them, and visit the homes of members and other people in the parish for prayers. In addition to this, they encourage vocations to the priesthood, brotherhood and sisterhood by helping parents and relatives to understand the true meaning of a priestly and religious vocation, visit to the sick people and the imprisoned, and promote the practice of daily mass and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. They also give financial assistance to the parish priest, and assist the Church during various activities in the parish, such as thanksgiving ceremonies, bazaars, weddings, etc.\textsuperscript{858}

St. Jude Society was introduced in the Catholic Church in Asaba in 1962, three years after its introduction in Nigeria. In Issele-Uku diocese, which Asaba belongs to, the society is organised both at the diocesan and local levels. The officers of this society are elected once a year, and may be re-elected for only a second term.

The meetings of this society are held weekly, and should last about one hour. The society lays emphasis, not on discussions, but on the Catholic action, which follows from these discussions.

During my fieldwork in 2004, I was present at a meeting of this society. There were 21 women and five men in attendance. The meeting started with an opening song and prayer, before an altar decorated with two lighted candles, two flower vases and an image of St. Jude. The Rosary was recited. This was followed by reading of the minutes of the preceding meeting, and marking of the attendance register by the secretary of the Society. After that, the members of the society gave a report on the corporal works done since the last meeting, and there was a short discussion on it. This was followed by a reading from the Gospel according to John, Chapter one, verses 35-51. During the reading, all the members of the society stood up. This was followed by a report from the president of the society, Barrister Okonkwo, and the treasurer, Mrs. J. Okolie, after which an offering and payment of the weekly subscription by the members was made. The president assigned the work to be done to members, while the secretary of the society, Mrs. M. Onyia, noted each assignment. The members were required to give an account of the work done at the next meeting. The meeting ended with a closing prayer.

According to my observations, also in this case, the women in the society did not participate actively in the discussions during the meeting. Despite the fact that the women held the posts of secretary and treasurer in the society, most of the discussion was still done by the men.

\textsuperscript{858} Interview with Fr. Jude Orazulume, the chaplain of St. Jude Society, St. Theresa's parish, Okwe, September 14, 2004.
14.6 The Legion of Mary

The Legion of Mary is one of the largest apostolic organisations of lay people in the Catholic Church, with more than three million active members in all Catholic churches all over the world. It was founded by Mr. Frank Duff and his group in 1921 in Dublin, Ireland.\textsuperscript{859}

This society is open to all Catholics who practice their Roman Catholic faith, and who are full of desire to participate in the Church's apostolate through membership in the Legion, and also those who are prepared to fulfil all the duties that an active membership in the Legion entails.\textsuperscript{860} The spirit of this organisation is that which has been attributed to Mary herself, thus humility, obedience, purity, sweetness, patience, wisdom, etc.\textsuperscript{861} According to the members:

The aim of this organisation is to bring Mary to the world as a means of winning the world for Jesus Christ, through their apostolate work, both in the Church and in the society, to assist in the spiritual advancement of its members and the general intensification of Catholic life; to lead men and women to Christ, and to contribute, with the Grace of God and the help of Mother Mary, for their conversion, most especially the conversion of non Catholics.\textsuperscript{862}

This association has spread in all the Catholic dioceses all over the world. Presently, it works in more than 1,300 dioceses in five continents.\textsuperscript{863} It has a handbook that is published in 125 languages.\textsuperscript{864} As noted by Onyeocha 1983:

This lay movement is now widespread in Nigeria, especially in Igboland, where it exists almost in every out-station of each parish. Every college and school has one or two units. It is not a family movement and cannot replace the family movement or the Catholic parent's association; nevertheless, it can do very valuable work in preparing Catholic youth for marriage. It very much helps Catholic married people to improve their married and family life on both the natural and supernatural planes.\textsuperscript{865}

The Legion of Mary was one of the lay apostolates that spread very quickly in many villages and towns in Igboland. Father James Moynagh, who was later known as Bishop Moynagh of Calabar, and Father Peadar, introduced this association at Ifuho in Ikot Ekpene Diocese in 1933.\textsuperscript{866} Unlike other

\textsuperscript{859} Onyeocha 1983, 186.
\textsuperscript{860} \textit{The official handbook of the Legion of Mary} 1993, 80.
\textsuperscript{861} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{862} Interview with some of the members of one of the Legion of Mary groups, St. Joseph parish, Asaba, August 1, 2004.
\textsuperscript{863} Onyeocha 1983, 186.
\textsuperscript{864} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{865} Ibid., 186-187.
\textsuperscript{866} Obi 1985, 343.
associations, which were closely related to school apostolate, and which were purely devotional in nature, members of this association “undertook not only the pursuit of personal sanctification but also active proselytization”.

In Asaba, where it was established in 1970, the Legion of Mary has a very large population in the Church today. The majority of the legionaries in St. Joseph parish, Asaba, are within the ages of 20 to 37 years. There are some older ones among them, but they are very few in number.

The legionaries are divided into ten groups. They are under the guidance of a spiritual director, who is the rev. father in charge of the parish. Members of this organisation meet once a week in a family home for prayer, planning and discussion, and also do two hours of apostolic work every week in pairs, under the leadership of their spiritual director. Members also have some duties, which they perform towards Mary, and some of those are devotion to Mary by serious meditations and prayers, the imitation of the humility of Mary through their actions, and devotion to Mary through their apostolic work.

The legionaries also have some other duties, in Church and society as well, including prayers for the Church, door to door evangelisation, prison ministry, visiting of homes in the parish or around the area, in order to establish friendly contacts with Catholic and non-Catholic families, and to help in carrying out spiritual apostolate in these families. In some parishes, the legionaries give marriage instructions in the church. In addition, they are also involved in settling disputes among married couples and counselling those involved in irregular unions. They work in maternity homes, where they care for mothers and their babies. They visit the hospitals, where they comfort the sick people. They pay home visits to the aged, the handicapped, the lonely, and the bereaved. They assist in the cleaning of the church, the rev. father’s house and compound; they carry out the control of motor vehicles within the church premises during mass, the visiting of the newly baptised Catholics in the parish, teaching of catechism in the church and the supervision of the junior praesidium. “They also do all the corporal works of mercy possible in their own different localities, ranging from fetching firewood for the elderly people, mending their mat-roofs, weeding their farms to digging graves for the dead”.

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867 Ibid.
868 Interview with Mr. Christopher Nwaede, the vice-president of one of the Legion of Mary groups, St. Joseph parish, Asaba, August 4, 2004.
869 Interview with Mr. Sunday Ede, one of the members of the Legion of Mary, Asaba, July 24, 2004.
871 Ibid.,.187-188.
872 Interview with Mr. Christopher Nduka, the president of one of the Legion of Mary groups, St. Joseph parish, Asaba, August 8, 2004.
873 Onyeocha 1983, 188.
Before you can become a member of this organisation, the first step is for you to be a guest at the meeting of the Legion of Mary. Guests are always welcome, and are sometimes asked to go on one of the work assignments with an experienced member of the Legion, if they wish. If they decide to join the Legion, they must apply to the praesidium for membership. If the candidates are below 18 years, they can only be admitted in the junior praesidia. No one should be admitted into this organisation until the president of the praesidium, in which admission is asked, has made a proper enquiry, and made sure that the candidate looking for admission fulfils the conditions required by the society. If the candidate meets the requirement, a satisfactory probation of a period of three months is needed on behalf of the candidate, before being admitted to the rank of the legionaries. The formal admission of the candidate includes the taking of the Legionary promise, and the entry of the candidate's name on the membership register of the praesidium.

The Legion of Mary has different levels of meetings within the diocese. There is what is called the Patrician meeting, the Comusium meeting and the Curia. The Patrician meeting is meant for all members in the diocese, irrespective of their group. The Comusium meeting is meant for the executive members of the association. Members may go as observers, but it is not mandatory. It is compulsory for the presidents and the secretaries of the various groups, who then report back to their groups. The Curia is the highest body of the Legion. All the executives of the association meet within the Curia group. A report of the meetings and the activities of each group are presented by their executive at this meeting.

The legionaries also have some rules that guide the association. Discussions during meetings are confidential, and members are not allowed to discuss the topics treated with non-members. Every first week of the month, there are instructions given, reminding members of their duties and obligations to the Legion. The meeting of the association is not supposed to last for more than an hour and thirty minutes.

Apart from this, the legionaries have what they call the legion functions, for a certain period of every year. During this period, the legionaries celebrate the birth of Mary. Such functions are: the annual general reunion, which is attended by all members. Activities such as dancing, singing, etc. are organised during the function. There are also outdoor functions, such as

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874 The Legionary promise, is a kind of oath taken by new members of the Legion of Mary before the members of the society at the final stage of their admission into the organisation.
875 Interview with Mr. Christopher Nduka, the president of one of the Legion of Mary groups, St. Joseph parish, Asaba, August 8, 2004.
876 Interview with Miss Christiana Oramadike, the secretary to one of the Legion of Mary groups, St. Joseph parish, Asaba, August 1, 2004.
877 Interview with Miss Ifeoma Obi, a member of the Legion of Mary, St. Luke’s parish, Kubwa, Abuja, August 19, 2004.
going on excursion, pilgrimages, and also the praesidium functions. In addition to this, the legionaries have activities such as weekend projects, retreats, seminars and workshops. They also have a special way of greeting each other, which is “Glory to Jesus”, with the response “Honour to Mary”, or “Ave”, with the response “Maria”.

During my fieldwork in August 2004, I attended a meeting with the legionaries at St. Joseph parish, Asaba. Before the meeting started, the legionaries sat around a table, at one end of which a small temporary altar was erected. The altar was decorated with two flower vases of the same type with the same kind of flowers, two lighted candles and a statue of Mary placed on a white cloth, with the feet of the statue crushing the head of a serpent. A little to the right of the statue and a little in advance of it was set the vexillum. The two-lighted candles used for decoration at the altar symbolise light, that is, the light of the world. The two flower vases symbolise beauty, because Mary is supposed to love flowers. The white cloth symbolises purity, because Mary is seen as pure. In the statue of Mary, the feet of the statue crush the head of a serpent. This symbolises the defeat of the devil. It also symbolises the presence of Mary at the meeting. The vexillum symbolises the Holy Spirit and the legion of Mary's soldiers.

In attendance at the meeting were 11 persons, comprising seven men and four women. Officers present were the president, who is a male, the vice-president, who is also a male, and the treasurer, who is a female. The meeting was conducted in both Igbo and English.

The meeting commenced with a prayer to the Holy Spirit, followed by a prayer session that included the recitation of the five decades of the rosary. A spiritual reading taken from the legionary handbook followed this. The president of the group did the reading. At the conclusion of the reading, the members made the sign of the cross together. After the reading, the minutes of the last meeting of the society were read by the vice-president of the association, on behalf of the secretary, who was absent. Following the reading, and in the absence of objection or correction, a motion to adopt the minutes was moved by one of the members, and seconded by another. The minutes were then adopted. The president asked if new members were present. There were none. A visitor present was then recognised, and asked to explain her mission, which she did.

After this, the president of the association gave a standing instruction. He talked to the members about regular attendance at the weekly meetings, the importance of the performance of the legionary work and the daily recitation.

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878 Interview with Miss Christiana Oramadike, the secretary to one of the Legion of Mary groups, St. Joseph parish, Asaba, August 1, 2004.
879 Interview with Mr. Christopher Nduka, the president of one of the Legion of Mary groups at St. Joseph parish, Asaba, August 8, 2004.
880 The vexillum is seen by the legionaries as the emblem of the Holy Spirit.
This was followed by the presentation of the statement of accounts by the treasurer, who is a female. This report was not debated, and the president announced that an internal auditor would soon be appointed to go through the accounts of the society.

The next item on the agenda was the report of work. Members were individually called upon to report on assignments given to them. These included home-to-home visits. It was reported that seven homes were visited, and 13 contacts had been made. These included two practising Catholics, one fallen Catholic and ten members of other Christian denominations. Follow-up visits to these initial contacts were planned. Another group of three persons reported on the cleaning of the church the day before.

At this juncture, the reports were stopped, and there was a short prayer session, including the recitation of the Catena with all the members standing. This was followed by a discussion of the earlier reading of the day. The theme was imitation of the humility of Mary, in keeping with the day being Assumption Sunday. There was a secret bag collection, in which all the members contributed according to their means. The meeting was not interrupted for the making of this collection. Thereafter, the reports on assignments continued.

The next topic discussed was the recruitment and care of auxiliaries. These are those unable to assume the duties of active membership, but who associate with the Legion by undertaking a service of prayer in its name. One female auxiliary member was present at the meeting. There was a work reassignment. The handbook study for next week's meeting was given to another member, since the earlier person had not done it. A few announcements were then made, followed by a general discussion session. The president reminded members, who had not done so, to complete their prayers for the success of the new bishop of Issele-Uku diocese, Bishop Michael Elue. The meeting was then adjourned, after a short prayer session. The members during the meeting addressed each other as “brothers” and “sisters”.

Apart from this, some of my observations during the meeting were that the four female members spoke very little, basically only replying to remarks addressed directly to them. The male members did most of the discussion, while the women just listened. This re-emphasises my previous argument in this thesis, that, in mixed meetings, where both men and women are present, members of the male sex dominate the discussions.

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881 The Catena is a prayer said by the legionaries everyday with the Rosary. It is also said at the middle of their meetings.

882 Assumption day is the day during which Catholics commemorate the taking up of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven.
14.7 Infant Jesus Society

The devotion to Infant Jesus of Prague is a devotion to the child Jesus, the son of God. This devotion started in the family of Princess Maria Manriquez de Lara of Spain. During her marriage in 1556, her mother presented her with a beautiful, thinly carved wooden statue coated with wax, about 18 inches high. When she married the Czech Vratislav of Pernstyn, she brought it to Bohemia.883 It was later inherited by her daughter, Princess Polyxena Lobkowitz, who continued to use it for family devotion at home. In 1623, after the death of her husband, she decided to devote her life to good works of charity. She was mainly generous to the Carmelites, who took the vow of poverty.

Wishing to share publicly the divine benefits she had enjoyed through her family devotion, she presented the statue to the Carmelites in Prague in 1628, with these words: I give you what I prize most highly in the world. As long as you venerate this image, you shall not want. So it was. Future events proved her right for, as long as the Divine Infant was venerated, God provided abundant grace both spiritually and temporally for the community. Whenever devotion to the Divine Infancy was relaxed, misfortune befell them.884

During the 30 years war in Europe 1618-1648, the Swedish army of king Gustavus Adolphus invaded Prague, and the monastery of the Carmelites were attacked and plundered, and the monks escaped to Munich in Germany. The monastery was also moved to Munich, and the statue of the Infant Jesus was lost. It was after the war, when the Carmelites moved back to Prague, that Fr. Cyril started the devotion again, and later found the statue of the Infant Jesus in the midst of dust and debris of a broken house in the monastery.885

The devotion to the Infant Jesus of Prague started in Ibadan in Nigeria in 1983. Missionaries, such as members of the Society of African Mission (SMA) and the Our Lady of Apostles sisters, knew about it, and taught Christians and students, who were ready to believe.886 “Most popular in schools from the early thirties to the sixties of this century, was the powerful nine hour novena. Students besought the help of the Divine Infant before and during their examinations”.887 It was mainly a private devotion in many schools and homes until the early 1980's.888 According to Newell 1998:

884 Ibid., 1-2.
885 Ibid., 2-3.
886 Ibid., 6.
887 Ibid., 6-7.
888 Ibid., 7.
In the seventies and eighties, some Nigerians, who while overseas came in contact with the Carmelites in Fayersham, came back with prayer books, Chaplets, medals and statues of the Divine king. Private devotion to the Divine Infant became more wide spread. The society of the Miraculous Infant of Prague as exists elsewhere in the world, began in Nigeria in 1983 when devotees at Ibadan came together and established it there.  

From Ibadan, the Infant Jesus Society spread to the Benin Archdiocese in 1986. “The first of many societies that followed began at St. Joseph's Catholic Church, First East Circular Road, Benin City. Within the same year, five other societies were founded in Benin City alone and many more outside Benin”. At the same time, the devotion spread quickly in many parishes in the Lagos Archdiocese. With the assistance of some of those people who had experienced the miraculous help of Infant Jesus, the first shrine was set up in Benin. “The high-light of the devotion in Nigeria was the organisation of a National Pilgrimage to the shrine in December of 1987. Since then, devotees from all parts of the country go there for pilgrimage every year.” 

With the help of the Jesuit Fathers in charge of St. Joseph's parish in Benin city, the society was given a piece of land behind the shrine of Infant Jesus, and a church for Infant Jesus was built in that place. On the 10 of December 1994, the first mass was conducted in this church, and the Archbishop of Benin Metropolitan See, Most Rev. P. E. Ekpu, dedicated a circular, portable little structure of Infant Jesus to the church. As Newell wrote:

> With the continued help of the Jesuit Fathers and Carmelites based in Enugu and now also of Ekpoma, Edo State, the Infant Jesus chapel has become a place of universal pilgrimage. The devotion that has taken many years to become wide spread in Nigeria has now become a devout practice in many homes and schools. Many devotees have experienced the mercy and presence of the Divine Infant in their hearts and in their homes. Many look forward to the annual pilgrimage with all the blessings attached. It is hoped that within the next decade, more and more believers will get to know and share in the graces of the Divine King. 

This society was started in St. Joseph parish, Asaba, in the year 1987. The members hold their meeting every Sunday at 4.30 p.m., and end at 6.30p.m. Membership in this society is open to people of all ages, including babies and infants. This society is one of the few societies in the Catholic Church

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889 Ibid.
890 Ibid.
891 Ibid.
892 Ibid.
893 Ibid.
894 Ibid.
895 Ibid., 7-8.
896 Ibid., 8.
that allows children to be members. This is because the society believes that “unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven…” (Matthew 18:3). The call in this society is that the members should have a child-like faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This means that they should imitate the innocence of childhood, and have faith in the power and mercy of Infant Jesus, and acknowledge the helplessness of man on earth.

The aims and objectives of this society are, according to the 1987 constitution:

Giving devotion to Infant Jesus through prayers and also spreading of the devotion to Infant Jesus to other Christians through prayers and teachings and by examples; assisting infants and children in the church and in the society by praying for them; assisting the sick, the poor, the orphans and the motherless babies by giving alms to them; co-operating in any manner with all other bodies and organisations in the church.

Members of the Infant Jesus Society, like other societies and organisations in the Catholic Church, assist in various ways in the Church and in the society. Through home visitation, they keep in constant touch with different families in the community, and assist them, most especially in bringing their children close to God, through constant teaching of the word of God. They also assist them in solving some of the problems faced by young Christians in non-Christian areas. They assist mothers and their babies in maternity homes. They also work in the parish by organising children from various organisations, such as the Catholic girls' organisation, Catholic boys’ organisation, Legion of Mary etc.

The regulations and obligations of this society, as noted by Newell, are as follows:

Attendance at Mass: The Holy Eucharist is the centre of worship and members are called upon to attend mass as often as they can, daily if possible. They are expected to participate fully in the Eucharistic celebration. They are expected to make use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation often and so remain close to Jesus all the time. Daily Consecration of self: Every Member is expected to consecrate himself daily to the Infant Jesus. Have on their person the image of the Infant Jesus at all times; Say the Glory Be three times daily, adding the aspiration “Holy Infant Jesus, bless and protect us; Say the “Daily prayer” each day; Say the Angelus at the appropriate time each day; Hold the society meeting weekly if possible or as often as local condition permits; Pray the 16-24 monthly novena; Observe the important feasts of the society,
such as Christ the King, Christmas and feast of the Infant Jesus of Prague, which comes up first Sunday of September every year. Pray the novena preceding major feasts of the society. On meeting one another, members should greet thus, “Praise be to Jesus Christ forever, Amen”. This shall be the universal greeting. Members are encouraged to say frequently the ejaculation: “Holy Infant Jesus, Bless and Protect us”. Vesicle for the Feast and Octave of Christmas: “The Word was made flesh, Alleluia”, and dwelt among us, Alleluia.  

During my fieldwork in 2004, I was present in one of their meetings. Before the commencement of the meeting of this society, the vice-president Mrs. F. N. Okwuobi decorated a small altar with two matched vases of flowers, two lighted candles, and a statue of the Infant Jesus holding in the left hand a sphere, while the right hand was raised. The sphere held at the left hand by the statue of Infant Jesus represents the world, while the right hand was raised, blessing all the people, who were present, at the meeting. The light from candles is the light of Christ shining on the people, while the flowers represent the beauty of heaven. The meeting was conducted in both Igbo and English.

There were 16 members present at the meeting. 15 of them were women and only one man. Most of the women were elderly. The meeting started with prayers. The man led the prayers, while the others responded. The prayers included a recitation of the holy Rosary.

Again, we can see the issue of male domination in this society. It was the only male present at this meeting who led the prayers, while the women responded. He was also the person who led most of the discussions during the meeting, while just some few women took part in these discussions. This again corresponds to my previous argument, that, in mixed gatherings, women behave as if they have lost their right to speak up, because of male domination.

During the meeting, announcements were made by the vice-president. Some of the announcements were exhortations to the members that they should pay one hundred naira as monthly dues, and that they should donate money for the building of the church. The meeting was conducted in a relaxed atmosphere and there was free interaction among the members.

The society also has six patrons, who are chosen by the members. Members greet each other by saying “Holy Infant Jesus”.

During the meeting, the members sang many songs from the society's handbook. There was also an offering, which was collected by the secretary of the association, toward the end of the meeting. Before closing, all the members joined in reciting some more prayers.

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902 The sphere is a golden globe, with a cross on top.
14.8 The Associations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

The Sacred Heart of Jesus devotion is very old in the history of the Church. This devotion became more prominent in the early 17th century, during the period of St. John Eudes, who was the founder of the cults of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. In order to establish the worship of these cults, and to spread them all over the world, God chose St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, the humble virgin from the Order of Visitatio. In 1673, in 1674, and in 1675, during the Octave of Corpus Christi, Jesus Christ appeared to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. Again, at Paray-le-Monial in France, Jesus Christ appeared to her, and asked her to spread the Feast of the Sacred Heart. Pointing to his heart, Jesus Christ said:

Behold this Heart, which has so loved Men that it has spared nothing to testify its love for them, even to the exhausting and consuming of itself for their sake. But in return for this I receive nothing from the generality of mankind but ingratitude through the contempt, irreverences, sacrileges and coldness with which I am treated in the Sacrament of Love.

He asked St. Margaret to spread the devotion of the Sacred Heart to the faithful, in order to encourage them to receive the Holy Communion “in reparation for the offences and indifferences of men, and to offer themselves in consecration to His Sacred Heart”. Since then, the devotion to the Sacred Heart has spread all over the world, from one country to the other.

The introduction of these devotions was, however, met with certain opposition from different groups such as the Jansenists, some priests, bishops, and, for some time, from the Austrian Government. The members called on the pope at that time to give approval of the devotions, but the call was refused from Rome. Some 20 years later, during the time of the pontificate of Benedict XII, there was a call again throughout the Christian world about the approval of these cults in the Church, but this call was again turned down, and the cults kept spreading. It was not until 1765 that the request for approval was finally granted from Rome.

After this, Father Mateo, a young Catholic priest, assisted in the spread of the devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary. He helped to introduce these devotions in various homes all over the world. As pointed out in the Prayer book of the Associations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary 1985:

903 Prayer book of the association of Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary, 1985, 3.
904 Ibid.
905 Ibid., 3-4.
906 Ibid., 4.
907 Ibid., 4 -5.
Besides the crusade of the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in homes and institutions, he founded the still popular “Night Adoration in the Home”(a monthly home Holy Hour), “Apostolate of Suffering” for the Reign of the Sacred Heart, the League of Tarcisians (junior missionaries of the Sacred Heart), and hundreds of apostolic enthronement centers wherever he preached - many of which are still functioning.\textsuperscript{908}

In September 1971, Father Francis Larkin, SSCC, and the successor of Father Mateo brought the devotions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary to Nigeria. During his visit, he was accompanied by Mr. Dominic Abatan, the number one African promoter of the devotions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. He visited Nigeria again, in 1973 and 1978.\textsuperscript{909} During this period, he told Catholics about the importance of the enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the homes and families, and about the significance of God's love for family life.\textsuperscript{910}

The Associations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary are organised nationwide in Nigeria, with the permanent headquarters located at Regina Mundi Catholic Church, Mushin, Lagos.\textsuperscript{911}

Mr. L. C. N. Olisa started these associations in 1987 in St. Joseph Parish, Asaba, together with some members of St. Jude Society and former members of the Apostleship of prayer. Within the first two years, the number of members in this association had risen to 40, which were made up of 35 women and five men.\textsuperscript{912} Mr. L. C. N. Olisa became the first president of the association. But in May 1990, he left Asaba, and Sister M. B. N. Ojido became the president of the society. During her term of office, there was a rapid growth of the society. After her term in office, Sister Beatrice Izegbu became the next president. But after some time, this society suffered a setback, with the deaths of nine members and the departure of about 35 members.\textsuperscript{913}

The aims and objectives of these associations, according to the 1999 constitution, are:

To propagate the social reign of the Sacred Heart of Jesus by helping the faithful to live a life of prayer and love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary, and to achieve Christian perfection. To encourage and promote perpetual adoration and enthronement of the Sacred Heart of Je-

\textsuperscript{908} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{909} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{910} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{911} Interview with Mrs. Mary Ann Nwandu, the secretary of the Associations of Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary, St. Joseph parish, Asaba, September 27, 2004.
\textsuperscript{912} Interview with Mr. Tas Iwelu, former president St. Joseph local council of the Associations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary, Asaba, September 30, 2004.
\textsuperscript{913} Interview with Mrs. Mary Ann Nwandu, the secretary of the Associations of Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary, St. Joseph parish, Asaba, September 27, 2004.
sus into homes of the members so that they may repay His great love with gratitude, render Him love for love, strive to please Him by an exemplary Catholic life. Entrust all their cares to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary both for their spiritual and material needs. To give moral and financial support to the training of Seminarians, the League of Tarcisians of the Sacred Heart ("the Youth Wing" and "the Benjamin's" i.e. infants).914

Membership in these associations is open to those Catholics who are prepared to enthrone the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary in their homes. In these associations, there are four types of membership: The intending member, the associate member, the enthronement member and the solemnly admitted member. The "intending member" is a new member, who is willing to join the association, the "associate member" is a member, who is already enrolled as a member of the association, the "enthronement member" is a member, who has enthroned the Sacred Heart of Jesus in his or her home, while the "solemnly admitted member" is a member, who has been invested with the scapular and medal of the association. Solemn admission is done once a year in each diocese, usually by the bishop of the diocese. Each member takes an admission vow, and receives a certificate of solemn admission. Before an intending member is allowed to join the association, the member is interviewed by the executives, and accepted, if found suitable. An intending member must attend twelve consecutive meetings before being enrolled as an associate member. An enthronement member is entitled to receive the constitution of the association.915

Apart from this, enthronement can only be done in a home, if the marriage is a valid one, recognised by the Catholic Church, or if one of the parents is an active Catholic, and if the family have the general intention of doing God's will. One significant thing about these associations is that the dead members are dressed in their uniform, scapular and medal for burial as a mark of respect.916

The Associations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary have their own officers, just like the other associations in the Catholic Church. The officers are elected for three years in the first instance, and may be re-elected for another three years, making a total of six years. The associations have officers at the local, diocesan, provincial and national levels.

I had the opportunity to attend the meeting of these associations in St. Joseph parish, Asaba, during my fieldwork in July 2004. This meeting was conducted both in Igbo and English. During the meeting, all members participated freely in the discussions. The atmosphere was very relaxed and

914 The Associations of Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary constitution 1999, 2.
915 Ibid., 3.
916 Ibid.
interactive. Each member wishing to speak would stand up and say “Glory to Jesus”, and the congregation would respond “ Honour to Mary”.

The meeting started with a song from their hymnbook. This was followed by the recitation of prayers. This included a complete recitation of all five decades of the Holy Rosary. During the prayers, one member read the prayers, while the congregation responded. A different member led each prayer. There were 33 members in attendance, made up of four men and 29, women. Most of the women were married, with their ages ranging from the late 20’s to the mid-50’s. The men were much older, their ages ranging from 50’s to the 80’s. All the members were casually dressed and all the women covered their hair.

There was an offering collection among the members. A bag was passed from one member to the other, with each one putting in some money. An attendance register was also passed round by the president, Mrs B. I. Okolo. All the members present signed the register. This was done after the prayers. After that, the secretary of the association made some announcements. These included a reminder to all members to attend a meeting coming up the following week at Ogwashi-Uku. She called on members, who had not done so, to pay for their uniforms that would be supplied from Lagos. Members were also told to be present next Thursday for a visit to Mrs. Okolotu, who would be having her enthronement offering.

The secretary also invited the members to decide on how much each member should contribute to assist the seminarian, who had been with them for some time, but who would be leaving in the next three weeks. After a debate, it was agreed that each member should contribute two hundred naira. She also reminded members to pay their monthly dues, and the contribution for renovation of the reverend father’s house.

Finally, the secretary invited new members to stand up and introduce themselves. Two women stood up and did so. The secretary told the new members that they had to attend the meetings consecutively for weeks before becoming full members. She pointed out that if any meeting during this probationary period was missed, it would void the previous attendance, and the new member would have to start afresh. The meeting ended with a prayer from the president of the association.

During the meeting it was also observed, that although all the members participated freely in the discussions, most of the discussions were initiated by the men.
14.9 Comparison between the different Catholic organisations

In this section of the book, a comparison between Catholic organisations has been made. For these organisations, information was obtained from the literature, as well as through interviews with leaders of these organisations, as seen above. On the surface, all these organisations have the same goals, but a comparison will be made in Table 3, below, to show the differences between them.

Table 3. Comparison between the different Catholic organisations.

| Origin of these organisations | Some organisations in the Catholic Church, such as St. Jude Society, St. Anthony's Guild, Legion of Mary, Infant Jesus Society, the associations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, started in Europe, while others, like Catholic Women Organisation, St. Theresa Women's Society, Christian Mothers, the Catholic Laity Council and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, are indigenous organisations which started in Nigeria. |
| Membership structure | Some of these organisations, like the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the St. Anthony's Guild, the Legion of Mary and the associations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, are open to all Catholics, both male and female. Some dual-sex organisations, such as St. Theresa Women's Society, are open to all women in the Church, while some others have more restricted membership. For instance, only married women can belong to the Catholic Women Organisation, while only those who are married and wedded in the Catholic Church can be members of the Christian Mothers. Similarly, the Infant Jesus Society admits both adults and infants, while the St. Jude Society enrols males, females and even dead members of the parish. |
| Roles in the church | The organisations in the Catholic Church have religious, social, political, economic and moral roles. However, their emphasis differs. Thus, organisations like the St. Jude Society, the St. Anthony's Guild, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the Legion of Mary, the Infant Jesus Society, the Christian Mothers and the Associations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, have primarily religious, social, economic and moral roles, and no political roles, while others, such as the Catholic Women Organisation, St. Theresa Women's Society and the Catholic Laity Council, have important religious, social, economic, political and moral roles in the Church. |
| Constitution | Some organisations, for instance the Catholic Women Organisation, the St. Theresa Women's Society, the Christian Mothers, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the Catholic Laity Council, |
the St. Anthony's Guild, the Legion of Mary, the Infant Jesus Society and the Associations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, have detailed constitutions, while others, like St. Jude Society, do not have any formal constitution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership structure</th>
<th>All the societies are democratic, and elect their executives. However, their duration in office differs, as some serve for one, two, or three years, some can be re-elected several times, while others can only serve for a maximum of two terms.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National operations</td>
<td>All these organisations operate nationally, and can be found in every parish all over the country. Most of them hold annual general meetings, at which national officers are elected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oversight functions</td>
<td>Some organisations, such as the Catholic Women Organisation and the Christian Mothers, have oversight functions. These organisations act as watch dogs in various parishes in Nigeria, and monitor the activities of other organisations in the Church. Others, like St. Theresa Women's Society, the Catholic Laity Council, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the St. Anthony's Guild, the St. Jude Society, the Legion of Mary, the Infant Jesus Society, the Associations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, etc., have no influence outside their organisations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14.10 Conclusion

From the descriptions in this chapter, we have seen the various mixed organisations that were introduced in the Catholic Church in Igboland. Some of these mixed organisations, such as St. Anthony's Guild, St. Jude Society, the Legion of Mary, etc. were societies that started in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. We can see from the history of these societies that they were developed in Europe where there was a different ideology as compared with eastern Nigeria. This might be a reason why there are few members in these societies compared to the single sex societies, where there are more members. However, the mixed organisations are few within the Catholic Church in Igboland compared to the dual–sex organisations, since the Catholics have an old rule that missionaries should adapt to the local customs of any people they visit. This implies that, in the Igbo context, there are many associations for only women, in the Catholic Church as well as in the traditional society. As we shall see in the next chapter, the CMS missionaries have not followed any of the rules of the “traditional” society. While the colonial administration only considered male organisational leaders for the introduction of indirect rule, the CMS missionaries chose the institutional organisations for the two sexes to be present simultaneously in the same associations. This was completely different from the traditional parallel organisation, and, due to
the customary rule of male domination in mixed meetings; the women lost their traditional freedom of being able to express themselves, in their own voices. Due to the male bias of public speech rights in mixed meetings, the women became “muted”.

However, I would say that these mixed organisations, which were introduced with the advent of the missionaries and the colonial administration, may be seen as a means which the missionaries used to control the power of the Igbo women in the traditional society. With the mixed meetings, the missionaries gave the Igbo men the power to dominate the women, and, through this, the Igbo women lost their former freedom of being able to express themselves in the traditional society.

I have also compared, in the tables above, the various Christian organisations in the Catholic Church, through the origins of these organisations, membership structure, and roles in the Church, constitutions, leadership structure, national operations and oversight functions.
From the late fifteenth to the late eighteenth centuries, the Christian faith experienced a rapid expansion all over the world. Before this period, Christianity was mainly spread in Europe. The Roman Catholic Church was the only Church at that time, and the Catholic mass was mainly said in Latin. But with the reformation of Martin Luther (1483-1546), which was based on the ideas of “the freedom of the Christian”, or “liberty”, the Protestants broke away from the Roman Catholic Church, and formed their own church. Martin Luther wanted to have a less authoritarian church, where preaching and masses would not be in Latin, but in the languages of ordinary people. This was in a way an attempt to adapt the Church to the culture of everyday life of ordinary people, in northern Europe. The culture in northern Europe was more egalitarian than the culture of southern Europe and more individualistic as well. From this point of view, it is all the more surprising that the Protestant church has been shown to pay less attention to local customs than the Catholic Church, wherever they have sent missionaries to overseas regions.

The strategies of the Protestant and the Catholic missions have differed in many cultural regions outside Nigeria. Whereas the Catholics have had an outspoken strategy of adaptation to indigenous cultures - particularly expressed after the Second Vatican consilium in the 1960's, - the Protestant Churches have had no such outspoken policy. They seem to just assume that since man is the same all over the world, culture is probably the same as well. This attitude has had particularly negative results in societies that differ very much from those impregnated with the north European, egalitarian, individualistic cultures.

Whether the Anglican Church, which is the mother church of CMS, used to regard itself as half-Catholic or opposed to the Catholic Church in this respect is not clear from the 19th century sources. What is clear, however, is that the Anglican Church used to send its missionaries as a support to the political, economic, and also ideological impact of the British Empire.

917 Verstraelen, 1995,213.
918 See Macfarlane 1979.
Thus, when the CMS began its mission in Nigeria in the 1850's, its missionaries used to work with the colonial power (thus Great Britain) as its protector, and, like the colonial power, the CMS was working with the same kind of ideological background as the country that had sent them. This implies that the CMS was working with the same guidelines as England, which belonged to northern Europe - no matter whether the Anglican Church wished to be seen as Catholic or non-Catholic.

As a result, the CMS missions in Nigeria started education of children according to the same model as in England, that is, in schools, where boys and girls were in separate schools. On the other hand, the CMS missionaries did not have any strategy for adaptation to indigenous cultures. Irrespective of how the society was organised, the CMS missionaries arranged for mixed associations among adult people everywhere, just like in England.

More than 350 years after the reformation, there was a call by Pope Pius IX for the First Vatican Ecumenical Council held from December 8, 1869, to October 20, 1870, in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. This meeting was attended by all the bishops and priests from all the Catholic churches all over the world, and by many representatives of the Protestant churches as well. The motives behind this meeting were to construct a defence against the growing influences of “enlightenment” in Europe, modernity, liberalism etc., and also for the Roman Catholics to try to make some changes in the Church. But, due to the Franco-Prussian war, this council ended earlier, before the participants had finished all discussions and reached a general agreement.919

In 1962, Pope John XXIII called the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council in Rome, which ended during the time of Pope Paul VI, in 1965. During this meeting, discussions were held on issues such as “adaptation and renewal of religious life, declaration on religious freedom, guide-lines on religious relations with the Jews”, 920 “dogmatic constitution on the divine revelation, declaration on the relation of the church to non-Christian religions, declaration on Christian education, decree on the training of priests”, etc.921 As noted in the Vatican 11 Document in 1965, “the traditions of each Church should be preserved intact, while adapting itself to the different necessities of time and place. In each Church the rights and privileges of patriarchs must be preserved and, where necessary, restored”.922

Also, in 1969, at the meeting of the Africa bishops in Kampala, Pope Paul VI declared: “You may, and you must have an African Christianity”.923

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919 The document of the First Vatican Ecumenical Council, December 8, 1869 to October 20, 1870.
923 Onaiyekan 1985, 5.
result of this, during the 1974 Roman Synod on Evangelisation, the African bishops called for the theology of adaptation and incarnation in the Roman Catholic churches in Africa.\footnote{Ibid.} Because of this, the Catholic churches in Nigeria started adapting to the indigenous culture of the people they had brought the gospel to. In regard to this, certain indigenous customs were introduced in the Catholic churches in Asaba. As noted by Otteh 2003, the former bishop of Issele-Uku diocese, which Asaba belongs to, regarding the \textit{Alo} title-taking:

The Catholic who is to take Alo title will pay the required sum of money, which will be distributed to those who are entitled to it. No part of this money is to be set-aside for any deity or spirit or deceased ancestor. If this has been part of the tradition it must now be ruled out. No pagan sacrifice of any kind will be offered either by the person taking the title directly or by proxy or any other way possible. The sacrifice of the Mass may be offered for the person taking the title. There may be a feast to celebrate the occasion, but no food that is offered in sacrifice will be allowed at the feast, and no part of the food will be left for any idol. The Alo, staff, symbol of office, and other tools and regalia of office, be blessed with holy water, and must not touch any idol or shrine, such as the “Ikenga”. Dancing to any shrine is forbidden, but dancing as merriment is allowed. The purification rite at the initial stages of the title should give way to blessing of the titled man with holy water. The Alo titled man is to be given a purely Christian burial.\footnote{Otteh 2003, 12-13. See also Gbui 1984, for further information on this.}

In addition to this, the theology of incarnation was also introduced in the Roman Catholic churches in Nigeria, where the image of God was introduced into African Christianity. The Church in Igboland is seen as “the family of God”, \textit{Ujamaa}, as stated by Onwubiko 2001, in his book \textit{The Church in Mission in the light of Ecclesia in Africa}, where he discussed the Church in relation with the concept of familyhood in Igbo community.\footnote{See Onwubiko 2001, 1-166.}

As already mentioned in part two of this thesis, on 1 November, 1884, a Treaty was signed by Consul Edward Hyde Hewitt Esq., a representative of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom, and the Asaba chiefs.\footnote{Osadebay 1984, 11.}

The Treaty provided, among other things, that all Ministers of Christian religion shall be permitted to reside and exercise their callings within the territories of the aforesaid Kings, Queen and Chiefs who thereby guaranteed to all Missionaries full protection. All forms of Christian religious worship and religious observances were allowed within the domains of the aforesaid Kings, Queen and chiefs and these undertook never to offer any hindrance thereto. With the establishment in 1886 of a Government over the territory stretching from Southern to Northern Nigeria with its capital at Asaba, by the Royal Ni-
ger Company, a British chartered trading company, the protection of European and other Missionaries was reassured.928

In July, 1875, nine years before the signing of the above-mentioned treaty, the CMS missionaries of the Anglican denomination brought Christianity to Asaba.929 At the initial time of their arrival, there was opposition from several groups, such as the titled men (ndi eze), the native doctors, or ndi dibia, and the Otu Omu against the missionaries, because of the introduction of the new religion.930 But in spite of these initial obstacles, the CMS missionaries continued in Asaba. Since then, Christianity has existed for more than one hundred years without any hindrance. So, the “Anglicans were the first Christians to establish a church at Asaba”.931 When the mission arrived, it settled at the bank of the river Niger, at a place named the Niger Company Beach, now called the John Holt Beach. These groups of missionaries were Europeans, West Indians and Sierra-Leoneans.932 As noted by Osadebay:

There they erected a thatched house for worship, from where they went into the town for evangelisation. During the course of their evangelisation, Obi Igweli, a Red Cap Chief of Umunkwo Umuezei quarters in Asaba, was converted, with his household.933

The next group of missionaries who came to Asaba were the Roman Catholics.934 As their converts increased in number, the CMS missionaries saw the need for a new church building. Seeing this need, Thomas Nwanukwu gave them a piece of land at Umuaji quarters, Asaba, in 1880, where we today find the building Holy Trinity Church, Asaba”.935

Earlier, in 1857, before the CMS came to Asaba, as also seen in part two, the CMS mission headquarters was established in Onitsha. But twenty years later, there was a dispute between the missionaries and the Onitsha people. “This dispute arose from the natives discovering that there was a woman who gave birth to twins. This was forbidden under native law and custom and the natives sought to kill the woman and the twin babies, but the Missionaries protested against this”.936 As a result of this event, the CMS missionaries removed their headquarters from Onitsha to Asaba in 1879.937 “At about the same time, the inhabitants of Onitsha looted a British factory in the town. As a punitive action, the Royal Niger Company forces shelled Onit-
sha, and removed the factory to Asaba, where the Company's troops were stationed”. The CMS mission activities then spread from Asaba to other neighbouring towns, such as Oko, Osemele, Atuma, Idumuje-Ugboko, Akwukwu, Onitsha-Olona, Ubulu-Uku, Ogwashi-Uku, Ezi, Owa, Agbor, etc. As the CMS missionaries moved hinterland, the Roman Catholic missionaries also expanded to such areas as Issele-Uku in 1894, and to Ibusa, Illah, Ebu, Ezi and Okpanam in 1898.

Among the CMS converts in Asaba at that period were Lazarus Odibosa Onyia, Thomas Nwanukwu, Obi James Odiwe, Obimgbo, Nkadi Monu, Pa Elijah, Obi Onyebobi, Enoch Obiechie and Samson Onwudiachi. The CMS church in Asaba at this time was under the supervision of Rev. H. Dobinson, while Mr. Hugh S. Macaulay, a Sierra-Leonean, was the headmaster of CMS primary school in Asaba. This mission also built a secondary school and a parsonage. Some of the important personalities, who attended this school, were Obed Azikiwe, the father of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the former Nigeria president at the first republic, Obi Oputa (King of Aboh), Isaac Mba, the former Honourable Member of the Legislative Council of Nigeria etc.

As Osadebay observes:

The church's work of evangelism had a glorious impact on the people between 1875 and 1890. By 1894 Lazarus Odibosa Onyia had gone to Akwukwu as the first resident catechist and opened the CMS station at Ogbedida village. He also began a primary school there. Obimgbo was posted to Atuma on the same basis. Later Lazarus Odibosa onyia was transferred to Holy Trinity Church Asaba where in addition to his other duties he opened night schools in the five quarters of Asaba Town. Between 1895 and 1896, Nkadi Monu opened the first CMS post at Onicha-Olona. In 1890, the CMS report from Onitsha put the population of Asaba at 16,000 (sixteen thousand) with a congregation of about 300 Christians among whom were 12 communicants.

The first Asaba native, who was ordained a priest by the CMS at St. Andrew's Church, Obosi, was Mr. Andrew N. Asiekwu. He was ordained on the 25 of January 1920 on the Feast of Conversion of St. Paul, by the Rt. Rev. Herbert Tugwell, DD. The old Holy Trinity Church in Asaba, which was built by the CMS, was dedicated by the retired Rev. Bertram Lasbrey DD, the bishop on the Niger, 1922-1945. Since 1922, the Holy Trinity Church has produced many catechists, clergymen and teachers. Some of those were Archdeacon P. E. I. Nwabuoku, 1972, Rev. R. C. Molokwu, 1957, Rev.

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938 Ibid., 12.
939 Ibid.
940 Odogwu 2003, 64.
942 Ibid., 13.
943 Ibid., 13-14.
944 Osadebay 1984, 14.

After some years, another CMS church, called All Saints Cathedral, was built at Cable Point, Asaba, by Archdeacon B. C. E. Nwosu, on a piece of land donated to the mission by the Umuezei family of Asaba.946 In 1972, this church was rebuilt, and made a cathedral. Some of the people, who assisted in the rebuilding of the church, and made sure it was completed in time, were Dr. N. O. Azinge, who later became a canon, and Mr. Ben Azinge.947 “Rev. B. C. E. Nwosu, who was the first clergyman to live at All Saints' Cable Point, named the church All Saints', because, in the ancient days, the kings of Asaba were buried in that land”.948

As already mentioned in part two, in 1962, the Anglican Girls Grammar School, Asaba, was established by Rev. P. O. Egolum. That was the first girls' secondary school built by the CMS in Asaba.949 The first principal of this school was a British missionary named Miss M. Backhouse.950 The missionaries also built a CMS primary school.951 As noted by Osadebay 1984:

In 1920 the primary school was reduced from the old Standard Six to Standard Two in the days of catechist R. N. Chiejina. Standard Six was restored when some old boys of the school returned home on retirement as pensioners from various parts of Nigeria. They took the challenge and volunteered to contribute the salaries of the teachers. Pupils were borrowed from the Roman Catholic Mission School to start the upper arms of the school. People like Mr. H. O. Okolo and Martin Nwaogalanya were among the pupils who started the session. The school later became a full-fledged primary school and came under the Bendel State Government when the Government took over all the schools in the State.952

Apart from the CMS primary school, another school was also established by the CMS mission, the All Saints primary school Cable Point, Asaba. The CMS missionaries also “joined the Methodists, the Presbyterians and the Baptist churches operating outside the area to establish the Rural Training Centre (R.T.C.) Anwai in 1943 with Rev. Kenneth H. Prior, a Canadian, as its first Principal”953. In this school, the missionaries taught the students various agricultural methods, such as the use of ploughing for improvement of agricultural production, while the missionaries were engaged in propagating the gospel.954

945 Ibid.
946 Ibid., 16
947 Ibid.
948 Ibid.
949 Ibid.
950 Ibid., 17.
951 Ibid., 13.
952 Ibid., 17.
953 Ibid.
954 Interview with Ogbueshi Akunwata S. A. Okocha, of Umuezei quarters Asaba, July
In 1976, the Rural Training Centre (R.T.C.) in Anwai was changed to a school of agriculture. This happened when the government took over the schools in Nigeria. Presently, it is part of Delta State University, Asaba Campus.

“In 1944, on the instruction of the Most Rev. William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury, ten bishops from the Diocese of West Africa met in Lagos to consider the formation of an Anglican Province of West Africa”. After much discussion on this issue, they all agreed to approve the project, because it was a good way of developing the Anglican Church in West Africa. So, at this meeting, the former dioceses that were created, such as the Diocese of Niger, Sierra Leone, Gambia and Accra, united to form the Anglican Province of West Africa, with the Rt. Rev. L. G. Vining as its first archbishop.

During that period, Nigeria was divided into three regions, the Northern, Eastern and the Western Regions. The Western Region included the Provinces of Benin and Warri, which were later, changed to Delta Province, and Asaba was part of the Benin Province. Some of the Anglican Churches at this time were under the Niger Diocese with the headquarters at Onitsha, which was part of the Eastern Region, while some were in Ondo-Benin Diocese, which was part of the Western Region.

On January 3, 1962, all the Anglican Churches in Benin and Delta Provinces, which were under the Niger and Ondo-Benin Dioceses, were brought together to form the Benin Diocese. The first bishop of the diocese was Bishop Agori Iwe, who was from the Delta Province. From the recently created Benin Diocese, Asaba archdeaconry was created. It comprises churches from Oshimili, Aniocha, Ika, Ndokwa, and part of Orhimwon, all of which are Local Government Areas. The archdeaconry of Asaba was later split into three different parts, with the Archdeacons placed at Asaba, Obiaruku, and Agbor. Archdeacon C. A. Echenim was placed at Obiaruku; Archdeacon A. O. Ifeadi was in Asaba, while Archdeacon G. I. Kerry was in Agbor.

In 1979, Archdeacon G. I. Kerry retired from service, and, in 1979, Archdeacon C. A. Echenim also retired. With the retirement of these men, a new set of people took over the administration of the archdeaconries. Archdeacon E. C. Udowyu was in Asaba archdeaconry with the Holy Trinity church Asaba as the headquarters. Archdeacon A. O. Ifeadi was in Ndokwa arch-

955 Osadebay 1984, 17.
956 See Odogwu 2003, 62.
957 Osadebay 1984, 17.
958 Ibid.
959 Ibid., 18.
960 Ibid.
deaconry with Obiaruku as the headquarters, while Archdeacon J. L. A. Idume was in Ika archdeaconry with Agbor as the headquarters.\textsuperscript{961}

Ten years after the creation of Benin Diocese, Christians from the Anglican Churches in the Province requested that the diocese should be divided into three parts, Asaba, Warri and Benin dioceses. (For effective administration and evangelisation.) After the request, planning committees were set up in the three areas, with the support of Bishop Agori Iwe. The request was then forwarded to the archbishop of West Africa and the Provincial Standing Committee for approval.\textsuperscript{962}

In 1977, the archbishop of the Anglican Province of West Africa, Rev. M. N. C. O. Scott, divided the Diocese of Benin into three parts, the Asaba, Warri and Benin Dioceses. With the creation of the dioceses, in August 6, 1977, Archdeacon R. N. C. Nwosu, the former bishop of Enugu Diocese, was appointed the first bishop of the Asaba Diocese.\textsuperscript{963} The headquarters of Asaba Diocese, and the seat of the Bishop, are placed at All Saints' Church Cable Point, Asaba.\textsuperscript{964}

There were many churches that were created by the CMS in Asaba Diocese. Some of these churches were All Saints' Cathedral Asaba, St Stephen's Ugbolu, Emmanuel Church Ibusa, St. John's Church Okogbele etc.\textsuperscript{965} According to Osadebay:


In 1979, the Anglican Church in Nigeria separated from the Anglican Province of West Africa to form a new province, called the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion). The first Anglican archbishop of Nigeria was Rev. R. O. Olufosoye, the bishop of Ibadan. On the 24th of February 1979, on the feast of St. Mathias, at the Cathedral Church of Christ, in Lagos, the Anglican Church of Nigeria was inaugurated.\textsuperscript{967}

\textsuperscript{961} Ibid., 18-19.  
\textsuperscript{962} Ibid., 19.  
\textsuperscript{963} Ibid. 20.  
\textsuperscript{964} Ibid., 18-19.  
\textsuperscript{965} Ibid., 23.  
\textsuperscript{966} Ibid., 24.  
\textsuperscript{967} Ibid.
In 1982, the archbishop of Canterbury and the spiritual head of the Anglican Communion, Rev. Robert Runcie, came to Nigeria. During this trip, on April 23, 1982, he visited Asaba, and celebrated a service at All Saints' Cathedral, and also met with some of the representatives of Asaba Anglican Diocese and some traditional rulers. The first archbishop of the Anglican Communion in Nigeria, Rev. Dr. T. O. Olufosoye, was also present at Asaba during the visit. He addressed on the 23 and 26 of June 1984, the representatives of the Asaba Anglican Diocese. Archbishop Runcie visited Nigeria again in 1984, where he headed the meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council (A.C.C.), which took place at Topo, in Badagry, in Lagos state.968

When the CMS and the Catholic missionaries came to Igboland, they adopted different strategies in the conversion of the people. Part of the strategy used by the CMS missionaries in Igbo society, most especially in Asaba, was conversion through the indigenous chiefs such as the Obi. They first got in touch with these chiefs, and tried to gain their favour so that they would not forbid them from introducing the new religion. Through them they were able to reach the other indigenous people. The same thing happened with Obi Igweli of Umuezei quarters, whom the CMS missionaries first converted. Through him they were able to convert the other indigenous people. According to Osadebay, 1984:

His conversion led to the Missionaries leaving their first premises and going to Obi Igweli’s compound. The piece of land he gave them at Umunkwo was where they built their next church. From there they carried the Gospel into the town.969

Apart from this, the CMS missionaries at that period also believed in collective conversion through the reading and teaching from the Bible, unlike their Roman Catholic colleagues, like Monsignor Zappa and his team, who believed in individual conversion, after visiting people in their homes, and by asking them to accept the new religion.970

Another strategy used by the CMS missionaries in their work of evangelisation in Igboland was the establishment of educational institutions. At first, Sunday schools were started, while primary schools were also established for children. The CMS missionaries saw education as a cardinal point in their evangelisation policy, for they believed that if the Bible was to be understood, it must not only be read but also be read in the local language. This was clearly accepted by the CMS authorities, which, as early as 1878, established a primary school at Asaba.971 The issue of the use of local languages in

968 Ibid.
969 Ibid.
970 Interview with Mrs. Rose Okotcha, a member of the Holy Trinity Church, Asaba, July 8, 2004.
971 Enenmoh 2001, 238.
the churches was also one of the major points of Martin Luther's reformation of 1483-1546, where he called on the pope and the Roman Catholic Church for a change of policy concerning the freedom of Christians, individuals, etc. So when the CMS missionaries came to Asaba, they built many schools in Asaba, in order to use them for their work of evangelisation, unlike the Roman Catholic missionaries of that time, who were not of the same opinion. People like Monsignor Zappa were against the method of evangelisation through education. It was much later that the Roman Catholic missionaries accepted the use of this method, and started building schools in Asaba.

Further, the CMS missionaries initially introduced mixed organisational structures in the CMS churches in Asaba for an effective study of the Bible, but this organisational structure had a too great effect on the freeborn women in Asaba to be accepted, because it made them lose their previous power of being able to express themselves in the dual-sex organisations of the traditional society.

In 1927, Madam Rhoda Asiekwu, the daughter of Rev. Andrew N. Asiekwu, formed, together with the female members of the Holy Trinity church, an organisation called *Ekpele-eke*, which held prayer meetings on Thursdays, and which also catered for the welfare of the women in the parish.\(^{972}\)

According to Mrs. Mordi, it was as a result of the negative effect of the introduction of mixed organisations in the Holy Trinity Church in Asaba that Madam Rhoda Asiekwu introduced the *Ekpele-eke* organisation for women in the church, in order to help them to be able to express themselves during prayer meetings.\(^{973}\) The CMS missionaries' introduction of mixed organisations in the Anglican Churches in Asaba thus had a negative effect on the freeborn women.

Another strategy used by the CMS missionaries at that period was the establishment of agricultural centres, which were used as centres of teaching and spreading of the gospel. Through these schools, some indigenous people were converted to Christianity.\(^{974}\)

With the arrival of the Roman Catholics in 1888, Monsignor Zappa and his team began to work in Asaba. At the beginning, it was very difficult for the missionaries to carry out their work of evangelisation effectively. This was as a result of certain obstacles, the most important of which was the problem of communication. It became very important for the missionaries to study the local language of the people, and the only way they could do that was to get close to the natives, if they were to master the language to the degree they needed for their missionary work. That meant that they had to

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972 Osadebay 1984, 14.
973 Interview with Mrs. F. Mordi, a member of the Holy Trinity Church, Asaba, August 12, 2004.
974 Odogwu 2003, 62.
establish a friendly relationship with the indigenous people, since there were no converts at that time, who could act as intermediaries between the people and the missionaries. 975 As noted by Nzemeke:

By about the middle of 1889, contact with the local people at Asaba was becoming closer by reason of the ability of the missionaries to understand the language. The assurances and confidence generated by this achievement encouraged the missionaries to extend their contacts to the various towns behind Asaba.976

Now that the missionaries could speak the local language, it became easier for them to communicate with the natives.

Apart from this, “the people of Asaba had developed suspicions about every white man as a result of their experience with the officials of the Royal Niger Company. Ever since 1886 when the company set up a colonial administration, they had practically terrorised Asaba people”. 977 The company has passed laws to stop many traditional practises and punishments that were very humiliating. 978 “And the fact that a punitive action in the form of a heavy bombardment was directed against Asaba in 1888, namely, the very year of the arrival of the missionaries, did not, and could not help matters”. 979

It was very difficult at this time to create contact with the local people, but the Catholic missionaries started first by giving humanitarian services to the sick, most especially the children. This was a period when the infant mortality was very high. They were assisted by the missionaries in giving drugs to them. This gave the Catholic missionaries the opportunity of giving baptisms to dying people. “This explains why the records of the initial missionary enterprise feature more private Baptisms even up to 1918 when the time of uncertainty as to the future of evangelical work at Asaba was still very real”. 980 At this time, the Catholic missionaries had a very little contact with the indigenous people. As noted by Nzemeke in 1988:

These kindly gestures however, especially in connection with gifts lavishly made to the people, began to thaw the icy coldness and reserve, which had met the first advances of the missionaries. The records do not furnish any deep insights into the degree of the ongoing ‘fraternisation,’ but oral evidences say that the missionaries could freely visit the people without any fear of molestation. It was the practise of casual visits of this kind that led to the eventual conversion of the first Asaba Catholic Christian in the person of Mr. Thomas Okolo. But before this was achieved the suspicions remained very

975 Nzemeke 1988, 11.
976 Ibid., 14-15.
977 Ibid., 11
978 Ibid.
979 Ibid.
980 Ibid., 11-12.
strong; for even though open hostility seemed to have given way to friendly exchanges the local people were not reassured.981

Apart from this, the people observed that the missionaries did not discriminate between the different kinds of people they came in contact with, and that they preached the gospel message to both the slaves and the freeborn.982 According to Nzemeke 1988:

After the bombardment of Asaba earlier on, slaves were proclaimed free and were given the liberty to leave their masters. Many of those who did, came to live with the missionaries, as they were not sure of their security anywhere else. This very factor drew the scorn of the local people for the whole evangelical enterprise and its personnel. Fr. Zappa and his colleagues were considered to be people of base extraction, and their religion to be worthy of a free people in as much as, admitting slaves it was 'une religion d'esclaves' (a religion of slaves) and therefore 'incompatible avec nos contumes (unbefitting our customs).983

This was a negative impression on the part of the indigenous people for future conversion. “The missionaries therefore had to be content with instructing the slaves with them while awaiting the hour decided upon by providence. Instruction, in the present context, implied a presentation of the truths of Christianity in a form of words and with signs understandable to its recipients”.984 At this time, the missionaries were only teaching the slaves, who were with them.

Another strategy used by the Catholic missionaries in Igboland, for the conversion of the people, was the adaptation to the indigenous culture. As discussed earlier in this chapter, at the Second Ecumenical Council in 1962 to 1965 in Rome, the Roman Catholic Church declared that the Catholic missionaries should adapt to the local customs of the people they had come to evangelise.985 After the Council of 1965, the Catholic missionaries in Igboland began to introduce the local customs into the churches. In 1973, the alo and the mkpisi titles were introduced into the Catholic Church in Asaba. The first Catholic in Asaba who took the alo title according to the blessing of the church was Mr. Okpuno.986 Since then, many Catholics have taken the title. As Gbuji wrote:

The first attempt to adopt traditional titles was on the 29th October 1915, at Asaba by very Reverend Father Zappa. Then some general directives were

981 Ibid., 12.
982 Ibid.
983 Ibid.
984 Ibid.
given to guide the priests and church ministers in their pastoral work. By these directives Catholics were allowed to assume titles that were for administrative purposes as well as those that were merely honorary. Catholics were not however, allowed to assume the Diokpa Title unless they abstained from all the fetish rituals and sharing of the emoluments that accrued from them. It was also forbidden to designate someone to perform the traditional sacrifices openly or secretly. Participation in secret societies was strictly forbidden. It was hoped that in course of time Western influence might bring about some change to the custom. The Mkpsi title (the initial rite of initiation into manhood in Asaba) was successfully handled with prudence by the same Father Zappa in 1917. Later on, in the forties; it was Father Duff, who finally made it possible for Catholics in Asaba to actually participate in the ceremony. The other missionaries within the jurisdiction adopted the Legislation in dealing with souls …entrusted to them. 987

As also observed by Monsignor Christopher Chukwumah:

The Catholic Church and all his predecessors in Asaba realise fully the importance of custom and tradition of any people and that it plays a valuable part in the day to day lives of any people. As such it will amount to greatest act of injustice to attempt to divorce any people completely from their traditional way of living (burial of the dead inclusive). 988

The Catholic Church in Asaba had been able to introduce the dual-sex organisational structure into the Catholic Church, through the method of adaptation to the indigenous culture. The introduction of dual-sex organisational structure into the Church has had both positive and negative effects on the women in Asaba. The positive aspect of it is that it has helped to increase the population of local women in the Catholic Church, compared to the Anglican Church, where the CMS missionaries initially for an effective study of the Bible, introduced mixed organisations.

However, the Catholic missionaries made use of the earlier converts in their work of evangelisation. They tried as much as possible to use whatever converts there were to further the spread of the gospel. 989 Particularly, they used these converts in the conferment of baptisms to new converts. 990

Among the other attempts Monsignor Zappa and his team made, one could note that they established mission stations in other western Igbo communities. He visited places such as Ibusa, Okpanam, Illah, Issele-Azagbu, Ubulu-Okiti, Issele-Uku and Ebu. During these visits, Monsignor Zappa and his team tried to make contact with the people. The method used by these Catholic missionaries (just like the CMS missionaries), “was to identify the paramount chief and try to win his favour for the cause being proposed, or at

987 Gbuji 1984, 11. See also Otteh 2003, 8-24, for further information on this issue.
988 Enenmoh 2001, 259.
990 Ibid.
least to obtain from him a promise not to oppose or forbid the introduction of the new religion they had come to preach”.\textsuperscript{991} This is similar to what the French Jesuits did in their early mission work among the “Amerindians” of North America.\textsuperscript{992}

However, the making of contact with other people outside Asaba gave the Catholic missionaries the opportunity to come close to the indigenous people, whom they had come to evangelise among, and to learn from, in order to get to know their cultures.\textsuperscript{993}

Further, just like their CMS counterparts, the Catholic missionaries used the method of giving lavish gifts to the early converts to win more souls to the Church. Some of the missionaries at that time gave cloths, shoes, drinks, tobacco, etc. as gifts to the indigenous people. They also gave presents to the poor, provided homes for the aged and forsaken people, such as the slaves, the twin mothers, the outcasts and the disabled in the society, in order to attract them to Christianity.\textsuperscript{994} As Nzemeke puts it:

\begin{quote}
By 1895, they had come so close in every town, that the local chiefs had become very friendly, even though they were far from accepting the new religion. As was usual with Europeans on the West African coasts in the nineteenth century, seeking favours of one kind or the other from African chiefs, they made lavish gifts in the form of cloths, drinks, tobacco and the like to these chiefs. The ordinary people were not excepted; for much help was given, especially to the sick. It is here that they began to make some impression on the generality of the people. Benevolence went to the extent of taking up babies abandoned to die in the bad bush and nursing them back to health. There are cases here and there in Issele-Uku Diocese today of people still living, who owe their lives to such acts of kindness by the missionaries.\textsuperscript{995}
\end{quote}

All these humanitarian measures adopted had helped the Catholic missionaries to gain a wider friendship among the people living in the communities and towns around Asaba.\textsuperscript{996}

In addition to this, the Catholic missionaries also used the strategy of the establishment of educational institutions in various part of the town to attract new converts to Christianity. But earlier, the pioneer missionary Monsignor Zappa and his teams were against the idea of evangelisation through education, unlike their CMS colleagues, who saw education as the major point in their evangelisation policy. It was later on that the Catholic missionaries at Asaba reluctantly accepted a change and started to establish schools. The first primary school opened by the Catholic missionaries in Asaba was St. Joseph Primary School. Later on, St. Patrick’s Primary School, Cable Point,
and Convent School, were built in Asaba. It was much later that the Catholic missionaries established secondary schools, such as St. Patrick's College, established for the boys, and St. Brigid's Grammar school, the first Catholic college for girls in Asaba. In these schools, the new converts had Christian instructions such as catechism. The aim of these catechetical instruction “was to make the first converts so soundly informed in the Christian faith that they would be able to carry on the message further afield”, 997 and with the hope that the baptised of these schools, would be able to go home full of God's life, and bring their parents and relatives close to God. 998 As a result of this, the Catholic missionaries built some training centres for the new converts, who were taught catechism.

Apart from this, the Rev. Sisters moved around in the villages in the evenings; when the women and the girls were back from the farms and markets, to teach catechism, and to give classes in cookery, needle work and childcare. 999 “Young prospective wives for Christian young men were frequently sent to the convent as boarders to attend classes for baptism”. 1000

The Catholic missionaries, who worked in Asaba at that time, mainly gained converts through individual conversion. The pioneer missionary at that period, Monsignor Zappa, did not believe in collective conversion like some of the CMS missionaries in Asaba. He believed in individual conversion, where he could meet people on individual basis, and tell them about Christianity, and also tell them the advantage of being a Christian. Because of this, Monsignor Zappa moved around the streets of Asaba trying to meet the chiefs (the Obi) in their homes, in order to convert them. 1001 As pointed out by Enenmoh:

Monsignor Zappa, an Italian from the city of Milan, was a man of exceptional devotion and perspicacity of mind. He was nick-named Ozokpokpo from the sound made by his leather shoes as he walked amidst broken rubbles and earth in his daily rounds from homestead to homestead in search of converts. 1002

So the Catholic missionaries, such as Monsignor Zappa and his team, believed that the best way to gain converts was through individual conversion, a method that they had effectively used in the whole of western Igboland.

Apart from this, the Catholic missionaries on their arrival at Asaba used the method of re-conversion of those Christians who were formerly converts of the CMS mission. Some of these Christians were thus converted to Ca-

997 Ibid., 18.
998 Anochie 1994, 27.
999 Osadebay 1984, 27.
1000 Ibid.
1001 Interview with Mrs. Rose Okotcha, July 8, 2004.
1002 Enenmoh 2001, 266.
tholicism, which caused a lot of problems between the Roman Catholic mission and the CMS in Asaba.1003

Furthermore, the Catholic missionaries used indigenous catechists and teachers in the work of evangelisation. Men such as Mr. Jacob Onyemenem and Mr. William Obi, both from Umuaji quarters in Asaba, served as catechists in the Catholic Church. Mr. Jacob Onyemenem was the person who assisted Monsignor Zappa in the compilation of the Igbo-French-English dictionary and the Igbo hymn book. Mr. William Obi, who worked as an interpreter, was also a teacher in the Catholic school. He was later transferred to Benin. This was, in 1930, when a new parish was built. There, he continued with his work of evangelisation among the Benin people.1004

As pointed out by Enenmoh (2001), “the rapid spread of Christianity in western Igboland may be attributed at least in part to the activities of the indigenous catechists and teachers. A considerable bulk of the work of evangelisation was done by the catechists”.1005

Thus, the catechists contributed tremendously to the rapid growth of Christianity in western Igboland in general, and in Asaba in particular. They were the people who made sure that Christianity spread to the hinterland. Without them, the missionaries would have met with much stiffer opposition from the natives. The teachers also contributed greatly in the work of evangelisation. Apart from their schoolwork, the teachers at that time took part in the spread of Christianity. They helped the missionaries in teaching catechism to students and pupils in the schools. According to Enenmoh:

Where the catechists stopped, the teachers began. Every teacher in Catholic schools was compulsorily made to teach catechism four times after school hours. Catechism was taught for one hour in the evening every Monday, Wednesday and Friday between 4 and 6 o’clock. On Sunday, the catechist took over preparing neophytes for baptism or any of the many sacraments in the church. He was particularly useful in marriage counselling in the outstations, but in Asaba town the nun’s of Our Lady of Apostles took charge of that.1006

Finally, another method adopted by both the CMS and the Catholic missionaries in their work of evangelization in Asaba and the rest of western Igboland was that of erecting hospitals and dispensaries, where the sick and those suffering from all kinds of illnesses were treated. Through these hospitals and dispensaries, the missionaries were able to be in contact with the natives, and preach the new religion. Through this method they were able to baptise the sick, who, when healed, carried the message to their relatives at home.1007

1005 Ibid.
1006 Ibid.
15.1 The traditional and the modern organisations

In this section, I will make a comparison between the traditional organisations and the new organisations, which were introduced by the missionaries in Igboland. Here I will try to identify the reasons for the changed role of Igbo women.

I will also show how the previous position of Igbo women in the traditional society was affected with the introduction of Christianity, colonialism and Western education in Igbo society.

15.2 Comparison between the traditional organisations and the new organisations introduced in the Church

As already indicated, in the traditional Igbo society, there was a system of organisation, according to which the men had their own associations separate from the women, while the women had their own organisations, each sex thus managing its own affairs. In this system of organisation, the women were able to make their voices heard in the community, through their own representatives. But with the advent of the Europeans, a new system of organisation was introduced in Igboland. According to this new system, the CMS missionaries chose the mixed organisation where the two sexes were present simultaneously in the same associations. This was completely different from the traditional parallel organisation, and, because of the domination of men in mixed meetings, and also their bias of public speech rights, the freeborn women lost their traditional freedom of being able to express their voices, and became “muted”.

Further, in the traditional organisations, the Igbo women had important posts in the community through their own leaders, such as the Omu, Ada–isi, etc., whereas in the new organisations founded by the missionaries, it was only the male members of the Church who were granted significant posts, such as priests and bishops, as also seen in Table 4 below. This applied to the CMS and the Catholic Church as well, and was a way of transferring power from the hands of the female members in the traditional institutions to the male members in the newly created organisations in the Church, which made the women feel inferior.

In addition to this, the Igbo women in the traditional society had some other organisations in the community such as the Umuada and Inyemedi, which were very powerful associations and independent from the male organisations. For instance, the Otu Umuada was seen as the spies of the community, whereas the new organisations introduced by the missionaries, like the Catholic Women's Organisation, the Christian Mothers, etc., were under the supervision and control of the parish priest and the diocesan bishop, irrespective of the roles they play in the Church.
In the traditional society, both the married and unmarried members of the community could be members of the organisations in the community, whereas in the new organisations in the Catholic Church, such as the CWO, the Christian Mothers, the St. Theresa Women's Society, only those women who are married may become members. The unmarried women are not allowed to be members. This may be seen as a kind of discrimination on the part of even the Catholic missionaries, who could use the split between the married and the unmarried women to control them through the male members in the Church.

In the traditional society, men were not allowed to be advisors to the organisations for women, whereas in the new organisations introduced by the Catholic missionaries, men were appointed sometimes to be advisors to the female organisations. This was a way of undermining the ability of the women to make decisions for themselves.

In addition to this, in the traditional society, the membership of clubs or societies was based on ranks and status of the members in the community, whereas, in the organisations in the church, membership is not based on your position or rank in the community but on egalitarian ideals.

By contrast, in the traditional organisations, there were some women, who represented the interests of other women at the community level, such as the *Omu* and her cabinet, the *Otu Omu*. The same was applicable in the new organisations founded by the missionaries, for example the Catholic Women’s Organisation, where there were some women in the organisation, who represented the interests of their fellow women at the diocesan and national level. But in the other Church organisations, this was not the case. Among these other Church organisations, some mention should be made of those belonging to the CMS, where, at many important occasions in the Church, only the men are nominated to represent the interest of the Church.

In the traditional organisation, and also in the new organisations in the Church, the ancestors and the saints are seen as the intermediaries between god and man, but the saints do not have the responsibility that ancestors have, especially for their kin.

The differences and similarities between these organisations are further highlighted in the tables below.
Table 4. The differences between the dual-sex organisations in the traditional society and the dual-sex and mixed organisations in the Church.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dual-sex organisations in the traditional society</th>
<th>Dual-sex organisations and mixed organisations in the Church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The women in the traditional society played very significant roles in life-cycle rituals such as birth, naming ceremonies, marriages and funeral rites.</td>
<td>The women in the Church do not perform life-cycle rituals. These are performed by the priest. Instead, the women assist in the training of seminarians and aspirants, in the teaching of catechism and moral instructions in the schools, the visitation of the sick and those in prison, in conducting pre-marriage and marriage counselling, and in the care of unmarried mothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership of traditional organisations was compulsory.</td>
<td>Membership in the organisations in the Church is voluntary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the traditional society, both the married and unmarried women in the community could become members of the <em>Umuada</em>.</td>
<td>Only those women who are married are allowed to be members of certain organisations: The Catholic Women's organisation, the St. Theresa Women's Society and the Christian Mothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The women's organisations were independent of other groups in the traditional society.</td>
<td>The women in these organisations, thus the Catholic Women's organisation, the St. Theresa Women's Society, the Christian Mothers, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the St. Anthony's Guild, the St. Jude Society, the Legion of Mary, the Infant Jesus Society, the associations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, are under the supervision of the Church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the traditional dual-sex organisations, such as the <em>Umuada</em> and the <em>Inyemedi</em>, a male would never be allowed to be present in the meetings.</td>
<td>The spiritual director, who is a male, could conduct meetings together with the women in the dual-sex organisations in the Church, such as the Catholic Women’s Organisation, the Christian Mothers and St. Theresa Women's Society.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5. The similarities between the dual-sex organisations in the traditional society and the dual-sex and mixed organisations in the Church.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dual-sex organisations in the traditional society</th>
<th>Dual-sex and mixed organisations in the Church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The <em>Umuada</em> and the <em>Inyemedi</em> performed some traditional dances in order to raise some money for the community.</td>
<td>During bazaars, the women sell food and perform some Christian plays in order to raise some money for the Church. This applies to all the Christian organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In co-operative associations in the traditional society, women were lent money to be paid back at the end of the year, with some interest.</td>
<td>The St. Theresa Women's Society functions as a co-operative society that offers loans to its members to be paid back with a little interest at the end of each month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in the traditional society gave instructions on life-cycle rituals such as marriage, where girls were taught how to live with their husbands.</td>
<td>The women give pre-marriage courses and counselling for those preparing to marry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in the traditional organisations sometimes contributed money during their meetings for the development of the community.</td>
<td>Women in these organisations contribute money during their meetings for the Church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through organisations such as the <em>Umuada and Inyemedi</em>, the women assisted in the community during various activities, such as festivals, marriages, burial ceremonies etc.</td>
<td>The women assist the Church during various activities in the parish, such as thanksgiving ceremonies, weddings etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The women performed a socialising function by watching over the conduct of the young girls in the villages.</td>
<td>The women perform a socialising function by watching over the conduct of the young girls in the parish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women assist in the training of young ones during initiation ceremonies in the villages.</td>
<td>The women assist in the training of seminarians and aspirants in the Church, and in the teaching of catechism and moral instructions in schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The men turned to the <em>Umuada</em> for help in disciplining their wives in times of crisis in their homes.</td>
<td>In periods of crisis in their homes, the men also turn to organisations, such as St. Theresa Women's Society, for help in disciplining their wives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the traditional society, women transmitted moral values and principles through their teaching of the young ones during life cycle rituals such as initiation.</td>
<td>Through their religious lives, the women, helped in the transmission of moral values and principles in the society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual-sex organisations in the traditional society</td>
<td>Dual-sex and mixed organisations in the Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women felt a sense of belonging in societies, such as the <em>Umuada</em> and the <em>Inyemedi</em>.</td>
<td>Socially, these organisations give the women some sense of belonging in the society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman, such as the <em>Omu</em>, played some political roles in the community. The women in the community could elect her, and she also had the right to vote in the community about issues concerning women.</td>
<td>Politically, the woman is recognised in some organisations: The St. Theresa women's Society and the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria. She has the right to vote, and to be elected, and even though no woman has campaigned for a political post, most women in the parish have gone out to vote for candidates of their choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the traditional society, the women took part in the naming of a child in the community.</td>
<td>The women participate during naming ceremonies in the parish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The women assisted in the promotion of the good image of motherhood in the community.</td>
<td>The women assist in the promotion of a good image of motherhood in all the organisations of the Church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The women participated in the end of the year sacrifices and ceremonies that were used to thank the gods and the ancestors for the activities of the past year.</td>
<td>In all the Christian organisations, women participate in the mass of thanksgiving, arranged at the beginning of each year, to thank God for the past year, and to ask Him to bless the activities of the new year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the traditional society, the women gave presents in cash or kind to their fellow women in cases of childbirth, bereavement, sickness, marriage, or extreme poverty.</td>
<td>The women give presents in cash or kind to the members in cases of childbirth, bereavement, sickness, marriage, or extreme poverty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The women helped bereaved families in the traditional society.</td>
<td>The women help families that are bereaved in the Church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women helped their fellow women in times of crisis, such as famine, epidemics, physical disaster, or mass distress of any sort.</td>
<td>The women assist their fellow women in times of crisis, such as famine, epidemics, physical disaster, or mass distress of any kind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The women were involved in counseling and settling disputes among married couples.</td>
<td>The women are involved in settling disputes among married couples and counselling those involved in irregular unions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the traditional society, women helped in the fetching of firewood for the elderly people, and the weeding of their farms.</td>
<td>The women in the rural areas assist in the fetching of firewood for the elderly people, and the weeding of their farms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
15.3 Igbo women lost their dual-sex political role

The previous position of Igbo women in the traditional society was affected, due to the introduction of Christianity, which came with colonialism. The colonial administration and the mission recognised only the male administration in Igbo society. They did not take into consideration the dual-sex political administration of the Igbo, where the men and the women had a say both in the political, economic and religious affairs in the community, and this led to the collapse of the power the (freeborn) Igbo women had in the traditional society. But for the slave women, it changed their social status in the traditional society, and gave them a better position. As an explanation to this, one could point at the fact that the missionaries and the people representing the colonial administration were Europeans, and therefore tried to introduce European ideas and customs relating to the gender roles. According to the European ideology, women would have to work under the same conditions as men, in order to achieve an equivalent status. In Igboland, men and women were seen as representing separate domains. This continues, still today.

As a result of the above, we could conclude that the CMS missionaries and the colonial administration were responsible for the loss of power of Igbo women (that is, the freeborn women) in the traditional society, because the representatives of both these institutions failed to recognise the important roles that the Igbo women played in the dual-sex political organisation. The fact that the women's opinions counted, on economic and religious issues as well, gave them much power in the traditional society, and made it possible for them to make their voices heard.

15.4 Education, women and change

With the introduction of education, the missionaries succeeded in transforming the position of women (freeborn and slaves) in Igbo society. The women started going to school, and in this way became “enlightened”. Some of them have now got good jobs as teachers, doctors, accountants, etc., which was something different from the previous roles played by the freeborn women in the traditional society. For the slave women, this changed their position in the society, as some of them could now work as doctors, nurses, etc., which is not the case in the traditional society, where they were not regarded as important in the community.

Thus the coming of the missionaries to Igbo society caused two changes. One of these changes applied to the freeborn women, who lost their previous roles. As some of them are now educated, they play a different role in the society. The other change was a change for the better. This change applied to the slave women, who felt that the coming of Christianity to Igbo society
was something positive, because it changed their social status, as some of them were educated, and became important people in the modern society.

15.5 Igbo women lost their former economic role

With the coming of colonial rule followed the introduction of a new economic system in Igbo society. With the introduction of this system, the Igbo women were deprived of their former economic roles in the traditional society, where they contributed in the economic sector of the community. This subsequently affected their economic roles in the community, and made the women lose their economic importance in the society, as only the men were employed and encouraged to engage in trade, and also in agriculture. For instance, as seen in part one of this book, in the traditional society, business activities could not start in the market until the Omu and her cabinet arrived and started the transactions. This shows how significant these women were in economic issues in the community, but these days, the market transactions could start without them, as the town council now controls the market.

15.6 The Omu lost her prestige in the society

With the introduction of Christianity and colonialism in Igbo society, and especially in Asaba, the Omu and her cabinet also lost their former powers. Okonjo writes:

The Omu lost her prestige and her clientele as her political and religious functions were replaced by colonial rule and Christianity. The introduction of clinics and foreign drugs replaced the sacrifices she and her ilogo had made in their role as guardians of the health and welfare of the community. Cases that formerly had come before her now went to the British-appointed colonial magistrate. The introduction of imported goods into the market place ruined her system of price fixing. New roads ended the practice of making “market medicines” to induce customers to attend the village market. The traditional title taking that the Omu had presided over was displaced as Christian converts acquired the new title of mississi (Mrs.) that came with marriage in church and brought higher status in the new social order. Other traditional women’s organizations lost some of their meaning as well: the Otu Umuada and Otu Inyemedi no longer had intervillage disputes to arbitrate; and schools replaced the social functions of the dance societies.1008

When colonialism and Christianity came, the Omu of Asaba lost her political and religious roles in the society, as her roles, for example such as presiding over the market, the making of market medicine, etc., were taken over by the

1008 Okonjo 1976, 56.
colonial administration and the missionaries. Since the religious roles are also political in an ancestor-based society, like that of the Igbo, when the religious roles are lost, and with these, the political roles are equally lost. For example, during my fieldwork in 1992, the late Omu of Asaba, Mrs. Nwoligidi Okocha, told me, that she and her cabinet do not perform the same religious and political roles that her predecessors performed years ago, because of the changes, which Christianity and colonialism had brought to Asaba.1009

So we have seen how the coming of colonialism and Christianity to Igbo society affected the previous roles of the Omu and her cabinet in the traditional Igbo society.

Thus to the freeborn women, not least to the Omu and her cabinet, the Otu Omu, the advent of the colonial officers and the missionaries to Igbo society was a negative thing, because it affected their previous roles in the traditional society.

15.7 Igbo women lost their roles as herbalists and traditional birth attendants

With the introduction of modern medical health care, which came with Christianity, the roles of the Igbo women as midwives or traditional birth attendants and herbalists were replaced by those of doctors and nurses. The missionaries failed to realise the importance of traditional medicine to the people. Because of this, new medical practices were introduced by the mission, which replaced the old ones. The missionaries condemned the old methods as “dirty”, in the sense that the herbs were not refined. This affected the work of the native doctors, especially the women, who were traditional healers. They lost most of their patients, and were out of business for a considerable length of time. Moreover, most people no longer accept traditional care when they are ill, but go to the hospitals instead. For example, my grandmother, Mrs. O. Onochie, told me that, during her time, there were no maternity homes or hospitals in Asaba, and that she gave birth to her five children with the help of traditional birth attendants. However, these days, it is no longer the same, as most women give birth in hospitals with the help of doctors and nurses. This has made the traditional birth attendants lose their previous role in the traditional society.

1009 Interview with Omu Nwoligidi Okocha, Asaba, February 8, 1992.
15.8 Igbo women's role changed from wives and mothers

Before Christianity came to Igboland, the roles of the Igbo women were mainly those of wives and mothers. Most of the women were also engaged in trading and cultivation, but when the missionaries came, they encouraged the women to go to school, which changed their former role in the traditional society. As a result of this, the Igbo women became educated, and play a new role in society as teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, etc. On the other hand, the men have got an education as well, and it is difficult to show that one sex has more power than the other. However, some other old ideas about women still apply when men and women gather in mixed meetings. Thus, for instance, it is the men that do most of the talking and make most of the decisions, while the women don’t dare to speak up.

Apart from this, with the education of women in Igbo society, a new trend could be noticed. Some Igbo women decided to be single and not to be married. This also affected their former roles in the traditional society. For example, in June, 1994, during my fieldwork, the late Miss M. Okolie told me that, in 1958, after her secondary school education at Anglican Girl's Grammar School Asaba, she got a job as a teacher in St. Joseph Primary School Asaba. Due to the nature of her job, she decided not to get married.1010

Also, at the same period, Rev. Sister N. Edozien, who was the first Asaba woman to be ordained nun in 1956, told me that after her primary and secondary education, she decided to join the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles to become a nun.1011

15.9 Christian organisations and Igbo women

With the introduction of Christianity, the missionaries (Catholic and CMS) preached to the women in Asaba, just like in other parts of Igboland, to forgo their traditional religion and to accept the new religion, Christianity. Women in Asaba were now converted to Christianity, and encouraged to go to church on Sundays, and to take part in the singing and the reading of the Bible during services. This was quite different from their old way of life. The introduction of Christianity in Asaba had a weakening effect on the hold, which the indigenous religion used to have on the women. It weakened the traditional religious belief system and institutions, and helped to emphasise the belief of the women in the Supreme Being. For example, the women lost their strong belief in issues such as the making of sacrifices to the gods and ancestors. Because of this, the role of Asaba women changed from what

1010 Interview with Miss M. Okolie, Asaba, June 8, 1994.
it had been in the traditional society. They now played a new role in the church. Most women now joined various women's organisations in the church and played new roles, such as teaching catechism, reading from the Bible during services, assisting financially in the training of priests and sisters, etc., which differed from their roles in the traditional society, where sacrifices were made to the ancestors and gods. For example, in November, 2002, during my fieldwork, Mrs C. O. Chukwumah told me that, in 1949, she was one of the women, who performed sacrifices in Asaba during special occasions, such as marriage ceremonies. But since she became a Christian, she has stopped taking part in these ceremonies.1012

Apart from this, with the introduction of Christianity, women in Asaba were encouraged by the missionaries to form various organisations in the Church. With the introduction of these organisations, such as the Christian Mothers, the role of the Asaba women changed from what it was in the traditional society, where they were used to the cultivation of land, and the planting of crops in the fields, and to decision-making, to a new role in the church, such as the cleaning of the church before service, or working at home. This was something that women were supposed to do in Europe. But in Igboland, they were accustomed to decision-making. And this is one of the points where two different cultural customs clash. This was to the detriment of the roles of certain categories of women in Igboland, namely the freeborn, who used to make their own political decisions via single-sex organisations in the dual-sex structure. The idea that women should only do the cleaning, and only obey other people, was something that the slave women were used to. When these women (the slaves) found that they were appreciated as human beings, in spite of their menial tasks, they happily joined the church. Hence, there were two kinds of changes for women that were brought about by the church.

15.10 The issue of class and hierarchy in the traditional society

As earlier seen in this book, the traditional Igbo society was divided according to a hierarchical structure. There were two classes of people in the society, the freeborn and the slaves. The freeborn men and women made most of the decisions, while the slaves were not allowed to play any active role because of their social status in the community. But the missionaries taught the people about the equality of all men before God. This was different from the hierarchical ideology, which used to dominate the Igbo society. The hierarchical ideology was not only visible in the division of people into two

classes – that of the freeborn and that of the slaves. The entire society was permeated with a hierarchical ideology, which was represented by ranked societies and ranked titles, a division between chiefs and commoners, and so on. Because of the new message of Christianity, many slaves were attracted to the Church. As a result of this, most of the first converts to Christianity were slaves.

But the question that should be asked today is whether the egalitarian ideology of Christianity is being followed up in any actual way, or whether a new hierarchy has been developed in the Catholic Church.

According to my own point of view, a new hierarchy has been developed in the Catholic Church today, and the slaves, who were nobodies in the traditional society, have now become important people in the Catholic Church. Some of them are priests and people of authority. Many of them seem to apply the old system of the traditional society within the Catholic Church. In the traditional society, people were respected according to their ranks and status in the society at large, which was against the egalitarian ideology of Christianity. For example, in the Catholic Church today, people are still respected according to their status and rank in the Catholic Church. Most people in the Catholic Church today still give more respect to the people of ecclesiastic authority, such as the pope, the bishops and the priests, than to the ordinary people in the Church.

The freeborn men and women did not like the egalitarian ideology of the Catholic Church, because they felt that it placed them on the same level as their former slaves. They felt that the Catholic Church helped their former slaves to ascend to power, which affected their own previous roles in the traditional society. However, by now they have come to realise that the only option for them to be accepted in the new society is to join the Church.

15.11 The different categories of women in the traditional society

As already mentioned in part one, in the traditional society there were two categories of women. The first group of women were the freeborn. This group of women represented about 80% of the female population. These women had a say and some importance in the traditional society. Those free-born women were very powerful and well respected in the traditional society because of the roles they played.

But with the advent of Christianity in Igboland, this group of women lost their power in the society, since most of their former roles in the traditional society were either taken over by the Catholic Church or preached against, at

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1013 My own estimation is that the freeborn women were about 80% of the women in the traditional society.
least indirectly, since they were told that all life cycle rituals should be handled by the Church authorities, rather than by ordinary women. Hence the Catholic Church did not recruit the freeborn women. It was mainly slave women who were recruited. When the slaves found that they were appreciated as human beings, in spite of their menial tasks in the church, they happily joined the Catholic Church. At last, the slave women, who were nobodies in the traditional society, gained prestige because of their acceptance of Christianity. Most of them became very active members in the Church, and became well educated and began to play important roles in the church activities and in the society in general. Because of this, they gained access to power.

However, since the freeborn women constituted the majority, the overall picture is that of a change for the worse. But since they were free not to join the Catholic Church, their position did not necessarily have to be affected in the beginning. But now, that the Catholic Church has grown, and become a very important factor in modern Igbo life, the freeborn women are in a different position compared to their former servants, the slaves, who have got a new prestige in the Church – the prestige of being equal, and the individual prestige of being regarded as having human rights.

Further, with the advent of Christianity in Igbo society, the freeborn women lost some of the roles, which they played in the traditional society in issues such as marriage, burial, title taking, female circumcisions etc. As pointed out by one of my informants, Mrs. M. U. Okonji, during my fieldwork in July 2004, some of the freeborn women, who were part of the Umuada, were converted to Christianity and some of the roles they played as regard to customs in the traditional society were abandoned. The traditional custom of Otu Umuada to punish and humiliate widows during traditional burials was minimised or abolished, and all the obnoxious laws of the Otu Umuada were removed. Another informant, Mrs. E. N. Isichei, said that, with the advent of Christianity, some traditional practices were abolished by the freeborn women, who were members of the Umuada. She gave an example: If you are a Christian, and are the Ada–isi of your lineage, you are not supposed to perform idol worship, such as sitting before a shrine to make sacrifices to gods and goddesses.

As we can see, with the advent of Christianity, the freeborn women’s roles were affected in that most of them were abandoned, while the slave women, on the other hand, as a result of becoming Christians, became educated and important people in the Church and in the society. So as a result of the effect of mission on the freeborn women, the women of slave origin now have a better position in the Church, and even in the society at large, compared to the freeborn women. For example, one of my informants, who is a

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1014 Interview with Mrs. M. U. Okonji, a member of Otu Umuada, Asaba, October 13, 2004.
1015 Interview with Mrs. E. N. Isichei, a member of Otu Umuada, Asaba, September 3, 2004.
descendant of slaves, and currently a member of the CMS Church (Holy Trinity), told me that, in the past, the slave women were not allowed to hold meetings with the freeborn women such as the *Umuada* in the villages but that nowadays, after the introduction of Christianity, they are invited to such meetings.\textsuperscript{1016} As pointed out by another informant, Mrs. Cecilia R. Maurice:

> In the olden days, women of slave origin were not moving freely with the freeborn women, for the fact that they were unacceptable in the society. They did not do things in common with freeborn women. They were regarded as outcasts, and were forbidden so many things in the society where they belonged. In any case, they did not share any sense of belonging with freeborn women. For these reasons, they chose to accept Christianity earlier than the freeborn women to enable them to feel a bit free and share a sense of belonging in any organisation or society, because Christianity does not select.\textsuperscript{1017}

Another of my informants, also a descendant of slaves, said that since she joined the Catholic Church, she has the feeling of being treated as a human being, and she is free to attend all meetings in the Church without any kind of discrimination, so she is happy to be a Christian. The overall picture after my fieldwork was that the slave descendants among the women have become quite satisfied, and they have more feeling of value today than their mothers may have had a hundred years ago.\textsuperscript{1018}

We could also compare this with the slave men (and the poor people in general), who were nobodies in the traditional society, but who, because of their acceptance of Christianity, were the first proselytes of the Church and the first to be educated, and who are now respected in the society. As also noted by one of my informants, Mr. J. C. Kafor:

> The slaves in the traditional society had no rights, and were considered and treated as outcasts. Association between slaves and the freeborn was strictly forbidden - a slave was, in effect, a non-person. Furthermore, the position of the slave in the society was eternal - slaves and their descendants would remain slaves for ever, with absolutely no hope of ever becoming free. Therefore, Christianity, with its doctrine of equality of all men, had immense appeal to the slaves. Most slaves willingly converted to Christianity because their social and economic status improved significantly when they did so. On the other hand, the freeborn had little incentive to join, as his status diminished significantly, if he converted to Christianity at that time.\textsuperscript{1019}

This could also be seen in the book by Metuh and Ejizu (1985), who discuss the fact that the first apostolate that the missionaries were engaged in on their arrival in Igboland was the rescuing of the slaves and the outcasts in the...
society, and that one of the reasons for this was because of the faith which the missionaries preached. It was also pointed out that the missionaries took care of the slaves, taught them to become good Christians, assisted them to find Christian families, and then resettled them in Christian villages.1020

This discussion about the freeborn women and the slaves could also be related to the message of the missionaries that those who were “the first” will become “the last”. The same was applicable to the slaves who were “the last” in the traditional society, but who, because of the advent of Christianity, became “the first” in the society. What was equally important was the message of the missionaries about the equality of all men and women before God.

In spite of the prohibition of slave trade, which began in 1760, and ended in 1810, slavery continued in Nigeria, and some families in Igboland today are still linked with slave descent. These people are regarded as slaves because of the Nigerian hierarchical values, which still seem to permeate people's minds.

Thus, the main change that has been brought about by the Catholic Church is the one of introducing an egalitarian ideology, instead of the hierarchical ideology that used to dominate Igbo society. Instead of ranks and titles as criteria for the value of a human being, the Catholic Church has introduced an egalitarian ideology, which takes the value of each single individual as a human being into account.

Nevertheless, we can see that there are new hierarchies appearing in the Catholic Church. Those who can read and write and speak for themselves are rising to power. Many of them would have had a much lower position in the traditional society, as slaves, if Christianity had not come to Nigeria.

So, after all, a new hierarchy has succeeded to an old hierarchy. It is the old hierarchy that has lost ground, and thereby also the freeborn women. But the hierarchical ideas are still at the back of people's minds. Some of those in power today are mainly the former slaves, because they belong to the Catholic Church.

15.12 The changed roles of the Catholic nuns in Igbo society

Before the coming of Christianity to Igboland, women in Igbo society were regarded as wives and mothers. But when the missionaries came, they encouraged the training of Igbo women to become nuns, which changed their former roles in the traditional society from motherhood to virginity. However, in spite of the fact that some of these women became Rev. Sisters, they

1020 Metuh and Ejizu 1985, 16-17.
were not acceptable in Igbo society. Their families rejected some of them, while some were badly treated, and some were being discriminated against in the society. Some of them were also called all kinds of names, and being laughed at by their people. Some were regarded as witches by their relatives, since they were not married and had no children. Most of them went through a lot of psychological problems because of the ways they were treated in the society. This might be as a result of the fact that the Igbo people attached more importance to marriage than the European missionaries did.

15.13 Conclusion

In my discussions in this chapter, I have described the different strategies used by the missionaries to gain converts in Igbo society, most especially in Asaba. I have also given evidence of how the women experience the difference between the traditional society and the Church, and the difference between the Catholic and the CMS churches. I have made a comparison between the traditional and the modern organisations, which were introduced by the missionaries in the churches in Igboland. In the process of doing this, the differences and the similarities between the dual-sex organisations in the traditional society and the dual-sex and mixed organisations in the Church were also highlighted.

I have shown how the Igbo women lost their dual-sex political role in the society with the coming of Christianity and colonialism. In doing this, I have shown how the colonial administration and the mission recognised only the male administration in Igbo society and how this has led to the collapse of the former power of the Igbo women in the traditional society.

In my discussion, I have also shown how the Igbo women lost their former economic roles in the traditional society and the way in which this affected their position in the traditional society.

I have also said how the traditional women’s organisations such as the Omu and the Otu Omu, the Umuada and the Inyemedi lost their religious and political roles in the society with the advent of the missionaries and colonial rule. Since the entire parallel organisation was built upon the separate roles of men and women, and since the women's roles were largely ritual, the abolition of the freeborn women's ritual contributions to the working of society at large had an impact on their political importance as well. And, since their political importance was guaranteed by their separate organisations, the combining of these organisations meant that the freeborn women also lost their main forum for economic and political expression.

Here, we can see that when religion permeates a particular social, political and economic organisation, it is impossible to exchange only the religion. Everything else falls in pieces as well, as far as organisation is concerned.
I have pointed out how the Igbo women lost the roles that they formerly held in the traditional society, as new societies were introduced in the Church such as the Catholic Women’s Organisation, the Christian Mothers, etc.

I have also discussed how the Igbo women’s roles changed from wives and mothers in the traditional society, into nuns. I have also said that many of them are now trained as lawyers, doctors, accountants, etc., which is different from their previous roles in the traditional society.

Finally, I have described the different strategies used by the CMS and the Catholic missionaries in their work of evangelism in Igbo society, most especially among the Asaba people.
CHAPTER 16
Women and Life-Cycle Rituals

16.1 Christian Rituals
In this chapter, I am going to discuss the various Christian rituals, which were performed in the church by the missionaries after the introduction of Christianity in Igboland, and in what ways these rituals affected the previous roles of Igbo women in connection with life-cycle rituals in the traditional society.

16.1.1 Marriage rituals in the Church
Before the Christian missionaries (Catholic) came to Igboland, the system of marriage was traditional Igbo marriage, but when the missionaries arrived, they introduced the Christian marriage in the churches in Igboland. As a result of this, most of the new converts were forced by the missionaries to abandon their former traditional marriages and to wed in the church. This affected the former role of Igbo women, as they could no longer play the ritual roles that they had played in the traditional society. Their ritual roles such as taking the new bride to the shrine of onishe to perform sacrifices, offering wine at the ancestral shrines, dancing and feasting, have been replaced by the Catholic rites which are performed by the priest, such as the celebration of service, the blessing of the bride and bridedgroom, and the giving of rings in the church. All these, and especially some of the religious rituals which have been abandoned with the coming of Christianity, have affected the role of the Igbo women, including the role of Asaba women, who used to be active as ritual officiants in all the life cycle rituals in the traditional society.

Apart from this, the institution of the Igbo marriage has also undergone a dynamic change. The effect of urbanisation and geographical mobility, (resulting from colonialism and the coming of Christianity), on traditional attitudes to marriage has been radical. Christian marriage practices are, however, still hemmed with customs. The choice of wife has taken another turn. At present, the possession of a formal education and the family background of the husband have been added to the qualities traditionally required of a husband. The profession of the husband plays a big role, because the mar-
riage of a girl to a prosperous young man enhances the social and economic position of the wife and her family. Also, with the new church marriage, some men were allowed to choose their own spouse, as compared to the situation linked to the traditional marriage, where the parents made the choice. With this new system, where individuals make their own choices, the formal marriage visits (iku-aka-na-uzo) are now replaced by the long marriage courting between the prospective husband and wife, and a tendency towards individual taste more than towards the choice of the family or lineage. The parents are formally informed about the marriage celebration when the partners are ready. Changes have also taken place in the family system, with the introduction of Christian marriage and marriage by ordinance. Both of these forms of marriage have given women new legal protection and property rights, which were not recognised by the traditional system.

Furthermore, monogamy is gradually replacing polygamy. Formerly, marriage in Asaba, just like in other parts of Igboland, was a social arrangement that attached women to the lineage of their husbands. At the husband's death, a woman would have to enter into a leviratic marriage with any of his kinsmen. But after the introduction of Christianity, most women are now Christians, and are not expected to enter into such marriage arrangements. In addition to this, the missionaries tried to alter the traditional Igbo marriage system from polygamy, which gave some independence to the women, as they shared their domestic roles with their fellow wives in contradistinction to the monogamous system, which tied the woman mainly to her domestic roles, thus affecting her economic position. For the educated Igbo people, the monogamous kind of marriage became the order of the day, because of their high zeal to imitate the Western ways of life.

16.1.2 Birth and naming ceremony in the Church

Before the coming of Christianity to Igboland, the Igbo people had their own naming ceremony, which was performed by the indigenous people at home. But with the advent of the missionaries in Igboland, the missionaries, in place of the traditional naming ceremony, introduced the Christian naming ceremony in the Church. The Church then made it compulsory for its members to take Christian names from the Bible, or names of prophets and saints, in abandonment of their traditional names at baptism.\(^\text{1021}\) This had a tremendous effect on the role that the Igbo women played in traditional naming ceremonies in the traditional society, as their role was now replaced by the roles of the priest and godparents during baptism. As a result of this, the new

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\(^{1021}\) See Sundkler 1980, 83-85, and Salamone and Mbabuike 1994, 213 for further information on the introduction of Christian names or baptismal names by the missionaries in different parts of Africa.
converts now take such names as Joseph, Peter, James, Paul, Mary, Martha, etc., while their traditional names are formally recorded but never used.

As mentioned above, in part one, from Igbo names one would be able to tell the historical implications surrounding the bearer of such names, which is an opportunity that the Christian religion never offers. A personal Igbo name was a convenient mechanism for preserving continuity and remembrances in identification of people in their social context, and for tracing family descent, which the present Christian names never substituted. The women used to be important in keeping this traditional knowledge alive. Now, they have lost this important role.

16.1.3 Death and funeral rites in the Church
When the missionaries came to Igboland, they were against certain traditional customs performed by the people, such as funeral rites, the making of sacrifices, etc. Since the Christian Church was strongly opposed to these customs, the members of the Church were forbidden to practise them. They were not allowed to take part in traditional funeral rites or burials, nor in traditional dances and ceremonies, which were often condemned as “paganistic” and “fetish”.1022 The missionaries then introduced the Christian funeral rites in place of the traditional funeral rites. Because of this, the Christians were not allowed to attend burial ceremonies of their kin. This had a great effect on the role performed by the Igbo women during burial ceremonies in the traditional society, as their role was now taken over by the Christian Church.

16.2 Igbo women lost their religious role in sacrifices
In traditional Igbo society, sacrifices played a very significant role. According to Arinze, "it is really the essence of their worship, and the heart of their religion".1023 By the Igbo women, sacrifices performed during family rituals like marriage ceremonies were regarded as something that would appease the gods. The Igbo were convinced that the ancestors and the spirits would help them, but after the introduction of Christianity, most Asaba women no longer made sacrifices to the gods. They now believed in the Christian God, and this affected the role they used to play in the traditional society, as they no longer made sacrifices to the traditional gods at various occasions, such as festivals, feasts, etc. For example, Mrs. G. Onyia, one of the members of the Umuada, told me that when she was young, her mother used to perform

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1022 Davidson, 1963, 102.
1023 Arinze 1970, 111.
sacrifices to the gods whenever a girl from her village wanted to get married, but with the advent of Christianity, these rituals were abolished.1024

16.3 The *Umuada* and the *Inyemedi* lost their former roles
With the advent of Christianity, which came with colonialism, the previous roles of women were affected, since the colonial government and the mission recognised only the male organisations in Igbo society. Important female organisations, such as the *Umuada* and the *Inyemedi*, lost their previous religious and political roles, since their former roles were taken over by the mission and later by the colonial administration. This could be noticed with respect to the roles of the *Umuada* in the traditional society, where these women played an active part in naming ceremonies in the villages, but when Christianity and colonialism were introduced, they lost those roles in the society. For example, my grandmother told me that when she was born, it was the *Ada–isi* of her village that performed the naming ceremony, but during my time, it was the priest from my parish who did so, which was quite different from the period of my grandmother, when Christianity had not come to Asaba.

16.4 Conclusion
We could thus see, from the above discussions and analyses that both the mission and the colonial administration were responsible for the change of the roles of Igbo women through the process of modernisation, since they both failed to recognise the significance of the roles played by women in the traditional society. In this chapter, I have shown how the different rituals that were performed by the missionaries in the Church affected the former roles of Igbo women in the traditional society. In doing so I have given some concrete examples from Igbo society such as how the traditional marriage rituals were changed when the missionaries introduced Christian marriage ceremonies.

I have also shown how the traditional Igbo naming ceremony was abandoned when the Christian naming ceremony was introduced, and the ways in which the traditional names were replaced by the Christian names. This affected not only the women, but also the entire family life, since some Igbo names were used as a link to the ancestors.

Finally, I have shown that the missionaries condemned the traditional funeral rites and sacrifices, and that the Christian funeral rites replaced the traditional rites and sacrifices, resulting in a significant change in the roles of women in Igbo society.
CHAPTER 17
Conclusions

This study has examined the changed role of women when Christianity in eastern Nigeria replaced traditional religion. I have focused on a small ethnic group in the western part of Igbo land called Asaba. In this study, I have examined problems such as how the religious and socio-political role of Igbo women changed with the advent of colonialism, modernisation, Western education, and Christianity in particular. I have concentrated on the changing role of Igbo women in the Catholic Church, and I have tried to show how this change corresponded to a change of women's socio-political role in the society outside the Church.

In this book, I have also argued that conversion to Christianity in Igbo society was a product of a long-term process of change resulting from the pressures of external forces, and that this change diminished the influence of Igbo women, who were granted certain well-defined functions in the traditional society. I have also argued, that these functions did not only consist in informal power behind the male scene, but that the women had a say in religious and economic matters, and that this was something guaranteed by customary law. In an ancestor-based society like that of the Igbo, the religious roles are also political. The lineage system is the social and thereby also political structure of such societies. The ancestor-cult expresses the lineage system. Without ancestors, there is no lineage. Hence, the “religious” worship in ancestor-based societies becomes “political”. But it should be noted, that this say in religious and economic matters was only valid for the free-born women, and not the slaves. The slaves had no say in the society. But when colonialism and mission introduced new ideals in such matters, the freeborn Igbo women lost some of their former strength in religious, political and economic matters, which affected their previous role in the traditional society.

In the book, I have also described how Christianity was introduced in Igbo society, and how colonialism introduced new rules. In this context, I have focused on the new political organisation, and on the role of the warrant chiefs. I have also shown how certain new economic rules clashed with the old rules, which resulted in the so-called Aba riots in 1929.

In this study, I have argued that the Church (CMS) has not respected the dual-sex system of the traditional society, and that this affected the previous
role of the Igbo women in the traditional society. As they now attend the meetings of mixed organisations, which were introduced by the CMS missionaries where the male and female members are present simultaneously in the same organisations, a new custom has been introduced, which is totally different from the traditional system of parallel organisations in the traditional society. The Igbo women have lost their former freedom of being able to express themselves in parallel organisations. The new meetings are usually dominated by the men, in whose presence the Igbo women become “muted”.

I have also argued, that, in the traditional society, the Igbo women used to have important roles at life cycle ceremonies. In the church today, all the officiating roles in connection with life cycle rituals have been taken over by men. I have also shown that the important roles at life cycle rituals were played by freeborn women, and not by slaves, since the slaves were not part of the lineage.

In the book I have also argued, that the Catholic Church has recruited people with slave origin (male and female), and among the active people in the Catholic Church today, many are of slave origin. Since the slaves were not happy with their position in the traditional society, and were excluded from male title societies and from the female counterparts in the traditional dual-sex system, they did not appreciate the traditional society and the way it was organised.

Further, I have also concentrated on the religious development inside the Catholic Church in Asaba. I have described the organisations in the Catholic Church, and the role that Igbo women play in these organisations. I have shown that the organised rural models in the Catholic Church were far from the religious organisation in traditional Igbo society. Since the organisational models in the Catholic Church were imported from societies with a different ideology about women's participation in social and religious life, in doing this I have shown that the Christian development did not imply a development of women's influence, at least not as far as the freeborn women are concerned. This has been done in the preceding chapters through a combination of ethnographic description and analytical discussion; focusing on the various levels at which these changes have taken place. An attempt will now be made to tie together the points developed in each of the chapters.

17.1 Achievement orientation

The Igbo are very individualistic, achievement-oriented and achievement-conscious. In Igbo society, people accord more respect to achieved than inherited status,\textsuperscript{1025} as we have already seen in this book. This corresponds with

\textsuperscript{1025} Ottenberg 1959, 130.
their belief in their personal god, \textit{chi}, which is the main expression of their individualistic and achievement-oriented spirit and self-reliance in life. We have also seen that, in Igbo traditional society, personal achievement could be recognised through membership in collective societies and clubs, title societies, etc. Freeborn men in these societies could achieve rank and title, but the authority of such a society was also used as an important instrument of discipline and government, and a means of socialisation and recreation. The club system was also a way for the rulers to carry out their political administration, and also a means to keep check on the power of the rulers in the communities. But all in all, as already mentioned, we may regard the system of clubs with ranks and titles as an expression of the popular Igbo achievement mentality. However, at the same time, we may note that there is a hierarchical mentality included in the ideology of the title system. This is opposite the Christian ideology of egalitarianism. In the title system, people were categorised according to their status in the society, but, in the Church, all people are seen as equal to each other, no matter what status or educational background a person may have in the profane society. Thus everybody is equal before God, according to the Christian ideology.

17.2 Economic organisation

In the economic organisation in the traditional Igbo society, we have seen how the Igbo women played significant roles in the planting and harvesting of crops in the farms, and also in the marketing and selling of goods in the market. Most of the women sold their own products, beside those of their husbands. These women kept most of the income received by the selling of these commodities. They had the right to keep their own cash separately from that of their husbands, and this made most women in the traditional Igbo societies economically independent. This gave them the power to act independently from the wishes of their husbands, especially if they were freeborn.

Also in the marketing and selling of goods in the market, the women used to be those who did most of the market transactions, and who always were at the forefront when discussions about market affairs were conducted. The market used to be under their control.

Igbo women also formed their own economic clubs in order to control the supply and price of the goods they sold in the market. These unions gave guidelines to all the women of the same trade, and enabled them to control the prices of their commodities.

All these economically important roles in the traditional society gave Igbo women a considerable power of decision in matters concerning marketing and selling. But when the colonial administration came, the Igbo women lost some of these powers, as these were taken over by the Igbo men. The colo-
nial administration did not recognize female economic power and independence. This is one of the main reasons why the Europeans gave the economic power to men, even in societies where women were the traders. The reason for this is mainly a matter of cultural difference between Europe and West Africa. The men, who carried out the colonial, administrative tasks, did not recognize female economic power and independence, in economic issues due to their lack of knowledge of the importance of Igbo women in economic matters. It was also due to the fact that the warrant chiefs did not want to support the existing, indigenous system, which they were not part of and also wanted to limit the economic power of the women, since the power of the women was part of this system.

17.3 Life-cycle rituals

As we have seen in Part one, in the traditional society, Igbo women (free-born women) played a very significant role in life cycle rituals, such as birth, naming ceremonies, initiation, marriage and funeral rites, but since the coming of Christianity to Igboland, these tasks have been taken over by the Christian Church.

These tasks used to be secular, social and educational roles (not religious). Now, these tasks have become “religious tasks”, and all life cycle rituals have been taken over by the Church. This is one of the important arenas where women's traditional roles have been taken over by the Church. Thereby, the Igbo women have lost a significant role. For example, in 1994, during my fieldwork in Asaba, Mrs C. O. Okonkwo told me that she used to give advice to youths in life cycle rituals in 1963, but it is no longer like that today, since many people are now Christians. They go to the Church for such rituals.

Also, during my fieldwork in 1994, Mrs A.S. Chukura told me that, in 1965, she was one of the women, who helped in the education of the youth during initiation, but today it is no longer like that, since this has been taken away by the Church.

17.4 Religious role

In the traditional society, Igbo women (freeborn women) used to play a very significant role in religious cults. For example, in Asaba, the Omu played a very important role in the worship of the goddess Onishe, beside the male priest, Orhene. She used to go to the shrine to offer prayers and sacrifices during religious festivals in the community. But with the advent of Christianity in Igbo society, the Omu lost her role in religious rituals in the traditional society, as her role was now taken over by the mission in Igbo society.
Since the religious roles were interwoven with the political roles, her political power in the society was also lost.
Thus, I could say that the coming of the mission to Igbo society did not favour the interest of the Igbo women, because it affected most of the roles played by the Igbo women in the traditional society, and that this was due to the cultural differences between the European missionaries and the Africans. This is particularly evident when we look at women’s previous sacrificial roles.

As pointed out by Arinze (1970), sacrifice was central to traditional Igbo religion and worship. In the traditional society, women in Igbo society (free-born women) made sacrifices to the gods, goddesses, ancestors, deities and spirit forces in order to appease them. During important annual festivals in the community, certain women, such as the Omu, performed sacrifices for the community. Further, sacrifices were also performed at special occasions. One example consists of the title taking, when the Ada–isi of the person taking the title performed sacrifices for the person concerned. But with the coming of Christianity to Igbo society, the Igbo women lost their sacrificial role in the community. The Church preached against this role.

As we have seen in this section, the coming of Christianity to Igbo society changed the former role of the Igbo women in the performance of sacrifices in the traditional society.

I would conclude that the advent of the mission in Igbo society was not in the interest of Igbo women, because it destroyed most of the essential values in Igbo religion, and also affected the significant roles of Igbo women in connection with religious rituals in the traditional society. Thereby, the political power of women was affected as well, since many religious roles were also political, and since these roles were not substituted by political posts for the women in the new administration the colonial authorities did not give the women any political posts.

17.5 Traditional birth attendants and herbalists

When the missionaries came to Igbo society, they introduced modern medical health care. With the introduction of modern medical health facilities, such as hospitals, dispensaries, health centres, maternity homes, etc., the traditional role of the Igbo women as midwives or traditional birth attendants and herbalists was affected, as their role was taken over by the doctors, nurses and midwives in the hospitals. As a result of this, the Igbo women lost their former roles as herbalists and as birth attendants. Thus we could see that the introduction of modern medical health care in Igbo society did

\[1026\text{ Arinze 1970, 111.}\]
not favour the interest of the Igbo women, but rather contributed to the loss of their traditional roles in these respects.

17.6 Resistance to the mission

Some of the questions that I would also like to raise in this book are concerned with how significant it is that the first converts were slaves, poor people, and “nobodies”, who did not have a say in the traditional socio-political organisation. How significant was this for the acceptance of a new kind of organisation - that of the Catholic Church? As already seen in the previous chapters, when Christianity came to Igboland, there was a resistance to the mission. The Igbo people, especially the people in Asaba, did not accept Christianity. They saw no need for a new religion, apart from their own. Because of this, they refused to be converted to Christianity for a long period of time. But as time went on, they sent their slaves to the Church, and, because of their low social status in the society, they readily accepted Christianity and started to go to school. As a result of this, the first converts, and the first to be educated in Igbo society, were slaves, outcasts, and poor people, who were not important in the society, and were not interested in a tradition that made them marginal. Because of this, they emerged in the first independent government in the country, and paid no attention to the women's organisations in the traditional society, which affected the role of the freeborn Igbo women.

Thus, I would say that the slaves, the outcasts and the poor people in Igbo society accepted Christianity in order to free themselves from the oppression of the natives in the traditional society, and not because they were really interested in the new religion.

17.7 Dual-sex organisation

When the mission and the colonial administration came to Igboland, they failed to take into account that the Igbo traditional organisation was a “parallel organisation” based on the “dual-sex” principle. While the colonial government only considered male organisational leaders for the introduction of “indirect rule”, the CMS missionaries arranged for the two sexes to be present simultaneously in the same associations. This was totally different from the traditional parallel organisation, and due to the customary rule of male domination in mixed meetings; the women (freeborn women) lost their traditional freedom of being able to express themselves. The consequence of

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1027 See Okonjo, 1976, 45-58 for further information on the dual-sex political organization in Igbo society.
this male bias of public speech rights in mixed meetings was that the women became “muted”. The reasons for the introduction of the dual-sex organisations in Igbo society was, according to many of the interviewed women, to enable the women to express themselves in the society and also to be able to organise themselves into various groups in the communities. Thus, in this context, the Igbo women lost the roles and power that they had had in the traditional society, because of the ways they were treated by their male counterparts in mixed associations, and also because of the mission and the colonial government. Since the colonial government and the CMS were used to North European cultures, they just assumed that the gender roles would be the same in Nigeria, and thus organised men and women into mixed groups.

However, the Roman Catholic Church was more open at that period to the consideration of local customs than the CMS. Thus, the Catholic missionaries came with a different perception of how they should organise groups in the church with respect to gender. They left the women with the option of having their own associations, or of joining mixed organisations. Most women chose to be members of female organisations, since they were used to this pattern. So were the men, and many of them joined all-male associations within the Catholic Church. This all resulted in the fact that the Roman Catholic Church became much more popular than the CMS. Thus, in spite of being the first missionary society in Asaba, that is, from 1875, the CMS was less successful in recruiting members than the Roman Catholic Church, which arrived several years later, in 1888.

17.8 Political organisation

In the socio-political organisation in the traditional Igbo society, Igbo women (freeborn women) played a very important role. Women such as the Omu were in charge of all affairs concerning women in the community, and also in charge of their market affairs. She and her cabinet, the Otu Omu, took care of all the female affairs in the town. Apart from the general, female organisation, where the Omu and her cabinet were the leaders, there were other women organisations in Igbo traditional society, such as the Umuada and the Inyemedi, which played a very significant role in Igbo society. The Otu Umuada was a very powerful group, which was constituted of women. They used to settle disputes between their fellow sisters and brothers in the community, and played a very important role during funeral rites in the community. But when Christianity and colonialism came to Igboland, these women lost both their political and religious roles in the society, as these roles were taken over by the colonial administration and the Church. This affected the women's previous roles.

But the question we should raise in this book is why the mission and the colonial administration were interested in taking over the roles of the Igbo
women. Did they take over these responsibilities because they wanted to help the women in the traditional society? Or, did they have any other motives? I would argue that the mission and the colonial administration took over the role of the Igbo women because of their ignorance of the Igbo culture.

17.9 Western education
As we have seen in Part two of this book, with the introduction of Western education, which came with Christianity to Igbo society, the Igbo women were encouraged by the missionaries to go to school. There, they learned western virtues. With the education of women in Igbo society, the role of the Igbo women changed from what it had been in the traditional society. The women now play a different role in the society as doctors, nurses, teachers, accountants, etc. This had a tremendous effect on Igbo women. With this development, Igbo women's role was affected in the society. This could be interpreted in a way as if the missionaries came with education in one hand, and, in the process of giving this education, which they believed was for the interest of the Igbo women, converted the women to Christianity.

17.10 Modernisation, migration and urbanisation
The modernisation and enlightenment, which came to Igboland as a result of the growing awareness in Nigeria, had a tremendous effect on Igbo society. With the spread of Western education, there were improvements in various aspects of life in the society. Further, there was rural-urban migration in the whole of Igboland. With the movement of people from one part of the country to the other, many women from Igboland moved either to the cities or to the towns with their husbands for “greener pastures”. As a result of this, Igbo women lost some of the roles, which they played in the traditional society and this had a great effect on their position.

In addition to this, the coming of modernisation to some parts of Igboland, affected the role that the women played, especially in the cult of Onishe. The digging of wells and the use of water tanks meant that many women no longer visited the river, where they would make sacrifices and prayers at the shrine of the river goddess, Onishe. Modern currency replaced the use of cowries, which were of significant use during worship, as many women now used coins instead of cowries for worship. Modernisation also made the women use modern objects such as breakable plates, ornaments, etc., for worship. These alterations were due to the fact that the women were now living in affluence. Thus, also in some other ways, the coming of modernisation and urbanisation to Igbo society, affected the Igbo women.
This study has suggested that the changed role of Igbo women was due to the influence of external forces, such as Christianity, colonialism, modernisation, and Western education, and that with these forces, the religious, social and political roles of Igbo women changed from what they used to be in the traditional society. I have argued that this change diminished the influence of the Igbo women, who were granted certain well-defined functions in the traditional society. But I have emphasised that this applies to the freeborn women only, who used to constitute about 80% of the population. However, the slave women were part of the same culture. I have also argued that the female functions did not only consist in informal power behind the male scene, but that the women had a say in economic and religious matters, and that this was something guaranteed by the customary law.

However, when colonialism and mission introduced new ideals in such matters, the Igbo women lost some of their previous strength in economic and religious matters.

I have also argued that the dual-sex system of the traditional society has not been respected by the CMS, and this affected the roles that the Igbo women had previously had, in the traditional society. As the Igbo women now attend the new organisational meetings introduced by the CMS mission, where the two sexes have to be present simultaneously in the same association, (which is totally different from the traditional parallel organisations in the traditional society), and because of the customary rule of male domination in these mixed meetings, the women have lost their traditional freedom of being able to express themselves and their own opinions. This has contributed to the CMS being less successful in Igboland than the Catholic Church, where the women can belong to singles-sex organisations.

I have also emphasised that the Igbo women used to play important roles at life cycle ceremonies, but that these functions have been taken over by male officiants in the Catholic Church. Further, I have pointed out that the important roles at life cycle rituals were roles played by the freeborn women, and not by slaves.

I have described the religious development within the Catholic Church in Asaba. In doing so, I have described the organisations within the Catholic Church in Asaba, and the roles played by the women in the Catholic Church. I have also shown that the organisational models in the Catholic Church were very different from the religious organisation in the traditional society. Since the organisational models in the Church were imported from societies with a different ideology about women's participation in social and religious life, this meant that the Christian development did not mean a development of women's influence.

I have also mentioned that the Catholic Church recruited people of slave origin (males and females), and that among the active people in the Catholic Church today many are of slave origin. Since the slaves were not happy with their position in the traditional society, where they were excluded from the
male title societies and from their female counterparts in the traditional dual-sex system, they did not appreciate the traditional society and the way it was organised. This encouraged them to readily accept Christianity.

17.11 Epilogue

The fact that Christianity has come to stay in Igbo society is beyond dispute, and the fact that more than seventy-five percent of the Igbo people today are Christians is another indisputable truth. But the question, which must be answered by future researchers in this area, is whether the initial, overwhelming success and progress of the missionaries will be maintained in Igbo society till the close of this century.

Again, as we have seen in this book, the Igbo are achievement-oriented and achievement-conscious. In Igbo society, people accord more respect to achieved than to inherited status\textsuperscript{1028} and, apart from this, the Igbo have a strong sense of hierarchy, which is partly expressed in the same symbols as achievement orientation (the taking of titles that give higher ranks, etc.). The questions we must ask are: Will these trends survive, or will they be overthrown by the egalitarian ideals of the Church? Will they survive within the Church, and will the Church become the new arena for hierarchically oriented achievement-orientation? What importance will it have that a significant percentage of the members of the Church are the descendants of slaves? Do they see the Church as their chance to achieve high ranks? Or will they take the egalitarian message seriously?

Also, within the framework of Igbo society, the role of Igbo women will be defined not only within the new political administration, but also in the religious organisations, where women play an important role.

With consideration to the changing roles of women in religious, social, political and economic contexts in Igbo society, one could say that before the end of this century, women will have gone a long way in achieving their desires, mainly through their own struggle. I could therefore conclude by saying that the future for the Igbo women looks brighter.

\textsuperscript{1028} Ottenberg 1959, 130.
APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire used for interviews with the Otu Omu, Umuada and Inyemedi

Questions

Name: First name: Middle name: Surname:
Sex: Age: Occupation: Religious Affiliation:

1. When did the Omu institution start in Asaba, and what is the meaning of the word Omu?
2. How was the Omu chosen? And how many were they in Otu Omu's cabinet?
3. What were the functions of the Omu and her cabinet?
4. At what age could a woman be qualified to become a member of the Otu Omu?
5. How often does the Otu Omu meet, is it on an ad hoc basis, or regularly? Who convenes meetings of the Otu Omu? Are all members of Otu Omu equal?
6. What type of religious and political role does the Omu play in Asaba?
7. What was the relationship between the Otu Omu and other women's groups such as the Umuada and Inyemedi?
8. What was the relationship between the Omu, the Asagba and the Oturaza council of chiefs?
9. Is there any special relationship between the Omu and Onishe river goddess of Asaba?
10. Do the Omu and her cabinet still play the same socio-political and religious role they played before the coming of colonial rule?
11. What were the roles of other women's groups such as the Umuada and the Inyemedi, as wives and mothers in the traditional society and during the colonial era?
12. What were their rights, such as property, land and inheritance?
13. What role did they play in family and communal rituals in the traditional society, could they be native doctors, diviners, and could they make sacrifices? Has this changed today?
14. Christianity has given women greater participation in religious affairs, could you say that the women today have more religious freedom?
15. What were the social and religious duties of the Ada at the village level? Does she perform the same socio-political role as she did before the coming of colonialism? What was her relationship to the Omu and the Diokpa?
16. What were the religious rituals associated with the death and burial of the Omu and Ada? Were they the same? Explain the significance of these rituals?
17. What was the relationship between the *Umuada* and the *Inyemedi* in Asaba community?
18. Do you believe in reincarnation? If yes, please could you kindly give the reason? If no, why?
19. What were the various titles taken in Asaba and what was their significance or importance as regarded the social, political, cultural and religious life of the people?
20. What was Asaba traditional organisation and family structure like? How was the town administered?
APPENDIX 2

Questionnaire used for interviews with the various male and female groups in Asaba both in the Church and in the villages

Questions

1. When did Christianity come to Asaba?
2. Which were the first congregations that came? CMS or Catholics?
3. When did the Roman Catholic mission come to Asaba?
4. What were the obstacles encountered by the missionaries in their attempt to establish a new religion?
5. What role did the traditionalists play in their opposition to missionary activities in Asaba?
6. What were the consequences of these reactions and how did the missionaries overcome them?
7. What were the various forms of traditional worship and religion before the coming of Christianity?
8. What impact did the coming of Christianity have on the Asaba people as regards to: traditional religion? cultural life? and social life of the people?
9. What were the traditional beliefs, values and importance attached to native doctors, rain-makers, burials and other elements of traditional religion in Asaba community? What impact did the coming of Christianity have on this?
APPENDIX 3

Questionnaire used for interviews with members of the Catholic Women’s Organisation

Questions

1. When was the Catholic Women's Organisation founded? How many members do you have in your organisation?
2. What major role does the organisation play in the Church?
3. Do you have any links with other Christian women's organisations in the country?
4. What are the sources of finance for this organisation?
5. What is the relationship between members of this organisation and female adherents of traditional religion?
6. As a Christian and also as a member of the Catholic Women's Organisation, do you still believe in and practise your traditional religion? If yes, in what way? If no, why?
7. What achievements and failures have occurred in this organisation since it began?
8. How often does the organisation hold meetings? What issues are discussed at such meetings?
9. Do you have any men's organisation in the Church, which is parallel to this organisation?
10. What is the composition of your executives? How are the members elected?
11. Do you have a constitution? If yes, what is your constitution in this organisation?
12. What is your relationship with the parish priest and the bishop?
13. Does your organisation allow women who are polygamous to play any active role in the Church? If yes, what kind of role do they play? If no, why?
14. Does your organisation have links with any youth organisations in the Church? If yes, what sort of link?
15. As a member of the Catholic Women's Organisation and also an Ada of your village, do you think you could be actively involved in the traditional religious rituals in your village, which the Ada is supposed to perform, as well as in the activities of the Church? If yes, why do you think so? If no, give your reason?
APPENDIX 4

Questionnaire used for interviews with members of the Christian Mothers Organisation

Questions

1. When was the Christian Mothers organisation founded?
2. How many members do you have in your organisation?
3. What is the composition of your executives? How are the members elected?
4. Do you have a constitution? If yes, what is your constitution?
5. What are the aims and objectives of this organisation?
6. Do you have any link with other women's organisations in the Church? If yes, what kind of link do you have? If no, why?
7. What are the sources of finance for this organisation?
8. How often does the organisation hold meetings? What issues are discussed at such meetings?
9. As a Christian and also a member of the Christian Mother's Organisation, do you still believe and practise your traditional religion? If yes, in what way? If no, why?
10. What achievements and failures have occurred in this organisation since it began?
11. Do you have any men's organisation in the Church, which is parallel to this organisation? If yes, do you work with them? If no, why?
12. What is your relationship with the parish priest and the bishop?
13. As a member of this organisation, do you have any relationship with female adherents of traditional religion? If yes, what kind of relationship do you have? If no, please also give your reason?
14. As a member of the Christian Mother's Organisation and also as an Ada of your village, do you think you could be actively involved in the traditional religious rituals performed in your village, as well as in the activities of the Church? If yes, why do you think so? If no, give your reason?
APPENDIX 5

Questionnaire used for interviews with members of St. Theresa Women’s Society

Questions

1. When was the St. Theresa Women's Society founded?
2. How many members do you have in your organisation?
3. What is the composition of your executives? How are the members elected?
4. Do you have a constitution?
5. What are the aims and objectives of this organisation?
6. Do you have any links with other women's organisations in the Church? If yes, what kind of links do you have? If no, why?
7. What role does this organisation play in the Church?
8. What are the sources of finance for this organisation?
9. How often does the organisation hold meetings? What issues are discussed at such meetings?
10. What achievements and failures have occurred in this organisation since it began?
11. As a Christian and also as a member of St. Theresa Women's Society, do you still believe and practise your traditional religion? If yes, in what way? If no, why?
12. Do you have any men's organisation in the Church, which is parallel to this organisation? If yes, do you work together with them? If no, why?
13. What is your relationship with the parish priest and the bishop?
14. Does your organisation allow women who are polygamous to play any active role in the organisation? If yes, what role do they play? If no, why?
15. As a member of this organisation, do you have any relationship with female adherents of traditional religion? If yes, what kinds of relationship do you have? If no, please give your reason?
16. As a member of the St. Theresa Women's Society and also as an Ada of your village, do you think you could be actively involved in the traditional religious rituals performed in your village, as well as in the activities of the Church? If yes, why do you think so? If no, give your reason?
APPENDIX 6

Questionnaire used for interviews with members of various congregations

Questions

1. When was this congregation founded?
2. Who was the founder of this congregation?
3. How many Sisters are there in this congregation?
4. Is this congregation an international congregation or an indigenous congregation?
5. What are the aims and objectives of this congregation?
6. Who were the first superior general and councillor of this congregation?
7. What is the main charism of this congregation?
8. What are the criteria for admitting members to this congregation?
9. What is the minimum age for a professed sister to make her final profession?
10. What are the three major problems faced by your congregation when admitting young women? And how are they handled?
11. What are the sources of finance for this congregation?
12. Does your congregation have any relationship with other women's organisations in the Church? If yes, what type of relationship? If no, why?
13. List the three main roles this congregation plays in the Church and in the society?
14. What are the achievements and failures of this congregation since its foundation?
15. As a professed sister, do you still believe in the traditional religion of your ancestors? If your answer is yes, what elements in the traditional religious heritage appeal to you? If no, please also give your reason?
16. What role do you play in local Catholic Church life and how do you manage local parishes?
17. Do you think that there is any similarity between African traditional religion and Christianity? If yes, what are the similarities? If no, why do you think so?
18. As a sister, do you think that there is any similarity between the roles you play in the Church today and the roles you played in your traditional religion before you became a Christian? If yes, what are the similarities? If no, why?
19. Do you have any relationship with female adherents of traditional religion? If yes, what kind of relationship do you have? If no, why?
20. Do you think as a Christian and as a sister that the role women played in traditional society has changed with the coming of Christianity, colonialism and Western education, or do you think it is still the same today in the Church? If yes, in what ways has it changed? If no, elaborate?
APPENDIX 7

Questionnaire used for interviews with women in the Catholic Church

Questions

1. Why do you like the Catholic Church?
2. Why did you join the Catholic Church rather than the CMS?
3. According to what you believe, what were their various policies in the Church?
4. According to what you believe, what were the differences between their policies and the CMS policies as regarding membership recruitment via associations in the Church?
5. What types of organization did they organize their members on their arrival? Was it mixed or single sex organizations?
6. Do you feel comfortable in mixed organizations in the Church? Why or why not?
7. How do you feel as a woman about the Roman Catholics’ way of organizing their members into associations?
8. Do you feel comfortable to speak up when the men are there in mixed meetings and associations in the Church?
9. As a woman and a member of this Church do you think that the coming of Christianity to Nigeria had changed your social status in the traditional society and make you to have a better status and position in the Church and the society today? If yes, why? If no, why not?
10. Is it easier to speak when only women are around in the Church?
11. Maria, she is like a mother, isn’t she? I feel at home in the Catholic Church just as I feel at home when there is a mother. How about you?
12. In your own opinion, do you think that the Catholics are more successful than the CMS? If yes, why do you think so? If no, why?
APPENDIX 8

Questionnaire used for interviews with women in the CMS (Church Missionary Society)

Questions

1. When did the CMS come to Asaba? Have you heard any statements about this? By whom?
2. Why did you choose the CMS rather than the Catholic Church? How about your mother, grandmother, great grandmother, etc.?
3. According to what you yourself feel, what were their various policies in the Church?
4. According to what you yourself feel, what were the difference between their policies and the Roman Catholic missions in their policies as regarding membership recruitment via associations in the Church?
5. According to what you yourself feel, what kind of organizations did they organize their members on their arrival? Was it dual-sex or mixed organizations and why was it so?
6. Do you feel comfortable in mixed organizations? Why, and why not?
7. How do you feel as a woman about the CMS ways of organizing their members into associations?
8. Do you feel comfortable to speak up when the men are there in mixed meetings and organizations?
9. As a woman and a member of CMS do you think that the coming of Christianity to Asaba had changed your social status in the traditional society and made you to have a better status and position in the Church and the society today? If yes, why? If no, why do you think so?
10. Do you dare to speak up when men are around? Did your mother dare to speak up when men were around? Did your grandmother dare to speak up when men were around?
APPENDIX 9

Questionnaire used for interviews with freeborn women

Questions

1. What kind of changes affected your *Otu Umuada* when Christianity and colonialism came?
2. Did you lose your power to speak up in the community? If so why?
3. Do you think that these changes affected the previous roles that you played in the traditional society? If yes in what ways? If no why?
4. Why was it that the women of slave origin accepted Christianity earlier than the freeborn women?
5. As a woman do you think that the former roles which you played in the traditional society diminished with the coming of Christianity and colonialism to Asaba? If yes, in what ways? If no, why?
6. Was it Christianity or colonialism that changed the role of women?
7. In what ways were the female roles changed?
APPENDIX 10

Questionnaire used for interviews with women of slave origin

Questions

1. Why was it that women of slave origin accepted Christianity earlier than the freeborn women?
2. Do you think that your status in the traditional society has changed with the coming of Christianity? If yes, why? If no, why?
3. Did the women’s roles change when Christianity arrived? In what ways? Describe what you have heard about this from your mother, grandmother, etc., and from other people?
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Ms Theresa Obiazor, Asaba, October 20, 1994.
Obi Njokanma, Asaba, October 2, 1994.
Mrs. S.A. Odiatu, Asaba, August 9, 1994.
Mrs. Veronica Chizoo Ibewuike, Umuoke, October 6, 1994.
Mrs. Ezewani, Asaba, August 18, 1994.
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Mrs. M. M. Miaphen, Jos, August 12, 1994.
Miss V. Osaji, Asaba, July 1, 1994.
Sister Mary Justin Uzoh, Onitsha, December 12, 1994.
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