

# **Igbo Historiography: Parts 1, II & III**

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## **Abstract**

Igbo historiography has advanced since the publication of the epic narrative of Olaudah Equiano in 1789 and its different versions, especially that of Paul Edwards, a British literary historian in 1969. The main objective of this essay is to demonstrate the vitality and diversity of Igbo historical studies and provide informative and thoughtful interpretations of its strengths and weaknesses. In three parts, the essay examines the origin, dispersal and settlement of the people; sociopolitical institutions and organization; economic systems, including slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, and the colonial economy; Igbo religion, Islam, Christianity and Western education; colonial encounter; the Igbo in precolonial and modern Nigeria with focus on intergroup relations, ethnicity and the Nigeria-Biafra War; and Igbo intellectual history. The essay makes a spirited critique of areas of overemphasis and the conceptual and methodological issues. It suggests important neglected themes that require further historical investigations. Its primary goal is to nudge Igbo historiography in new and challenging directions and inspire historians interested in Igbo studies to adopt a historiographical approach that emphasizes currency, relevance and usability.

## **Igbo Historiography: Part I**

### **Introduction**

Igbo historiography has advanced since the publication of the epic narrative of Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789) and its different versions, especially that of Paul Edwards, a British literary historian in 1969 (Carretta, 2005; Chuku, 2013b; Edwards, 1969; Equiano, 1995; Green, 1995; Sapoznik, 2013; Walvin, 1998). Despite his limited knowledge and experience, Equiano contributed immensely to the development of Igbo historiography by presenting a general account of

the people's culture, their economy, government and politics, social life, warfare, and the question of Igbo origins. To underscore the significance of Equiano's contribution to the study of Igbo history and culture, there is no historical or ethnographical work of importance on the Igbo, particularly those covering the pre-twentieth century period that has not made reference to *The Interesting Narrative*. Adiele Afigbo, the eminent and most prolific Igbo historian of his generation, has stated that "Equiano's *Narrative* though limited in scope and depth could be said to provide a base line for the study of traditional Igbo society" (1981a:183). The book has remained the earliest work most grounded in Igbo heritage and has continued to serve as a primary source for the study of eighteenth-century Igbo society and culture. Interestingly, the controversy surrounding Equiano's birthplace has generated serious scholarship by historians and literary critics. While the latter led by Vincent Carretta (2005) suggest that Equiano was most likely born in South Carolina, most historians believe that he was born in what is now Nigeria (Chuku, 2013b; Korieh, 2009; Lovejoy, 2007, 2006; Walvin, 1998; Afigbo, 1981a)

There were other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Diaspora Igbo who contributed to the development of Igbo historiography. Among them were Archibald Monteath (ca. 1792-1864) of Jamaica, James Africanus Horton (1835-1883), and John C. Taylor, both of Sierra Leone. Monteath's biographical narrative provides vital information about certain aspects of Igbo culture and values, including marriage tradition, economic activities, family socialization, gender roles, and facial scarification (*igbu ichi* practice), which Equiano also discussed in his autobiography (Warner-Lewis, 2007; Monteith, 2002; Nelson, 1966). In his *West African Countries and Peoples*, Horton discussed Igbo characteristic features and dispensations, their economic base,

sociopolitical organization, religious beliefs and rites, new yam festival, crime and punishment, warfare, medicine, language and dialectical differences, gender relations, and their adaptability to new ideas, customs and mannerism. In spite of Igbo complex lifestyle that Horton presented, he still described the people as “barbarous, unlettered, unchristian, and imbued with a vast idolatrous superstition.” He advocated for the integration of Igbo communities into a strong united Christian nation with liberal immigration policy that would attract “civilized individuals” for its development since according to him, “it is impossible for a nation to civilize itself; civilization must come from abroad” (Horton, 1969:171-198). While appealing for colonization based on an evolutionary conception of cultures, Horton recognized the danger inherent in such an appeal, particularly in commercialized colonialism and its merchant abuses. Ironically, this became apparent with the British colonization of Igbo territory and other parts of Nigeria.

As a nineteenth-century missionary in Igbo homeland, who with Samuel Crowther, pioneered the Christianization of Igbo society, Taylor offered the first account of the size of Igbo territory in southeastern Nigeria, an area he described as stretching from the Bonny River to the confines of Calabar and as far north as Idda, and from Aboh and Asaba in the west to the confines of the Benin kingdom. He devoted considerable attention to the study of the Igbo language through translational work and teaching of the language (Chuku, 2013a: 12-13; Crowther and Taylor, 1968). These Diaspora Igbo laid the foundation to the development of Igbo historiography through their writings which have constituted a primary resource to the study of Igbo history and culture.

Accounts of early European visitors, missionaries, colonial officers, anthropologists and ethnographers were also instrumental to the development of Igbo historiography. Such accounts of early European visitors, mainly traders, explorers and military officers, to the Niger Delta and Igbo homeland included those of John Adams (1823 and 1822), William B. Baikie (1856), John Barbot (1732), Hugh Crow (1830), Macgregor Laird and R. A. K. Oldfield (1837), Arthur G. Leonard (1906), and Richard Lander and John Lander (1832). Although useful this body of work is unsystematic, ethnocentric and tendentious. Colonial administrators, government-appointed anthropologists and missionaries such as, George T. Basden, Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones, Margaret M. Green, Mervin D.W. Jeffreys, Sylvia Leith-Ross, Charles K. Meek, Margery Perham, P. Amaury Talbot, and Northcote W. Thomas pioneered major studies and publications on the Igbo, their culture and worldview in order to understand the people for the effective implementation of the native authority administration in the area. They offered the much needed information about the people to advance the British colonial project and mission evangelization in the area. These European authors produced a massive body of work on various aspects of Igbo life and culture, including Igbo origins and sub-groups, language and dialects, marriage and kinship institutions, family structure, traditional systems of government, status and social organization, economic activities, customary laws, gender relations, religion, and external relations (Forde and Jones, 1950; Green, 1947; Leith-Ross, 1939; Basden, 1938 and 1921; Meek, 1937; Talbot, 1932 and 1926; Thomas, 1914 and 1913). For example, the major objective of Talbot's *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria* was "to classify the tribes and sub-tribes and to define their

boundaries” (Talbot, 1926: vi). He also discussed, among other important topics, Igbo origins, sociocultural institutions, and language and dialectical variations.

However, these works are flawed in a number of ways, including their justification of European imperialism and entrapment in Eurocentric and racist biases and vocabularies, promoting an ideology of primitive and backward people who needed European civilization and guardianship. For instance, Basden’s subtitle of *Niger Ibos* is “A Description of Primitive Life ... of the Ibo People;” and while Leith-Ross (1939: 38) refers to the Igbo as “one of the least disciplined and least intelligible, of African peoples,” Perham (1937: 160) describes them as an “amorphous and backward mass.” There were also problems associated with language barriers and cultural insensitivity due to ignorance and racial arrogance. In spite of the deficiencies, these voluminous works by European authors have continued to serve as a springboard for historical scholarship on the Igbo, their culture and society. Generations of Igbo historians and others have relied on the above earliest body of work on the Igbo in corroboration with other genre of sources.

First generation of Igbo pamphleteers and amateur and professional historians played a major role in the development of Igbo historiography through their writings. The publication of pamphlets on different aspects of Igbo culture and life by Igbo products of mission and colonial education gave rise to what is known as the Onitsha Market Literature [OML] (Obiechina, 1973). The pamphlets—usually romance novels, chapbooks and didactic booklets—may lack intellectual depth but they were full of humor and vitality and they reflected the dynamism of the changing Igbo experience as their writers attempted to reconcile two cultures of traditional rural Igbo community and urban society

shaped by alien values. The pamphleteers, who wrote between the 1920s and 1950s, were among the first group of Africans to write local histories of the Igbo people. Isaac Iweka-Nuno (1924) and Pita Nwana (1933) were leading pioneers in this endeavor. Azikiwe (1930) was on Onitsha history. There are also important works by nonprofessional historians (Akosa, 1987; Arua, 1951; Bosah, 1973; Idigo, 1955; Igwegbe, 1962; Ike, 1951, 1952; Ndupu, 1972; Ogali, 1960; Umo, 1947)

The professional Igbo historians some of whom products of the University of Ibadan, took up the challenge of vindicating Igbo history and culture through nationalist historiography. These pioneer nationalist historians, including Joseph Anene, Chieka Ifemesia, Adiele Afigbo, and others led by Kenneth Onwuka Dike, not only contributed to our understanding of the various aspects of the history of the Igbo and their neighbors, and their interactions with other groups within Africa and beyond, but also deployed historical enquiry and publication as an ideological weaponry against colonization and European ethnocentrism. They pioneered a historiographical revolution that challenged Western historical methodologies and imperialist narrative that denied Africans any agency in cultural and knowledge production by adopting different genre of sources, including oral history, archaeological and linguistic evidence. These nationalist Igbo historians heeded to the call at the time to rescue Igbo and Nigerian histories from imperial denials and distortions. But the critical question was whether they were able to write nationalist and community histories devoid of biases and romanticization. Were they able to navigate the delicate boundaries between local, ethnic, national, and global histories amidst competing forces engendered by class, culture, ethnicity, nationalism and globalization? In spite of the criticisms against nationalist historians over being

consumed by nationalist sentiments, politically oriented toward the history of state and empire building, and driven by elitism with a focus on the powerful, one cannot ignore the vital role they played in laying the foundation upon which a new historiographical tradition with more broad fields in social, economic, political and gender histories emerged. The nationalist historiography (1950s-1970s), the first wave of historical studies in Nigeria, is followed by the second (1970s-1980s) and the third (1990s-2000s) waves (Aderinto and Osifodunrin, 2012; Falola and Aderinto, 2010).

The main objective of this essay is to demonstrate the vitality and diversity of Igbo historical studies and provide informative and thoughtful interpretations of its strengths and weaknesses. The essay points out both themes that have been emphasized and those neglected in existing historiography. It also makes a spirited critique of areas of overemphasis as well as conceptual and methodological issues. This three-part essay follows a thematic approach. Part I examines Igbo historiography in the areas of the origin, dispersal and settlement of the people; and their sociopolitical institutions and organization. Part II discusses the economic systems, including slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, and the colonial economy; and Igbo religion, Islam, Christianity and Western education. Part III evaluates the historiography on Igbo colonial encounter; the Igbo in precolonial and modern Nigeria with focus on intergroup relations, ethnicity and the Nigeria-Biafra War; and Igbo intellectual history.

### **Origins, Dispersal and Settlements**

The question of Igbo origins and migrations is an aspect of Igbo historiography that has not only remained controversial but has been debated for more than a century.

Equiano was the first to attribute the origin of the Igbo to external providence, arguing that the people were a branch of dispersed Jews. Equiano cited the similarities in Igbo and Jewish cultures, such as the practice of circumcision, confinement of their women for a specific period after child-birth and menstrual cycle followed by purification rituals, and naming their children after specific events and experiences—as proof that the Igbo were Jews of Africa (Equiano, 1995: 41-44). This view of Hamitic origins of the Igbo was popularized during the colonial period by Europeans. Arthur Leonard, a British colonial officer who spent ten years studying different parts of West Africa, particularly, southern Nigeria, relied on linguistic evidence to draw his conclusion that the Igbo language “abound in Hebraisms” and that the people originated from the “eastern portion of Central Africa” from which they were pushed westward “into the apex formed by the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers” (Leonard, 1906: 43-44). In 1921, Herbert R. Palmer, a British colonial officer in Igbo area pointed to the similarities of the religious and ritual practices of the Aro and Nri and claimed that they were superior compared to the rest of Igbo groups and therefore assigned them to the Hamitic origins. He suggested that the highest features of Igbo culture evolved under the leadership of the Aro and the Nri (Palmer, 1921).

Similarly, George Basden, a missionary and ethnolinguist, who first visited Igbo territory in late 1900 and worked there for nearly 40 years, claimed that the Igbo culture evolved under the influence of the Levitical Code. In tracing the sources of many Igbo customs, Basden was struck by the similarities between them and certain ideas and practices of the Levitical code. These included their rites of passage, the religious intensity of the Igbo, symbolism of blood, their circumcision of male and female



children, specific forms of economic and political organization, and the closeness of certain idioms of their language to Hebrew language (Basden, 1938: 411-423; 1912: 246-7). Using the Nri-Awka cultural traits, colonial anthropologist Mervin Jeffreys traces Igbo origins to Egypt, arguing that the dual organization of the group of Igbo he studied and their aristocratic traditions were a carryover of ancient Egyptian where their territory and society were divided into Upper and Lower Egypt (Jeffreys, 1956, 1946, 1935, 1931).

Ironically, these claims to alien origins have resonated among certain Igbo people, especially those who were elevated in such claims, and who were motivated by strategic rather than scholastic interests. These Igbo groups have drawn parallels between Igbo business acumen and their sufferings at the hands of other Nigerian ethnic nationalities, and Jewish experience throughout history; and between the short-lived Republic of Biafra and acts of genocide perpetrated against Biafrans, mostly Igbo, by other Nigerians during the Nigeria-Biafra War and the holocaust against the Jews and the state of Israel surrounded by Arab enemies. The Hamitic theorists have ignored the importance of the corroborative use of multiple sources—oral traditions, archaeological and linguistic evidence—in dealing with complex and complicated historical topics such as origins, migrations and settlements. Incidentally, none of these multiple sources has supported that the Igbo originated either from ancient Egypt or the Middle East. These sources also discredit the Hamitic theory that places Igbo origins to the nineteenth-century. Oral traditions of the people, archaeological and linguistic evidence show that the Igbo had emerged as a distinct group more than 6,000 years ago (Oguagha and Okpoko, 1984; Chikwendu, 1976; Shaw, 1970; Hartle, 1967, 1966 and 1965).

Igbo historians have challenged the historicity of such claims. The most forceful of these Igbo historians was Adiele Afigbo. Arguably, the most renowned, prolific and a pioneer Igbo historian with nine authored and co-authored books, six edited volumes and over 200 pieces of scholarship, whose volume of work and leadership have exerted an enormous influence on Igbo historiography and Igbo historians, Afigbo debunked the Oriental or Hamitic myth of Igbo origin by questioning the validity of the theories of a monogenetic origin of human races and peoples from the Middle East, as well as cultural diffusionism that are popular within anthropological circles (Afigbo, 1992a, 1986, 1983a, 1981a, 1971).<sup>1</sup> He suggested that these claims lack historical evidence and are merely an ideology for group survival. He opined that the British colonizers' support of an Oriental origin of certain Igbo groups such as the Aro and Nri, was to justify and boost their colonization of the Igbo, which to them was not a radical departure from Igbo experience of foreign domination, but rather a continuation of what the immigrant Hebrews and Egyptians had started, both experience being beneficial to the Igbo. Thus, propagating the Hamitic origin of certain Igbo groups with their dominant influence on the rest of the Igbo portrays the benevolence of the British Imperial Empire in Igbo society (Afigbo, 1992a, 1983a, 1971).

Relying on a variety of sources, Afigbo places Igbo origin to an autochthonous development around the Niger-Benue confluence area from where the people dispersed. He suggested that the Igbo were among the members of the Kwa sub-group of the Niger-

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<sup>1</sup> Many of Afigbo's articles, pamphlets and unpublished studies, written over four decades and focusing on diverse themes such as Igbo origins and migrations; precolonial Igbo culture, religion, economy, slavery and transatlantic slave trade, politics and political organization, warfare, ethnic identity and intergroup relations; and Igbo encounter with the Europeans, colonial conquest, rule and consequences; gender; Igbo intellectuals; and the role of the Igbo in southeastern Nigeria and in postcolonial Nigeria were published in a massive edition of two books to make them more accessible (Falola, 2006 and 2005).

Congo family of African languages who established ancient sociocultural and political communities in the forest belt of Nigeria within the Niger-Benue area dating back to over 6,000 years ago. It was from here that they dispersed to surrounding areas due to a variety of factors, including increased population, pressure on the land and resource scarcity. Afigbo concluded that the Igbo ancestors were firmly settled in and around their present homeland in southeastern Nigeria by the third millennium, and that the Nsukka, Awka, Okigwe, Orlu and Owerri areas constituted the heartland of the Igbo and their cultural baseline, a center whose location helped it retain most of what could be regarded as pristine Igbo culture unadulterated by external influences until it encountered the Europeans. From this center, he continues, waves of secondary and tertiary migrations occurred, leading to the establishment of West Niger Igbo, the Isuama and Ohuhu-Ngwa communities, whose further expansion brought them in contact with non-Igbo groups (Afigbo, 1992a). On the basis of Igbo origins and migrations, Afigbo referred to their society as a “cultural federation” made up of culture centers and culture margins depending on the varying intensity of the practice and usage of the dominant Igbo traits (Afigbo, 1992a:145).

In her groundbreaking works on the Igbo, Elizabeth Isichei<sup>2</sup> supports the Niger-Benue confluence of the people’s origin from which proto-Igbo populations migrated to the Cross River and the Anambra Valley-Nsukka escarpment, which to her were the

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth is a New Zealander with a PhD in history from Oxford University (1967), married to an Igbo man, and taught history courses for many years in Nigerian universities (Nsukka and Jos). Within few years’ intervals in the 1970s, she published three books that have remained significant in Igbo historical studies (Isichei, 1977, 1976 and 1973). Her *Igbo Worlds* is an anthology of two categories of materials: descriptions of Igbo society (1505-1910) by European traders, missionaries and colonizers; and oral histories collected by history students and the author; with a brief introduction and postscript tips for amateur historians on how to collect and record oral history of the Igbo. *A History of the Igbo People*, though an ambitious account of diverse topics and themes in Igbo history from antiquity to the present which makes superficiality, shabbiness, and inaccuracies inevitable, is unquestionably a major contribution to Igbo historical studies, a historiography that was at the time in its infancy.

earliest nucleus of Igbo settlement (Isichei, 1977, 1976). Citing archaeological and other sources, she notes that “4500 years ago people in Nsukka were making pottery ... similar in style to that still made in the area today [and that there was] a rock shelter at Afikpo ... inhabited 5000 years ago by people who made rough red pottery and a variety of stone tools” (Isichei, 1976: 3). According to Isichei, further migrations from this northern heartland occurred which resulted in the concentration of the Igbo in the Owerri, Okigwe, Orlu and Awka areas, which Afigbo, G.I. Jones, and others regarded as the Igbo heartland. In refuting Afigbo’s position above, Isichei questions why the Igbo concentrated on “sandy uplands of limited fertility, with frequent water shortages, rather than on the well-watered alluvial soils of the river valleys,” yet she offers suggestions that contradict her northern Anambra Valley-Nsukka heartland. Some of the factors she suggested as to why the Igbo preferred to concentrate in “sandy uplands of limited fertility,” included the challenges associated with the flooding river banks during raining seasons, susceptibility of riverain settlements to water-borne attacks and water-born diseases such as malaria and schistosomiasis, and the Igbo apprehensiveness to bodies of water which they regarded as the abodes of their gods and other spirits (Isichei, 1976: 4-6). A major problem with Isichei’s argument is lack of chronology, particularly in reference to secondary and tertiary migrations, which Afigbo offers in his own analysis.

John Oriji is another Igbo historian who has contributed to the debate on Igbo origins and settlements. In his *Traditions of Igbo Origin* (1990: 5), Oriji aimed to “collate and synthesize the numerous sources” that would help us understand Igbo origins and migrations. But, while citing previous publications on the subject, Oriji relied extensively on oral traditions collected in the form of undergraduate essays from the University of

Nigeria, Nsukka written between the 1970s and 1980s. These traditions mainly focused on the origins of Igbo towns and clans and are therefore valuable, but would have been more helpful in our understanding of the subject if their methodological and analytical qualities are critically discussed in the book. He presents an overall pattern of Igbo migrations by identifying the Nri-Awka and Amaigbo-Orlu areas as the “primary core,” the Oratta-Owerri-Okigwe-Awgu-Udi-Nsukka-Agbor axis as the “secondary core,” and the Mbaise-Umuahia-Ngwa-Ikwerre-Etche-Ahoada-Arochukwu-Afikpo-Abakiliki areas as the “tertiary core.” Oriji suggests that the Igbo were among the early inhabitants of the forest region of Western Africa who first established their settlements in the fertile river banks of the Niger, Imo, Orashi and Cross River, evidence he points out, was supported by traditions of the Arochukwu, Aboh, Oguta, Onitsha and other towns which were founded by autochthonous groups. As a result of economic, demographic, political and social factors, some Igbo started migrating from the Nri-Awka-Amigbo-Orlu areas and other parts of their heartland to the frontiers during the Neolithic period and that further “expansion” of the Igbo to the frontiers was intensified by the overseas trade and European colonization in the early part of the 20th century. It is not clear which of the Igbo groups expanded their territories during the “overseas trade” and the “colonial rule;” or is Oriji mixing up migration of the Igbo people outside Igbo territory with territorial expansion? In his study of the Anioma, the West-Niger Igbo, Ohadike (1994) points to the secondary migration and settlement of the Igbo and other ethnic groups to the area but rejects the notion that the Anioma Igbo originated from the Benin Kingdom. He emphasizes that Anioma Igbo migrated from Igbo territory east of the Niger River due to land scarcity, population growth and warfare.

Conclusively, one can argue that one of Afigbo's most innovative and perhaps, most controversial contributions to Igbo historiography deals with the question of the origins and migrations of the people. Relying only on cultural similarities as basis for Igbo Oriental origins and attributing the people's civilization to a single source, which was what the proponents of Hamitic paradigm have done, is rather too simplistic. As Arthur Leonard (1906: 31) aptly stated in reference to the difficult challenges of studying the origins of Benin and Igbo peoples: "if the problem that so far has engaged our attention has been extremely intricate [that is, Benin origins], that which concerns the origin of the Ibo [Igbo] is still more so, for it is a very maze within a maze." Igbo origins and migrations are an intricate and usually confusing network of interconnecting pathways of decentralized sub-groups of over 300 autonomous states and ministates and therefore require meticulous historical investigations and analyses, using multidisciplinary methods and sources in order to enrich our understanding of the subject. The Igbo might have originated from the area around the Niger-Benue confluence, and also embarked on different migratory epochs due to a number of factors, it is important not to elevate some groups such as the Nri-Awka, Aro, Anambra Valley-Nsukka or Isuama-Orlu over the others especially since the traditions of origins and settlements from other parts of Igbo society do not support a center-periphery model or paradigm. Therefore in order to advance our knowledge of Igbo origins and patterns of migration and settlement the decentralized democratic character of the people with remarkable diffused centers of artisans, traders, and religious/ritual specialists should be factored in our analyses.

## **Sociopolitical Institutions and Organization**

Scholarship on Igbo history has also challenged the branding of the Igbo as disorderly people incapable of establishing state structures due to their emphasis on individuality and competitiveness. Igbo historiography has demonstrated that the people had developed complex political systems in which political decentralization did not amount to political disorganization. In addition, it shows that centuries prior to European contact, the Igbo developed and nurtured complex political and social institutions with which they dealt with challenges emanating from their environment and its surroundings. The institutions were diverse and included village republican, kingship/presidential monarchy, kinship and gerontocratic systems; but most Igbo polities were village republican governed by councils of elders and village assemblies. Historical studies by Oriji (2011), Ijoma (1984), Ifemesia (1979), Njaka (1974), Afigbo (1973a), as well as those of anthropologists Onwuejeogwu (1981), Nsugbe (1974), Nzimiro (1972), Henderson (1972), Ottenberg (1971, 1968), Jones (1962, 1956), Meek (1937), and Jeffreys (1935) have enriched our understanding of Igbo political institutions and social organization. While Afigbo (1973a, 1972: 16-22) delineates Igbo political structures into constitutional village monarchies and democratic village republics; Onwuejeogwu's study of Nri kingship system; Henderson's on Onitsha kingship structure, social organization and religious rituals; and Nzimiro's work on kingship political organization in Onitsha, Abo, Oguta and Osomari demonstrate their marked similarities and differences. In these polities, kings/monarchs, titled chiefs, titled associations and age grades constituted the political authorities, but other Igbo polities such as in Asaba,

Aguleri, Abakaliki and Afikpo, political authority was drawn from kinship, titled personnel and age grades (Afigbo, 1983b; Onwuejeogwu, 1979).

Njaka (1974) summarizes traditional Igbo political arrangements and many changes that had occurred and argues that *Oha* (people or community) was at the center of the Igbo political culture and *Ofo* (Igbo ritual symbol of authority) validated government powers and actions, a tradition that guaranteed checks and balances. While McCall (2000) and Nsugbe (1974) focus on the Ohaffia, Ottenberg (1989, 1975, 1968) use the Afikpo sociopolitical institutions which were based on the dual descent of matrilineal-patrilineage to demonstrate different versions of Igbo sociopolitical organization. Though Meek (1937) was stimulated by the Women's War of 1929 and government search for workable traditional native authorities, it enriches Igbo historiography in the areas of major political institutions, kinship organizations and the administration of law in Igbo polities.

Chuku (2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d, 2009), Achebe (2011), Uchendu (2006), McCall (1996), Mba (1982), Okonjo (1976), Van Allen (1972), Ekejiuba (1967), and Green (1947) add gender dimension to our understanding of Igbo political structures and social organization. Green uses Umueke village in southern Igbo as a case study of Igbo kinship and social organization; the maintenance of law and social cohesion; women's organizations; and marriage relations that linked autonomous villages and communities and mitigated conflicts and warfare. Focusing on the political organization of the Igbo west of the Niger River, Okonjo and Uchendu emphasize the gendered political system in which political power was shared between men and women in a complementary manner to promote harmony and the wellbeing of the society. Achebe's and Chuku's



biographical studies focus on Ahebi Ugbabe who rose from a servile background to become the only female warrant chief in colonial Nigeria. Van Allen examines the declining political power of Igbo women during the colonial period. Chuku (2009) expands the discussion by tracing the history of political participation of Igbo women in the affairs of precolonial Igbo government, the British colonial administration, and in the Nigerian political systems, as well as in the activities of groups and subgroups that exercised authority; and emphasizes the need for gender sensitivity and the politics of inclusion and integration in Nigeria that would significantly increase the number of women in elected positions at all levels of government, even if it requires instituting a gender quota system.

In summation, Igbo kingship was open, participatory and communal rather than an isolated institution that privileged a few. The republican democratic tradition fostered popular participation, collective wellbeing and individual growth and advancement. The political culture nurtured egalitarianism, liberty, freedom, and opportunities for negotiation and advancement. Importance was placed on seniority in age with its accompanied wisdom, experience and personal qualities such as skilled oratory, aggressiveness, proven entrepreneurship and drive, intellectual acumen and knowledge of cultural norms and conventions. Igbo indigenous institutions and value systems were products of the people's dynamism, practices and acculturation.

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