

© 2014

Robin P. Chapdelaine

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

A HISTORY OF CHILD TRAFFICKING IN SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA,

1900s-1930s

By

ROBIN P. CHAPDELAINE

A Dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in History

written under the direction of

Professors Temma Kaplan and Carolyn A. Brown

and approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

May 2014

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A History of Child Trafficking in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900s-1930s

By ROBIN PHYLISIA CHAPDELAINE

Dissertation Directors:
Temma Kaplan and Carolyn A. Brown

Southeastern Nigeria underwent significant economic, political, and social change as a result of European conquest. The transatlantic slave trade, the expansion of the legitimate trade in palm oil and the subsequent need for domestic labor contributed to a long history of human trafficking. The existing continuities between the transatlantic slave trade and the ways in which colonial authorities and Igbo, Ibibio, Efik and Ijaw (Ijo) populations mobilized juvenile productive and reproductive labor is at the center of this study. Child dealing supported domestic labor needs at a time when the legality of colonial 'slavery' was in flux. Nigeria's steep economic decline of the 1920s and 1930s caused a dramatic increase in child pawning, stealing and dealing. This dissertation examines the porosity between the institutions of pawnship, slavery, child (girl) marriage, panyarring, serfdom, clientelism, and servanthood. The transformation of child pawning, a family strategy that used children's labor as collateral for loans, is highlighted as an institution that allowed slippages from 'pawn' to 'slave' as the procurement and post-slavery exploitation of children became an important local system of attaining child labor. Many parents pawned children in order to pay colonial taxes. Men pawned girls to raise the bride price needed for their own marriages and child dealers stole and sold children to add to their personal wealth.

This study also examines the actions of Nigerian, European, American and Canadian women who attempted to challenge colonial policies at a time when the welfare of poor Nigerian children decreased and colonial economic demands increased. The decline of Nigerian children's livelihoods occurred at the same historical moment that American, European and Canadian activists sought to increase the protection of children globally. This work also disrupts assumptions about categorizing certain groups as primary trafficking 'victims'. Members of the League of Nations and similar groups concerned with the rights of women and children often focused on women and children as specific groups needing protection in colonial Nigeria. However, my work shows that women and children participated in human trafficking for the same reasons men did—they wanted to enhance their own financial and social security.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I received invaluable support from many individuals who enabled the completion of this project. My interest in child pawning developed as a result of reading Judith van Allen's article, "Sitting on a Man." In order to fully understand the women's movement, Dr. Barbara Cooper encouraged me to read the *Ogu Umunwaanyi* (1929 Women's War) *Commission of Inquiry Testimony* in the fall of 2003. One year later, Dr. Temma Kaplan supervised a year-long research project, which examined the reasons why Igbo-speaking women participated in the revolt. After consulting Dr. Allen M. Howard and others whose work focused on the institution of pawnship, I decided on my dissertation research topic. I am grateful for the support of my co-directors, Dr. Temma Kaplan and Dr. Carolyn A. Brown for their meaningful insight and continued support. Other committee members, Dr. Seth Koven and Dr. Judith A. Byfield pushed me to think about my project in an international context. Dr. Paul E. Lovejoy provided resources and advice on how to conceptualize pawning as part of economic and social processes. Finally, Dr. Paula Fass encouraged me to view this study as part of a history of children and childhood.

Rutgers University provided the majority of financial support for this project. I am grateful for the funding provided by The Department of History, the Graduate School, and the Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis. I also received funding from the American Historical Association's Bernadotte E. Schmitt Research Grant.

I am thankful for the assistance I received while conducting research for the dissertation. I am deeply indebted to Joseph and Temitope Ayodokun. Their in-depth knowledge of the Nigeria National Archive at Ibadan made my research in Nigeria manageable. Additionally, Anayo Enechukwu collected archival materials and

interviewed informants in Enugu when a national crisis erupted and forced me to evacuate the country on short notice. I am also thankful for our now departed Dr. Austin M. Ahanotu who assembled a team of research assistants that conducted interviews for this study in Aba, Calabar and Owerri. I am also grateful for my dear friends, Mama Veneka, Mohammed Sessay and Fatima Sessay, in London, who opened up their homes to a stranger when I needed a place to stay.

To my friends, who provided much of the late night company and emotional support that made this experience a well-rounded one—thank you: Leigh-Anne Francis, Christopher Mitchell, Iben Trino- Molenkamp, Rebecca Tuuri, Laurie Marhoefer, John Adams, Vanessa Holden, Arika Easley-Houser, Monique Porrow, Stephanie Jones-Rogers, Felicia Thomas, Marie Villefranche, Shanita Tartt, Lynn Shanko, Candace Walcott-Shepherd and Dawn Ruskai. I also appreciate Raul Zamudio, Brent Little, Munir Bayyari and ‘Just Jealous’ Katrina Stevens who always supported me from afar.

Words cannot express the appreciation I have for each member of my family. My parents, Robert and Ermalinda Moore, encouraged me to pursue a graduate education and supported me financially and emotionally every step of the way. My brother Clarence Stewart moved to New Jersey to help me with my sons when I needed assistance. My brother and sister-in-law, Paul and Ana Taylor, also offered emotional and financial support to ensure the completion of my project. My husband, Kyle Davison, provided daily encouragement and insurmountable love. My sons, Caleb and River, gave me the motivation to push through all of life’s challenges in order to finish the thesis. Finally, I thank God for affording me the inner strength needed to achieve my goal.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract		ii
Acknowledgements		iv
Table of Contents		vi
List of Illustrations		vii
Introduction	Contextualizing Nigerian Child Trafficking	1
Chapter 1	Social Relations and Trade in the Bight of Biafra	22
Chapter 2	Early Contradictions in Imperialist Policies: Pawnship, Moneylending and the Mobilization of Juvenile Labor	59
Chapter 3	No Justice for the Poor: Child Pawns in Lugard's Nigeria	97
Chapter 4	The <i>Ogu Umunwaanyi</i> (1929 Women's War)	130
Chapter 5	An International Consensus on the Welfare of Children: Girl Pawns, Brides and Slaves, 1920s-1930s	157
Chapter 6	Child Trafficking in the Aftermath of the 1929 Women's War	181
Conclusion		211
Bibliography		218

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Maps

1.1 The Igbo and Their Neighbors	28
1.2 The Niger Delta in the Mid-nineteenth Century	33
1.3 Aro Trading Routes	39
1.4 Nigeria, 1906-1914	64
1.5 Eastern Provinces in 1922	103
1.6 Map of Events-Women's War, 1929	143
1.7 Utu Etim Ekpo, December 15 th , 1929	145
1.8 Opobo District Map	146
1.9 Southeastern Provinces	188
1.10 Owerri Province	192

Photographs

2.1 Okpoho Manilla	89
2.2 "Roadside Market" Igbo Peoples, Nigeria	111
2.3 Owerri Girls	193

Tables

3.1 Atlantic Slave Trade by Percentage of Children, 1714-1886	22
3.2 The Bight of Biafra: Percentages of Men, Women, Boys and Girls, 1663-1713	23
3.3 1900-1907 Imports/Exports for Southern Nigeria	91
3.4 Register of Freed Slaves in Owerri	110
3.5 1921 Native Court Cases	114
3.6 Slave Dealing Cases, March 1934	197
3.7 Slave Dealing Report, March 1934	201

Introduction: Contextualizing Nigerian Child Trafficking

In March 2001, up to 250 children aboard a ship, the *Enterino*, arrived at a port on the coasts of Gabon and Cameroon, but were denied entry because human rights activists believed that the children on board were victims of child trafficking. Coming from Benin, Nigeria and other bordering countries, the children testified that agents aboard the ship had paid parents before the children left home.¹ Child trafficking is still going on and it is useful to look at West Africa's past in order to understand this contemporary phenomenon.

Southeastern Nigerians mobilized juvenile labor during the pre-colonial and colonial era in an attempt to maintain their families, communities, and economies. An examination of the transfer of children from one home to another under various forms of guardianship reveals frequently invisible aspects of colonial policies, cultural and religious practices, and attempts to meet new challenges in the face of cultural and economic conflicts. Through focus on the Igbo, Ibibio, Ijaw (Ijo), and Efik people's efforts to confront the European powers, respond to the intensification of the slave trade, and survive and prosper under adverse economic and social conditions from the eighteenth to through the twentieth century, this study provides an understanding of the legacy of child trafficking in Southeastern Nigeria.

The period between 1900 and the 1930s was an especially tumultuous time in Nigerian history. This era included Southeastern Nigerians' recovery from the forced removal of indigenous populations caused by the transatlantic slave trade (that survived from the sixteenth century to 1807); a time when they suffered a moral assault on their

¹ "Trafficking in Children," *The New York Times*, May 4, 2001, sec. Opinion, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/04/opinion/trafficking-in-children.html>.

independence as a result of the Aro Expedition of 1901 to 1902; and a period when indigenous people tried to renegotiate power over a dwindling labor force during the 1920s and 1930s. As Southeastern populations experienced the influx of Western missionaries who challenged their religious customs and beliefs and faced the colonial officers who imposed new political and economic policies, some people enjoyed new economic opportunities while others floundered in the wake of the Great Depression. As a result, these internal changes created spaces in which relationships and expectations between men and women, political authorities and their subjects, and between different generations sometimes exploded into armed struggle. These changes, while providing new financial opportunities for some Nigerians, also destabilized the relations between children and their extended families.

Children often occupied one or more types of servile status during the pre-colonial and colonial era. They were pawns, slaves, serfs, servants, subjects, clients, and child brides. Pawnship, a form of legal dependency in which a pawn was held as security for a loan, became a widespread labor condition in Southeastern Nigeria in the 20th century. The pawn's labor paid the interest on debts until the debtor reimbursed the moneylender.² Slavery, another dependent category, robbed the slave of any legal rights, making him or her a form of commercial property, a 'capital investment'.³ The system of panyarring was different from slavery and pawning insofar as moneylenders or their debt collectors could 'seize' the debtor or his or her relatives.⁴ Paul E. Lovejoy describes

² Paul E. Lovejoy and Toyin Falola, "Pawnship in Historical Perspective," in *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*, eds. Paul E. Lovejoy and Toyin Falola (Africa World Pr, 2003), 3.

³ Suzanne Miers, *Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade*. (New York: Africana Pub. Corp., 1975), 118–134.

⁴ Lovejoy and Falola, "Pawnship in Historical Perspective," *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*, 16.

panyarring as a form of foreclosure on the loan.⁵ Clients, serfs and subjects were people who lacked wealth, and who usually offered to work in return for sustenance and protection.⁶ I refer to child brides as girls under the age of sixteen, who were betrothed or married, but still dependent on her parents or guardians for support. Other forms of adoption or fostering that may not have been part of a payment-child exchange also existed.⁷ For the purpose of this study, I primarily examine the institution of pawnship as a way to understand the porosity between all of the above-mentioned statuses as they related to child trafficking in Southeastern Nigeria.

Benjamin N. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts suggest that child trafficking must be considered in relation to how colonization related to the global economy.⁸ The Igbo, Ibibio, Ijaw (Ijo) and Efik had many methods of appropriating child labor as economic shifts dictated. While pawning existed before colonization, pawnship became increasingly frequent as Nigeria's economy gradually was absorbed by the international economy.⁹ In the pre-colonial era, moneylenders often accepted children as collateral preventing their sale as slaves. However, during the colonial era we see a large number of pawns sold into slavery.

My use of the terms 'child' and 'childhood' are largely informed by Western scholarship that developed during and after the Industrial Revolution. In response to the

⁵ Lovejoy, "Pawnship, Debt and 'Freedom' in Atlantic Africa during the Era of the Slave Trade: A Re-Assessment," 9.

⁶ Felix K. Ekechi, "Pawnship in Igbo Society," in *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa* eds., Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2003), 175. See also Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade, New Approaches to the Americas*; New Approaches to the Americas (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 5.

⁷ J. S. Harris, "Some Aspects of Slavery in Southeastern Nigeria," *The Journal of Negro History* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 1942): 37-54.

⁸ Benjamin N. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts, eds., "Introduction," in *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa*, 1st ed. (Ohio University Press, 2012), 3.

⁹ A. J. H. Latham, "Currency, Credit and Capitalism on the Cross River in the Pre-Colonial Era," *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 4 (January 1, 1971): 599-605.

use of child labor during industrialization, social reformers set out to define children as a protected class in order to keep them safe.¹⁰ Defining children as a protected group that should not be exploited is relatively easy. Defining a child according to age is a bit more complicated. The British and American laws that attempted to circumvent the use of child labor generally defined childhood as lasting up until the age of sixteen. However, in 1911, Scott Nearing, the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Child Labor Committee, asked, “what is the purpose in setting an age limit for child labor and why [was] that limit set at fourteen?”¹¹ Dr. Nearing suggested that childhood should be defined according to the child’s maturity and not marked by national standards.¹² It would be impossible to make a thoughtful evaluation of any of my historical subjects and define them according to maturity, but I can make some generalizations, however limited. My attempt to define children as a demographic group under the age of sixteen is largely due to the lack of any other rubric by which to measure childhood, not because it is the best method.

This study shows that the welfare of African children decreased as colonial economic demands increased. The decline of Nigerian children’s livelihoods occurred at the same time that American, European and Canadian activists attempted to increase the protections of children globally. This inherent contradiction highlights the fact that colonial rulers subordinated the overall concerns about the wellbeing of Nigerian children to that of the colonial economy and justified their actions by offering different conceptualizations of Nigerian children.

¹⁰ Clark Nardinelli, *Child Labor and the Industrial Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

¹¹ Scott Nearing, *The Solution of the Child Labor Problem* (New York, Moffat, Yard and company, 1911), 1–6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

During the colonial era, Southeastern Nigerians pawned children in order to obtain loans. Though the exact origin of pawning is unknown,¹³ it became a “legal category of social and economic dependency” often certified before witnesses.¹⁴ Pawnship was a form of familial relationship that permitted families to survive despite economic crises. After Nigeria became a British protectorate in 1901, the British allowed Nigerians to pawn themselves and some dependents when economic circumstances dictated. Archival materials provide evidence that this practice continued well into the 1930s, and that it underwent significant changes during that time. Evidence shows that a once legal and public practice (when an adult pawned himself), turned into a social and economic institution that became part of the darkest elements of Nigeria’s shadow economy.

Pawned children expected to be redeemed and returned to their natal village once the loan had been repaid. Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy explain that, “Kinship, marital bonds, or some other clearly recognized social status was supposed to safeguard individuals from excessive abuse, prevent the transfer of pawns to third parties, or obstruct other acts that the debtors might consider inappropriate or illegal.”¹⁵ This project highlights the issues that led to the breakdown of these basic expectations making the slippage from pawn to slave a likely occurrence. Moreover, it shows how the faltering system of pawning created a dependent class of children who were completely vulnerable to the economic instability of the time.

¹³ Felix K. Ekechi, “Pawnship in Igbo Society,” in *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), 165.

¹⁴ Falola and Lovejoy, “Pawnship in Historical Perspective,” 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

This dissertation studies child pawnship and child trafficking as a way to explore how children became the most vulnerable dependent population as Nigeria's economy became linked to the global economy. Non-slave-owning debtors offered children as collateral in order to secure loans. Creditors expected children to provide agricultural, domestic or commercial labor. In addition, if the child was a girl, she might be sold as a prostitute or pawned as a future bride.¹⁶ The security of child pawns changed as a result of the significant economic, political, and social changes that Nigeria underwent during the colonial period. British authorities subordinated international concerns, which focused on the trafficking of women and children, to concerns about the colonial economy in the the 1920s and 1930s.

An examination of marriage customs and bride price payments attempts to illustrate how Southeastern Nigerians concealed child trafficking. Because bride price payments and pawning oneself or dependents for the purpose of acquiring a loan remained legal during the early period of colonialism, it was difficult for colonial officials to prosecute individuals who participated in this nefarious form of child dealing. Child dealers and moneylenders created a shadow economy wherein numerous children, especially girls, changed hands. By utilizing legal venacular, i.e. by claiming that a legal marriage was agreed to by the girls' parents, or by claiming that the child in hand was one's own, it became virtually impossible to recognize, stop, or prosecute child dealers.

Judith Byfield argues that an increase in pawnship practices among the Yoruba in the Western Province occurred when the British made the slave trade illegal.¹⁷ The same

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷ Judith Ann-Marie Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940*, Social History of Africa series; Social History of Africa (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann ; Oxford : James Currey, 2002), 66.

can be said about the Southeastern Provinces. Western leaders had hoped that the trade in slaves would end with introduction of “Christianity, commerce and civilization.”¹⁸

However, most small-scale societies in the Southeast depended on slaves and other types of servile dependents for their labor needs. Masters used these dependents as agricultural laborers, repairmen, porters, canoe builders, prostitutes, and as personal guards. Masters also held subjects as a form of conspicuous wealth and for religious sacrifices.¹⁹ More specifically, village life depended on the labor of the servile population and pawns served that need.

This project unveils how a child’s status changed when a guardian attempted to gain some form of profit from the child’s labor. At the core of this study, is the realization that the lack of financial security is the fundamental reason that child dealing existed during the colonial period. There were a variety of reasons of why people pawned children, but an increase in child pawning seemed to follow the economic decline after the Great War, the demand that Nigerians use British currency, direct taxation under indirect rule, and as a result of the Great Depression. The exchange of children became a major way the indigenous population dealt with their economic circumstances.

Background and Historiography

A History of Child Trafficking in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900s-1930s attempts to contribute to the scholarship about child labor and trade in African history. European merchants, seamen and anthropologists were the first to document and describe pawnship. In 1991, scholar of customary law in Africa, Martin Chanock claimed:

¹⁸ Miers, *Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade.*, 118.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 131–4.

Disputes about debt which build up over very long periods are a feature of the social relations of this period...Some were created and preserved in order to cement 'relationships of obligation and dependency', the recipients of 'loans' being thereafter primarily clients rather than debtors.²⁰

A variety of sources help inform the growing economic histories focused on debt and the mobilization of juvenile labor in Africa. In 1994, Lovejoy and Falola published the first edited volume, *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective*, focused solely on the institution of pawnship.²¹ When the updated version of this volume, *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*,²² was published in 2004 it added to the growing scholarship on Africa's economic past and to the history of various forms of servile or forced labor. Perhaps the previous lack of scholarship dedicated to explaining the institution was due to its complex nature, making the development of a general historical framework arduous. Nevertheless, the articles in these groundbreaking volumes illuminate how the practice of pawning enabled Africans to engage in commercial activities. More specifically, the articles by Lovejoy, Falola, Byfield, David Richardson, and Felix Ekechi provide details about pawning in its historical context taking into account global economic factors. In addition, works such as Jane I. Guyer's *Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa* (2004)²³ provide an overview of Nigeria's economic transformation. Guyer explains how Nigeria's involvement in 'coastal capitalism' created a culture of commercial activity throughout the country. All of these works help us understand how Africans mitigated their economic circumstances in the face of colonialism.

²⁰ Martin Chanock, "A Peculiar Sharpness: An Essay on Property in the History of Customary Law in Colonial Africa," *The Journal of African History* 32, no. 1 (January 1, 1991): 84.

²¹ Toyin Falola, *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Westview Press, 1994).

²² Lovejoy and Falola, *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*.

²³ Jane I. Guyer, *Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa*, 1st ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 2004).

As the Igbo-speaking people attempted to deal with the faltering economy, many borrowed money to meet their fiscal responsibilities. Anthropologist Cati Coe explains that children were “a source of capital for their elders through pawning and marriage” at a time when communities were figuring out new ways of “organizing production and labor.”²⁴ Parents viewed children as assets because children provided domestic and agricultural labor while young, and generally supported their parents in their old age. As a result, the poor pawned children for temporary loans for a variety of reasons.²⁵ What these studies reveal is that the most fundamental aspect about pawning was that the pawn was a dependent of another individual and at the same time part of an economic transaction. In Igboland, patrons who could afford to obtain pawns were called *ogaranya*, defined as “persons with some property.”²⁶ Nigerian men created a large dependent population, extending kinship networks by lending money and thereby increasing individual power. Because pawnship was closely linked to kinship, rather than labor, it remained effective only when pawns were in close proximity to kin and patrons. My study shows how the breakdown in kinship responsibilities led to the deterioration of pawning practices.

The study of children as historical subjects is necessary in order to fully understand the complexities of social, cultural, economic and political histories. Scholars, however, have only begun in the past few decades to consider “children” and “childhood”

²⁴ Cati Coe, “How Debt Became Care: Child Pawning and Its Transformation in Akuapem, The Gold Coast, 1874-1929,” *Africa* 82, no. 2 (2012): 306. Even though Cati Coe's focus is on the Gold Coast, the Akuapem and Igbo exchanged children in pawn for loans and at times gave the girl in exchange for a bride price.

²⁵ Cornelius Echeruo Ezinna, “Interview Conducted by Cynthia E. Uche on Behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the Project Entitled, ‘A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s’,” August 29, 2012. Ezinna was born in Aba in 1929 and offered in depth knowledge about pawning during the 1930s and 40s.

²⁶ Ekechi, “*Pawnship in Igbo Society*,” in *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism*, 175.

as formal categories of analysis. However, early thinkers called upon the intellectual community to pay attention to childhood as a significant moment in a person's life. For instance, scholars have granted credit to Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) for identifying adolescent needs. Rousseau philosophized that the life experience of a child, known as "growing up" was a process worth paying attention to.²⁷ However, it wasn't until the twentieth century that historians truly focused on children and childhood as legitimate categories of research.

In 1962, Philippe Ariès wrote, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien regime*, published in English as *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family life*. Ariès argued that the construction of childhood as a category during the modern period "resulted in a tyrannical concept of the family which destroyed friendship and sociability and deprived children of freedom, inflicting upon them for the first time the birch and the prison cell."²⁸ Diverging from beliefs that children were miniature adults, Ariès argued that children and the historical concepts of childhood changed over time, and he emphasized how these changes were represented in art and images.²⁹ Social historian, Adrian Wilson wrote that, "few works have exerted a greater influence upon British and American social historians than Philippe Ariès."³⁰ Ariès, more than any other historian, focused on childhood as a category of historical study.

Since the 1960s, historians' attempts to historicize the lives of children and adolescents have not waned. Historians are increasingly placing child histories in the context of family histories. During the 1970s and 1980s histories on the 'family' grew in

²⁷ Lloyd deMause, *The History of Childhood* (Jason Aronson, 1995).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (Vintage, 1965).

³⁰ Adrian Wilson, "The Infancy of the History of Childhood: An Appraisal of Philippe Ariès," *History and Theory* 19, no. 2 (February 1, 1980): 132-153.

number. Focusing on English histories, Alan Macfarlane wrote *Origins of English Individualism* (1978), and *Marriage and Love in England* (1985). In addition, Lawrence Stone wrote *Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (1977) as more scholarship began to focus on intimate relationships in the household.³¹ However, although histories of childhood and children experienced a downturn in the 1980s,³² the history of women and gender continued to prosper. As a result, the historiography of children developed as an offshoot, and at times in tandem with histories of women and the family.³³

Contemporary histories that solely focused on children and childhood developed during 1990s. The journal, *Childhood*, appeared in 1993,³⁴ and *Childhood in America* appeared in 2000.³⁵ Children's productive activities soon became the focus of intense scholarly inquiry. Paula Fass and Mary Ann Mason wrote,

Even in the nineteenth century, when sentimental images of children and childhood innocence were treasured in public language and culture, most children were firmly part of the family economy and their contribution was viewed in those terms. Individual children may have been loved and even spoiled, but most parents depended on their labor for survival.³⁶

By the early twenty-first century, scholars began to intensify their interest in child labor. Colin Heywood wrote that, “Child labour is a subject that stirs the passions. People today react indignantly to reports of children still working in the ‘sweatshops’ in Western

³¹ Margaret King, “Concepts of Childhood: What We Know and Where We Might Go,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 371–407.

³² Peter N Stearns, *Growing up: The History of Childhood in a Global Context*, Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures ; 28; Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures ; 28th (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2005), 3.

³³ Harvey J. Graff, “Review: The History of Childhood and Youth: Beyond Infancy?,” *History of Education Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (April 1, 1986): 95–109.

³⁴ Patrick J. Ryan, “How New Is the ‘New’ Social Study of Childhood? The Myth of a Paradigm Shift,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38, no. 4 (April 1, 2008): 553–576.

³⁵ Paula Fass and Mary Ann Mason, *Childhood in America* (NYU Press, 2000).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

societies, not to mention the millions employed in the poorer countries in the world.”³⁷

In part, this attention toward and anxiety about the increase in child labor invited academic attention.

The attention to class divisions and social experiences became more pronounced in children’s histories and consideration is now given to the reality that agricultural communities use very young children as farm laborers and hired hands.³⁸ Historian Hugh Cunningham describes the link between poverty and child labor:

The most obvious manifestation of poverty is the division between children who are an expense to their parents throughout childhood and beyond, and those who, through work of some kind, contribute to their family economies. This is primarily a global geographical division, with child labor in the developing world a rising cause for concern.³⁹

Human rights activists have been especially attentive to the use of child labor in the Global South, but some scholars have called for historical explorations of children’s productive activities in the past in order to formulate policies for ending it in contemporary society.

In 2004, Beverly Grier, a historian of Africa, pleaded with other Africanists to “take children more seriously in their research,” and argued “that children have shaped and continue to shape history in Africa in significant but hitherto largely untold ways.”⁴⁰ Grier’s suggestion came at the same time that contemporary concerns arose regarding the welfare of African children. One specific way to explain the welfare of children in Africa today is to explore the ways children contributed to the family economies of

³⁷ Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times*, 1st ed. (Polity, 2002).

³⁸ Stearns, *Growing up*, 15.

³⁹ Hugh Cunningham, “Histories of Childhood,” *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 4 (October 1, 1998): 1195–1208.

⁴⁰ Beverly Grier, “Child Labor and Africanist Scholarship: A Critical Overview,” *African Studies Review* 47, no. 2 (2004): 3.

impoverished households in the past.⁴¹ But the idea of a unique form of African childhood must be understood as a “social construction that varies in time and space.”⁴² Grier also argues that scholarly theories about what constitutes ‘childhood’ is largely based on social and political motivations, which include “patriarchy, capital, colonial and post-colonial states, and children themselves.”⁴³ We must examine the lives of African children with regard to their geographical, political, cultural and economic particularities.

During the early 20th century western humanitarian groups considered African children as a class of individuals that needed certain forms of protection. However, colonial economic agendas often thwarted their efforts. These conflicts between the international organizations and British colonial officials are evident in the ways in which authorities, defined acceptable ‘uses’ for Nigerian children.

Evelyn Sharpe’s 1931 report of the convention held on the welfare of African children, *The African Child: An Account of the International Conference on African Children at Geneva* (1931) serves as the formal impetus for scholarship focused on the wellbeing of children throughout the Empire.⁴⁴ Using Sharpe’s work as a resource from which to draw an understanding of international attention to African children, I use *The African Child* to situate the concern about Nigerian children in an international context. Furthermore, my scholarship aims to contribute to the newly developed histories of slave systems that focus on children primarily. Those works include the *Children in Slavery*

⁴¹ Sylvain E. Dessy and Stéphane Pallage, “A Theory of the Worst Forms of Child Labour,” *The Economic Journal* 115, no. 500 (January 1, 2005): 68.

⁴² Grier, “Child Labor and Africanist Scholarship,” 3.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Evelyn Sharp, *The African Child: An Account of the International Conference on African Children, Geneva* (Negro Universities Press, 1970).

Through the Ages (2009)⁴⁵, *Child Slaves in the Modern World* (2011)⁴⁶, and *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake* (2012).⁴⁷

In the context of how colonial officials and anti-slavery reformers defined respectable uses of child labor, it is important to address how Southeastern Nigerians valued children. What has been clear at the outset of this study is that parents had an emotional bond with their children.⁴⁸ Using children in economic capacities did not negate the love that guardians generally felt for children. As I explain throughout my work, parents and guardians discarded 'taboo' children, those who were disobedient, as thieves or considered lazy through killing and the institutions of pawnship, slavery or some other form of fosterage. However, even taking those realities into account, most parents loathed the idea of losing their children. Children not only represented a source of labor and future financial security, but parents considered children as part of their religious existence known as *Chi*. *Chi* is a spirit, which is associated with individual wealth and character. As the primary Igbo cosmological force, *Chi* shapes the Igbo understanding of their creation and reincarnation in the spiritual realm. The birth and survival of children is integral to the continued existence of one's *Chi*, even after death. To lose or not have children meant a possible end to Igbo existence in the afterlife.⁴⁹

As missionary George Basden realized, Igbo parents expressed a "deep fondness" for their children. Parents wanted as many children as they could have and considered them "priceless possessions." And just as I have found in the oral interviews

⁴⁵ Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph Calder Miller, *Children in Slavery through the Ages* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009).

⁴⁶ Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph Calder Miller, *Child Slaves in the Modern World* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011).

⁴⁷ Lawrance and Roberts, *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake*.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Isichei, *History of Nigeria* (Prentice Hall Press, 1983), 259.

⁴⁹ Christopher I. Ejizu, "Chi Symbolism as a Potent Mirror of Igbo Indigenous Worldview," *Anthropos* 87, no. 4/6 (January 1, 1992): 379–389.

commissioned for this study, the parents', especially the mother's expression of love for a child seemed to always be apparent.⁵⁰ The focus on the political economy of child labor in this study should in no way detract from the fact that African parents' love for their children went far beyond the economic analysis provided in this dissertation.

Attention to the history of women and gender in Africa has grown significantly over the past 30 years.⁵¹ My work adds to the specific histories focused on women and slavery, both as agents and as victims. My intervention follows in the footsteps of the 1983 edited collection *Women and Slavery* that brings together histories of the effect of the transatlantic slave trade on girls and women; the ways men co-opted the reproductive and productive labor of women and children; and consideration of women as traders and slave owners.⁵² Additionally, the 2007 two-volume series, *Women and Slavery: Africa, the Indian Ocean World, and the Medieval North Atlantic*⁵³ and *Women and Slavery: The Modern Atlantic*⁵⁴ informs my approach to analyzing girls and women as historical subjects. The themes represented in these volumes are central to histories of women's and children's lives. They entail studies of the codification of native family law; an analysis of sexuality and the exploitation of young girls; and consideration of why certain women mobilized against officials called warrant chiefs.

Overall, my work just begins to deal with the numerous themes in the history of childhood and women's and gender history, but it does offer insights into how and why

⁵⁰ G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. Publishing, 1966), 64.

⁵¹ Akosua Adomako Ampofo et al., "Women's and Gender Studies in English-Speaking Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review of Research in the Social Sciences," *Gender and Society* 18, no. 6 (December 1, 2004): 685.

⁵² *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

⁵³ Gwyn Campbell, *Women and Slavery: Africa, the Indian Ocean World, and the Medieval North Atlantic*. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 2007).

⁵⁴ Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph Calder Miller, *Women and Slavery* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007).

African children and women became vulnerable to trafficking during the first few decades of the twentieth century. My dissertation also contributes to the larger scholarship on human trafficking and modern slavery. By historicizing the Bight of Biafra's long legacy of slave dealing and of child trafficking we can identify some of the age-old underpinnings of the trade.

Scope of Research

This study focuses on the inhabitants of the southeastern region of Nigeria, known as Igboland. Igboland is divided into two parts and separated by the Niger River. The largest area is in the east, and the smallest in the west. The eastern Igbo dwell in the space that runs from the Niger Delta to the Yako and Ibibio boundary. They are in between Ijaw and Ogonoi in the south and the Igala and Tiv to the north. This research project examines the communities dwelling within the boundaries of Brass (west), Onitsha (north) and Calabar (east).

British and Nigerian archives have provided most of the material used for this study. These items include personal correspondence, newspaper and magazine articles, formal correspondence between British officers, court records, provincial and intelligence reports, treasury reports, League of Nation documents, missionary records and anthropological accounts. In addition, literary works such as novels have been consulted to provide cultural insights and historical context. In particular, the 1922 report entitled "Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province of Nigeria: Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts,"⁵⁵ and the 1933-1935 report, "Slave Dealing and

⁵⁵ *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 1922, CSO 26/1/074 Vol. I, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

Child Stealing Investigation” provided substantial information about the colonial authorities perception of child dealing operations throughout Southeastern Nigeria.⁵⁶

Despite the numerous available archival resources, it has been impossible to quantify the exact number of pawning cases that transformed into marriage or slavery (or vice versa) during this period, but we do get a glimpse of the operations of child pawnship and slavery through anecdotal evidence and by analyzing the several available cases found in court records and colonial accounts.

Finally, oral interviews have provided much of the indigenous perspectives offered in this study. Cultural norms, taboos, and ideas about Igbo children and motherhood are gained from these personal accounts. We must rely on personal accounts and colonial records regarding slavery, pawning, various forms of servile labor, and marriage customs in order to attain a general sense of how the exchange of children operated during this period. As Adiele Afigbo has already noted, there is a “thin line separated the pledged child from slavery,”⁵⁷ and the informants interviewed for this project confirms the interconnectedness of pawnship and slavery that is evidenced in my study.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter One examines the history of the Bight of Biafra as a region that exported an extraordinary number of children and women during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By examining the slave trade and its main participants, we can

⁵⁶ S.P. George, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing Investigation* (Bende, Owerri, February 4, 1935), C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

⁵⁷ A. E. Afigbo, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885-1950* (University of Rochester Press, 2006), 101.

identify the deep social, economic and political legacies that enabled the continued trafficking of children well into the twentieth century. The transformation of child pawning, a family strategy that used children's labor as collateral for loans, was an institution that should have prevented the slippage between pawnship and slavery. This chapter shows how the customary protections of pawnship began to fail as Igbo speaking people became more involved in the transatlantic slave trade and coastal trade activities.

Chapter Two discusses British incursions into southern Nigeria and their relationship to indigenous governing bodies, transatlantic and domestic slavery, and the resulting economic conditions they created. In the era of conquest, I focus on the transformation of the local economy into a colonial economy—the move from the transatlantic slave trade to the trade in palm oil products and its effect on domestic slavery. Conflicting colonial policies about coerced labor, especially in the House systems (trading centers), attracted international attention. As a result, anti-slavery reformers begin to critique the use of child labor, especially pawns, in the Houses. This chapter also evaluates how Nigerians responded to the introduction of the British sterling, the decline in Nigerian economic solvency, and the introduction of colonial moneylending policies.

Chapter Three looks closely at the post-1914 Lugardian reforms of the indirect rule form of governance. The implementation of the warrant chief system, and removing the District Officers who provided oversight of the Native Court system left residents vulnerable to warrant chief abuses. Local inhabitants often had limited access to colonial authorities, leaving them reliant on warrant chiefs, court clerks and other court members to mediate disputes. Due to their unchecked power, warrant chiefs abused their

constituents during the first and second decades of the twentieth century by extorting litigants and their families. This chapter illustrates the particularly difficult economic realities that families, especially women and children, endured at the hands of the warrant chiefs.

Chapter Four offers a new perspective on the 1929 Women's War by reconsidering the women's motivation to participate. In addition to the well-known reasons cited for the uprising—taxes, decreased export prices, increased import costs—women lost their children in pawn as a result of attempting to earn the money required to pay colonial taxes. I examine the increased tensions between women and political authorities, mainly the warrant chiefs. The chapter also shows the similarities of the 1925 Women's Dancing movement and the 1929 revolt. We see a continuation of the concerns about financial instability, the decrease of women's political influence, and a desire that women's economic endeavors be secure from male infringement. In both cases, women protested the need to pawn their children in order to remain economically viable in colonial Nigeria.

Chapter Five considers the development of concern for the wellbeing of African children that occurred with increased organizational attempts to end domestic slavery. While social reformers in Europe, the United States, and Canada worked to improve the livelihoods of children in their respective countries, they also began to define acceptable conditions of the African 'childhood'. Critical attention is paid to girls as child brides, slaves and pawns as concerns about human trafficking increased. Women's groups, anti-slavery lobbies and humanitarian organizations, based primarily in the League of Nations, shifted their attention to the trafficking of women and children in an effort to

end domestic slavery.⁵⁸ This chapter examines the reformist agenda at a time when British policies focused on generating revenue from Nigeria and when the success of the colonial economy necessitated various forms of coerced labor.⁵⁹

Chapter Six focuses on the aftermath of the 1929 Women's War and the ways in which colonial officials responded to international pressure to investigate child trafficking. It examines the British ambivalence about ending the traffic in pawns. By pressuring colonial officials to investigate child dealing, the League ensured the development of colonial records that identify specific stakeholders in child trafficking practices. In particular, this chapter provides an overview of women and children as victims and traffickers. By identifying women and children as actors engaged in child trafficking schemes, we complicate the idea that women and children should have been defined as protected categories.

The Conclusion offers an analysis of the entire dissertation and suggests questions for future study. Specifically, I ask the question, how else can we define victims of human trafficking when some of the alleged victims also participate in the trade? How does it help scholars and activists to redefine 'perpetrators', perhaps in terms of wealth or by their ability to fend off traffickers themselves in contrast to victims? Is their age or gender sufficient reason to place them in a protected category?

Child trafficking in Nigeria is a contemporary problem that is a product of the long history of West Africa's involvement in slave dealing. The social and economic underpinnings of the trade in children can best be understood by examining the conditions in which it occurred. During the colonial era, when Nigeria's economy

⁵⁸ Sharp, *The African Child*, 12.

⁵⁹ Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, 1st ed. (University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 42–3.

became linked to the global economy, economic exchanges increasingly included the exchange of children. Consequently, poor children's vulnerability increased as the colonial economy deteriorated. This dissertation aims to examine and explain how children became assets of exchange when Nigeria's economy failed. Moreover, understanding the deep history of child dealing in Nigeria may provide answers on how to end current day child trafficking.

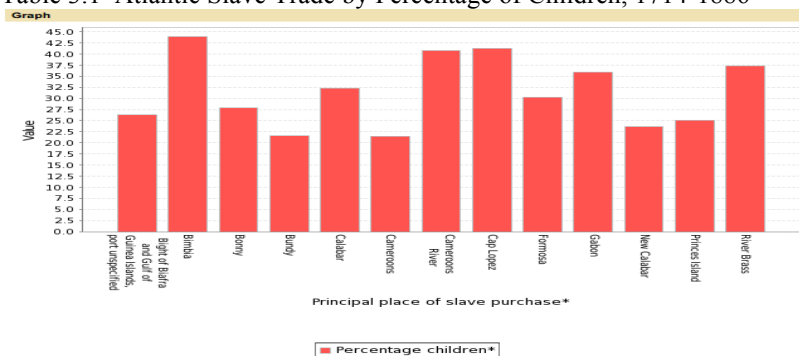
Chapter 1 – Social Relations and Trade in the Bight of Biafra

The women and children are employed in collecting palm-oil; the men, in trading to Brass and Eboe, [and] kidnapping their neighbors.

Laird MacGregor, British Trader, 1832¹

The Biafran hinterland was a key slaving area from the sixteenth century to the mid nineteenth century. As early as the sixteenth century, the Jesuit priest Alonso de Sandoval (1577-1652) commented on the unusual number of slave women and children coming from the Biafran hinterland to Cartagena, Colombia.² It is not certain that these children were Igbo or children from neighboring ethnic groups, but what is clear is that slavers shipped a large number of children from slave ports in the Bight of Biafra. The number of documented children on slave ships numbered 14 percent in the years spanning 1659-1702. The graph below showing ratios for the years spanning 1714 to 1866, during which the child population on slave ships leaving Bight of Biafra and the Guinea Islands ranged from 25 to 40 percent.³

Table 3.1 Atlantic Slave Trade by Percentage of Children, 1714-1886



Source: www.slavevoyages.org

¹ Laird MacGregor and Oldfield, R. A. K., *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa, by the River Niger* (London: Richard Bentley, 1837), 102–3, 5. Eboe in this context refers to Aboh, located in western Igboland, a major trading center situated along the Niger river. MacGregor was a Scottish merchant of British trade and sought trade opportunities along the Niger river.

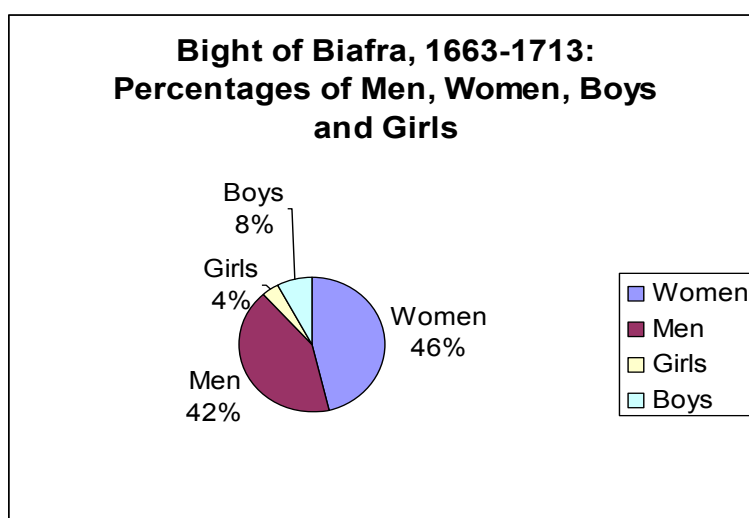
² Alonso De Sandoval, *Treatise on Slavery: Selections from De Instauranda Aethiopum Salute*, ed. Nicole Von Germeten (Hackett Pub Co, 2008), 15.

³ I include Bight of Biafra (unspecified), Bonny, Calabar, Cameroons, Calabar, New Calabar, and River Brass as part of Biafra.

And the percentage of child slaves shipped from the Bight of Biafra increased even more to 39 percent between 1821 and 1839.⁴ The large percentage of children incorporated into the transatlantic slave trade continued as a norm until the mid-nineteenth century.

In 1826, a Spanish ship, *Nuevo Campeador*, documented the sex and age of its captives. Of the 303 slaves, the ship held approximately 60 percent males, 20 percent women and 20 percent children.⁵ However, records show that an overwhelming number of women and children had been taken from the Bight of Biafra during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Table 3.2 The Bight of Biafra, 1663-1713: Percentages of Men, Women Boys and Girls



Source: www.slavevoyages.org

Women and children became enslaved as a result of capture during raids, wars and through the institution of pawnship.

⁴ David Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1978), 78. 1659-1702 records were based on the records of five slave ships. 1821-39 records were based on 109 ships emancipated in Sierra Leone.

⁵ Ibid, Voyage 561.

An early glimpse into how a child became a pawn or a slave can be found in the eighteenth century personal account of the celebrated abolitionist Gustavas Vassa,⁶ otherwise more commonly known as Olaudah Equiano. Kidnappers stole Equiano from his Igbo village in 1756. Historians have not been able to identify the exact village but Adiele E. Afigbo, the eminent Igbo scholar, believes that Equiano was born in Nsukke in northern Igboland.⁷ At the time that kidnappers captured him, child stealing had become commonplace in Igboland as a result of the transatlantic slave trade. Two men and a woman kidnapped ten-year old Equiano and his sister while their parents worked on their farm.⁸ What happened to Equiano and his sister next gives historians insight into the complex and wide-ranging trading system, which seized children and threw them into the trade routes linking the transatlantic slave trade.

After their abduction, Equiano and his sister traveled all day and took shelter in a small home, a station along the trade route, where they ate and slept through the night.⁹ In the following days, Equiano's sister was sold off without him and various slave dealers continued to buy and sell Equiano over several days' journey. Equiano's personal account depicts a trade network that was comprised of numerous actors.¹⁰ Some were responsible for the actual abduction; others took responsibility for securing a rest house in which they could hide along the route; and others acted as intermediaries when buying and selling the children.

⁶ Paul E. Lovejoy, "Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa - What's in a Name?," *Atlantic Studies: Literary, Cultural and Historical Perspectives* 9, no. 2 (June 2012): 165. There exists an ongoing academic debate about where Equiano was born, whether in Africa or in Carolina and how that fact should determine the name used to refer to him.

⁷ A. E. (Adiele Eberechukwu) Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*, 1981, 156.

⁸ Vincent Carretta (Ed.), *Interesting Narrative and Other Writings by Equiano, Olaudah Published by Penguin Classics Paperback* (Penguin Classics, 1995), 46–47.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

After many days of travelling and changing hands, Equiano ended up with a chief, who worked as a blacksmith. For about a month, he employed Equiano as an apprentice working with the bellows and as a cook's helper.¹¹ After the death of his master's only child, Equiano was once again sold. One can only guess why the chieftain sold Equiano. It is likely that he did so in order to secure the funds to pay a debt brought on by his daughter's funeral.

There are other stories similar to Equiano's that show the vulnerability of children during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During the late eighteenth century, a prominent slave trading family in Old Calabar fell victim to their African competitors. In 1773, an Old Calabar ruler wrote, "you may think Sir that it was vary vaxing to have my sons carried of by Captn Jackson and Robbin sons and the King of Qua sons..."¹² The Old Calabar ruler had offered his sons, known as the Robin Johns, as pawns to a slave trader while waiting for his subordinates to deliver the anticipated slaves. However, the slave trader broke from custom when he left with the boys before the arrival of the slaves.

In 1828, a young man named Peter was also thrust into the slave trade. Peter's father, a well-respected trader who operated along the Niger Delta, Cameroonian coast and in Fernando Po, purchased a canoe from a canoe trader. He paid half the cost of the canoe and left his son, Peter, as pawn to guarantee that he would return with the balance due. Before Peter's father returned, Peter was exchanged again. In this case, Peter's

¹¹ Ibid., 49.

¹² As cited in Randy J Sparks, *The Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth-century Atlantic Odyssey* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 49.

guardian, the canoe trader, gave him as collateral to a slave trader to whom he promised slaves. In exchange, the canoe trader received goods and payment in advance.¹³

When Peter's guardian returned with slaves in tow, Peter assisted him in carrying provisions and goods onto the slave ship in order to prepare for its departure. But before Peter could leave the ship, the slave trader seized him, causing great frustration to the canoe trader.¹⁴ As young Peter stood in the ship, he watched as his guardian yelled at the slave trader. His guardian, the canoe trader, remained at the shore demanding that his pawn, Peter, be allowed to disembark the vessel, but it was too late. The slave trader who had Peter in his possession decided to sail with the boy. Peter could not escape and his guardian could not retrieve him. In that moment, Peter's status as a pawn switched to one of a slave.¹⁵ The slave trader violated the conventions of trade by stealing Peter whose status of a pawn should have been protected.

As a result of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, a British warship seized Peter's ship in Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone a Colonel Nichols adopted Peter and enrolled him in school. Peter joined thousands of others in Sierra Leone, the British colony established for liberated slaves.¹⁶ Peter's fortune was better than other freed slaves in Sierra Leone. After five years he was able to travel back to his home village

¹³ MacGregor and Oldfield, R. A. K., *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa, by the River Niger*, 287–8.

¹⁴ Ibid., 287–8. Peter's father was a Bimbia trader who operated in the Cameroons, which was then a part of Southeastern Nigeria. MacGregor was a Scottish merchant looking for trade opportunities. He traveled from as far west as the Niger River along the coast to the Cameroons and over to Fernando Po. He shared stories such as Peter's as examples of how moneylending agreements, such as the indigenous institution of pawning left children especially vulnerable during slave trade era.. There is no record of the time that passed between his father initially leaving him in pawn with the canoe trader and the subsequent transaction when the slaver stole Peter.

¹⁵ Stephen D. Behrendt, A. J. H. Latham, and David Northrup, *The Diary of Antera Duke, an Eighteenth-Century African Slave Trader* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 237. According to Antera Duke, a slave trader, Calabar slave traders spent up to nine months out of the year in Cameroon.

¹⁶ Britain pressured other countries to allow them to search their ships during this era and it is likely that this was the case in Peter's situation.

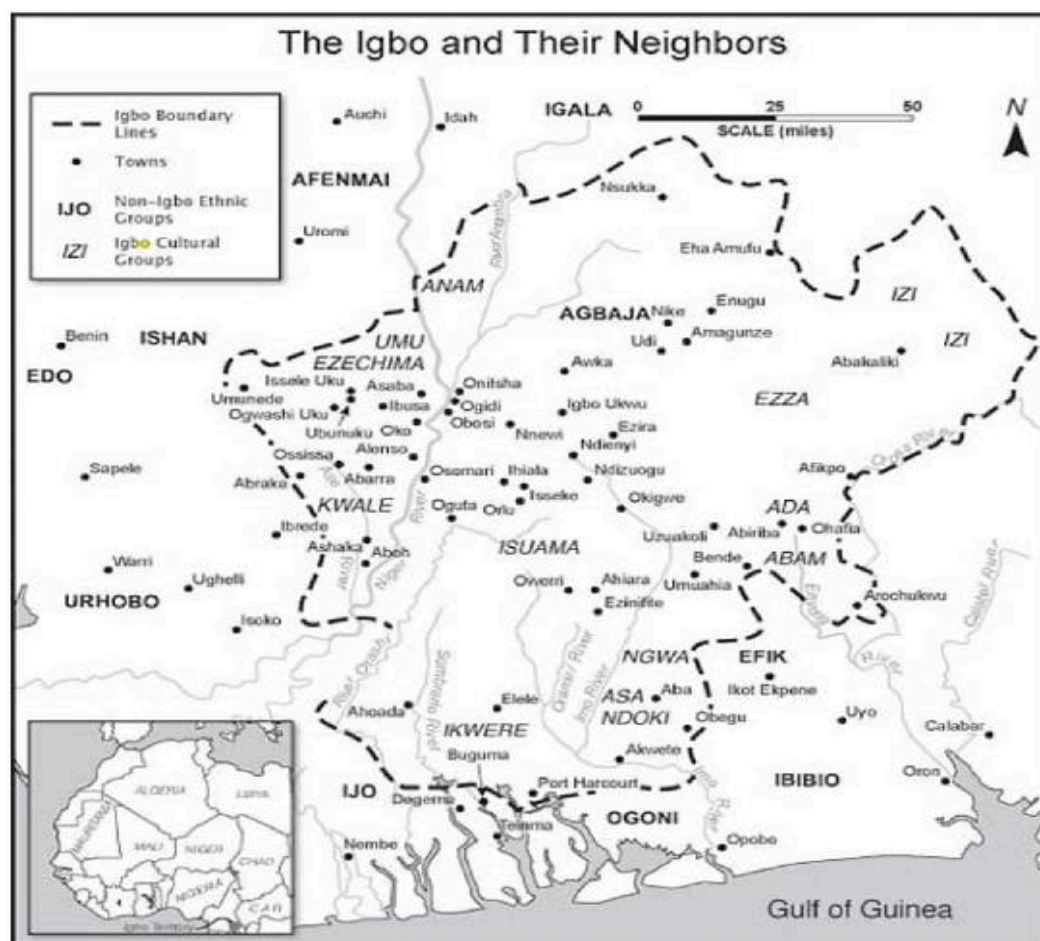
and reunite with his mother. By that time he called himself Prince William of Bimbia (Cameroon), which signifies that he had made a name for himself—probably in trade. Nevertheless, the moment that the slave ship sailed off, Peter’s life reflected the precarious status of child pawns during the period of the slave trade.¹⁷

Kidnappers and nefarious moneylenders victimized girls as well. Shortly before 1880, a man captured a fourteen-year-old girl Mgbeke from Umuoji (an important coastal trading town, near Onitsha, in Igboland) while she and other girls worked on the farm. The kidnapper claimed that Mgbeke’s father owed him a debt and he and another man took her in lieu of repayment. As an example of the most severe form of panyarring, the men did not give the Mgbeke’s father a chance to repay the debt. Instead, the men sold her at Mkpo after which she was sold again at Bende, Oloko, Akwete, and eventually the “richest chief in Okrika” purchased her.¹⁸

¹⁷ MacGregor and Oldfield, R. A. K., *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa, by the River Niger*, 288.

¹⁸ *Igbo Worlds: An Anthology of Oral Histories and Historical Descriptions* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978), 292–3. All of the towns in which Mgbeke was sold were core stopping points along slave routes.

Map 1.1 The Igbo and Their Neighbors



Source: Reprinted from Gloria Chuku, *The Igbo Intellectual Tradition* (2013)

Sandoval's observation, and the stories of Equiano, the John Robins, Peter and Mgbeke are some of the earliest evidence of children in slave exchanges that we have from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century Biafran hinterland. All offer the historian important cues to the vulnerability of children and the inland networks of supply from the late 1600s until the 1800s. Each of the stories illustrates the ways in which children became part of a larger trade system.

Peter's account shows how his father participated in a credit system when purchasing the canoe. Peter's father trusted the canoe trader to keep Peter safe and believed that he would be able to retrieve his son upon his return. This account also shows that leaving a child in pawn was customary, and that children served as financial guarantors when necessary. The behavior of the slave dealer, however, was unusual because he violated the conventions that governed credit relations between traders from the hinterland and foreigners. The fact that he refused to honor the rules of pawnship, suggests that he did not have a long-standing relationship with Peter's father or that he never intended to return the child. As such, Peter's story illustrates how easily a child could slip from the status of a pawn to a slave in the nineteenth century. Equiano's story gives us a glimpse of the internal network of traders and slave owners who transported girls and boys to the coast, and thence into the Atlantic slave trade. These stories reveal how kidnappers, markets, credit systems, and above all, the cultural mores allowed for the exchange and theft of children.

Recent research, including the development of several major databases has given us insight into the slave trade from Biafra. Ugo Nwokeji, a prominent historian of Nigeria, has already noted the extraordinary number of Igbo females who entered the Atlantic trade.¹⁹ But, of even more importance for our work is the large number of girls in the trade during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Thus by examining the internal workings of the slave trade, and the actions of the main participants, we can see the deep historical roots of child trafficking.

¹⁹ Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*; G. Ugo Nwokeji, "The Atlantic Slave Trade and Population Density: A Historical Demography of the Biafran Hinterland," in *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, Vol. 34, No. 3, Special Issue: On Slavery and Islam in African History: A Tribute to Martin Klein (2000), pp. 616-655.

What is still in question is how particular children ended up as slaves. The stories of Equiano, the Robin Johns, Peter and Mgbekwe suggest ways some children, especially those pawned, became enslaved. The porosity of the statuses of pawn and slave became more marked in the period when Southeastern Nigeria became a major contributor to the transatlantic slave trade. This occurred in the 1780s with a slight resurgence between 1820-1840, when palm oil and kernels eclipsed slaves as the region's major export.²⁰

These accounts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries coincide with the period when 13 percent of slaves crossing the Atlantic came from the Biafran hinterland.²¹ These centuries were key in the creation of trade networks, market places, financial institutions and practices, and cultural mores that allowed the sale and use of children as slaves and pawns. Nwokeji's recent research indicates that the nineteenth century was a period when wealthy, brutal men, who he labels "merchant-warriors" violated Igbo cultural standards.²² Brigands with their own personal militias employed groups of kidnappers, and exercised political power that rejected the governing power of senior men. As illustrated in Equiano's account, slave traders depended on accomplices to assist with the transport of children to their final destinations and highlights how child-dealing networks operated during the eighteenth century.

²⁰ MacGregor and Oldfield, R. A. K., *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa, by the River Niger*, 287–8.

²¹ Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*, xiii.

²² *Ibid.*, 179.

The Bight of Biafra

Pawning, kidnapping, and enslaving children and adults reshaped life in Africa especially among the Igbo, Aro (Igbo sub-group), Ibibio, Ijaw (Ijo) and Efik communities of Southeastern Nigeria during the transatlantic slave trade. These ethnic groups live in the area that extends from the Niger Delta to Cameroon. Igboland, which makes up the majority of land in southeastern Nigeria, is located between the Niger River and the Cross River on the east.²³ It is an area that is fragmented into many small villages, with no history of a precolonial empire or powerful state as was the case with the Oyo Empire of the Yoruba in Western Nigeria.²⁴ Nonetheless, the region contributed large numbers of slaves during the transatlantic slave trade, during which the rise of the Aro coincided with intensified slaving. The Bight of Biafra is also a region that saw an increase in pawned and enslaved children during the colonial period.

The Biafran hinterland's physical geography and ecology shaped the political, social, religious and economic systems that affected the vulnerability of children.²⁵ The area consisted of three main environmental regions, the northern grasslands, the fertile palm belt and the salt marshes of the coast. Each had its own geography and resulting forms of economic specialization. In the north (about 140 miles from the coast) the land is savanna-like grasslands and has lower rainfall than the areas to the south. Historians believe that it served as an escape from slave traders from the south and was a key source area for slaves both during the earlier centuries as well as the colonial period. The people

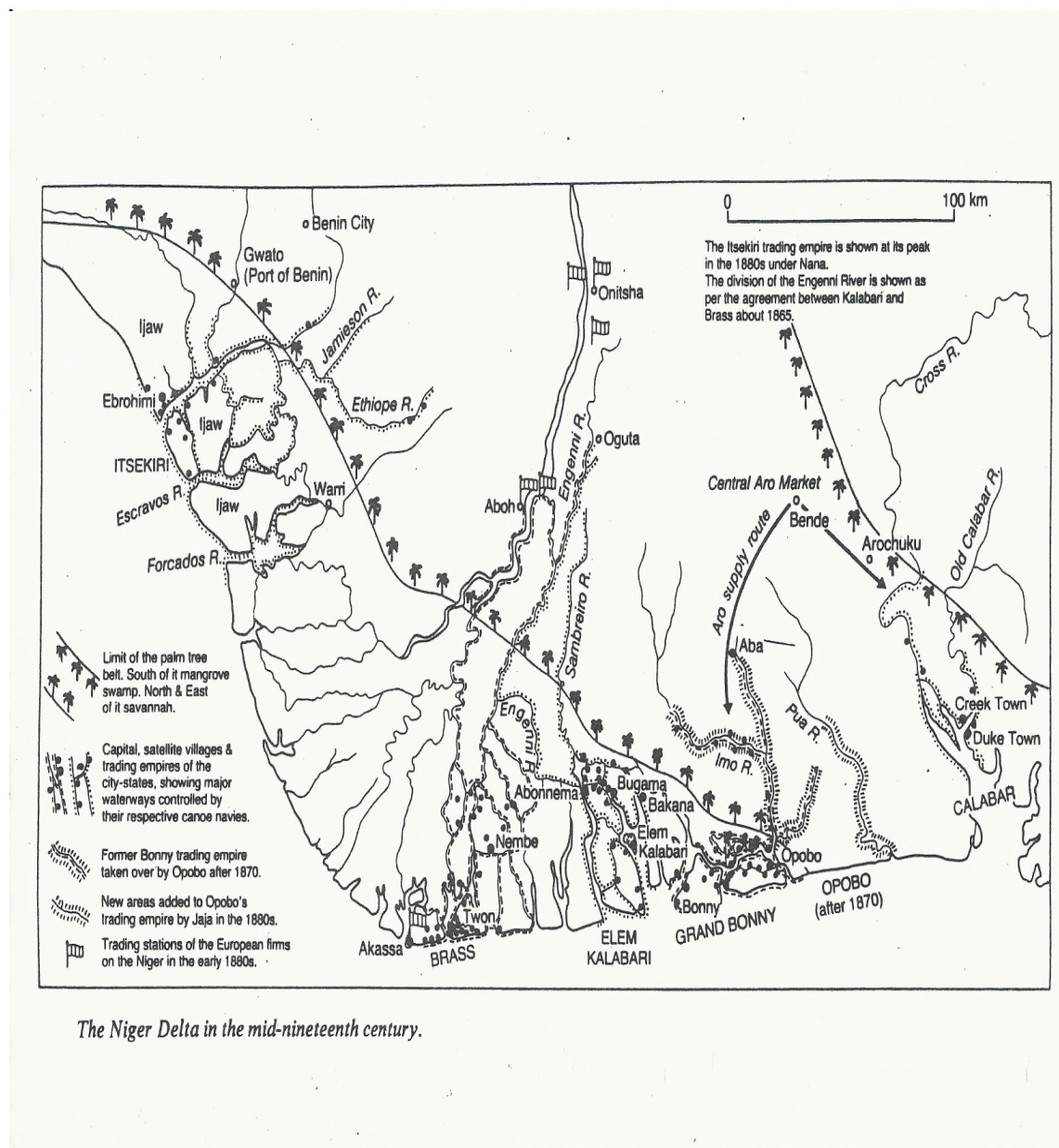
²³ Elizabeth Allo Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans: The Genesis of a Relationship--to 1906* (Faber and Faber, 1973), 2.

²⁴ The absence of a unified state to coordinate the trade is discussed in David Northrup's *Trade Without Rulers* (1978), where he explains how a group of the Igbo, the Aro, were able to link all these villages together in a trade grid.

²⁵ Akin Mabogunje, "The land and the peoples of West Africa," in *History of West Africa*, eds. J. F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder., Vol. 1, 1st ed. (Columbia University Press, 1970), 1.

of this region live in densely populated villages, some approximating 1000 per square mile with many were perched on infertile, eroded escarpments where they could barely eke out a living. While this offered some protection from slavers, the farmland was not sufficient to support all of the inhabitants. These villages were often forced to sell some children in order to secure the means to feed others. Near them, in the more fertile valley, prosperous farmers, called Nkanu allied with the Aro slave traders. The land in the north yielded yams, cassava, corn and beans. To the southeast, near Enyong Creek, inhabitants successfully grew oil palms, bananas, and cassava. In the south, inhabitants farmed a variety of vegetables, oil palm, corn and bananas. They were willing buyers of their less fortunate neighbors' children who they employed on their rich fields or sold to slave traders going to the coast. The slave-based economy integrated slave families as the major labor force for their food-producing farms.

Map 1.2: The Niger Delta in the Mid-nineteenth century



Source: Reprinted from Basil Davidson, *A History of West Africa, 1000-1800* (1978)

The Palm Belt is an area, north of the rivers region, that developed in the nineteenth century as a result of farmers who cleared the rain forest and planted palm

kernels.²⁶ In order to produce a four-gallon of oil tin, several women and at least one man would have to invest two days worth of labor.²⁷ They spent several ‘man’ hours planting, harvesting, and preparing the palm products for export to the markets. Women and men had distinct responsibilities in the palm trade. Men generally controlled the production and profits from palm oil while women controlled the trade in palm kernels. As the area came to specialize in palm exports in the nineteenth century residents increasingly relied on northern Igbo farmers for staples like yams.²⁸ The dense population in this region may have contributed to the success of the palm trade since palm products required huge labor expenditures. Susan Martin suggests that perhaps the Ngwa palm farmers, a dominant group in the palm belt, mainly used pawns for their labor needs.²⁹

The Ibibio, Efik, and Ijo people occupied the Niger Delta, an area with salt marshes, where they evolved from fishing villages as the slave trade intensified in the late sixteenth century.³⁰ They specialized in the slave trade and secured their foodstuffs from the people in the interior, most often those slave-based farming communities in the North. The Efik, a former fishing people who became the key traders in contact with the Europeans, predominated the estuary of the Cross River, which was the main artery connecting the interior Igbo areas to the coast. These horizontal belts of varied ecology encouraged regional trade, which linked the interior peoples of several hundred miles inland with the coastal people who were partners in the Atlantic trade. A smaller group

²⁶ K. Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885. An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (Oxford University Press, 1962), 41.

²⁷ Susan Martin, “Gender and Innovation: Farming, Cooking and Palm Processing in the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1900-1930,” *The Journal of African History* 25, no. 4 (January 1, 1984): 425.

²⁸ W. R. G. Horton, “The Ohu System of Slavery in a Northern Ibo Village-Group,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 24, no. 4 (October 1, 1954): 318.

²⁹ Martin, “Gender and Innovation,” 425.

³⁰ Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885. An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria*, 22.

of Igbo occupy the area to the west of the massive Niger River and, being close to the kingdom of Benin, their political system was both influenced by that monarchy as well as the rich trading communities, such as Onitsha, located along the river banks.

As the Atlantic trade reached the area from the sixteenth century, the many rivers and streams that penetrate the interior became important byways that facilitated the area's engagement with the transatlantic slave trade and subsequent 'legitimate' oil palm trade. These peoples of the Biafran hinterland were as much a part of the global Atlantic trading system as were the recipient areas in the New World. While it was difficult and treacherous for traders to move over land in many parts, the waterways allowed for easier access to those coastal societies where European traders were based. Important rivers, all of which flow north to south, include the Imo, the Anambra, the Urasi, and the Cross River connected the central areas of the key slave traders, the Aro.³¹ The most important river is the massive Niger River, which divides the west from the east and functioned as one of the key entry points into Igboland and Nigeria as a whole. The rivers allowed travel into the interior and enabled the development of the region's integrated economy.

Power and Kinship: The Social Bases of the Biafran Trade in Children

The story of Equiano's capture and sale in the Biafran hinterland reveals a deeply imbedded culture of trade and a powerful series of integrated networks. Despite the absence of a politically unifying institution or state, trade relations were highly developed throughout Biafra and were an important part of the societies as far north throughout the Sahara, and with Europeans along the coast. Archaeologist Thurstan Shaw claims that

³¹ Victor Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, First Edition (Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1965), i.

artifacts found at the renown Igbo-Ukwu site, an area northeast of Onitsha, suggests that early trade developed between the Igbo and societies in the Sahara, trans-Saharan trade, and as far as India.³² The site included pottery, beads, copper work and other artifacts, which date back to the ninth century A.D and account for the very early trade that was oriented toward the Sahara and beyond.³³ As against this orientation towards the North in the fifteenth through sixteenth centuries, the European trade reoriented the Niger region toward the coast when Portuguese and others European nations reached the area through their nautical expeditions.³⁴

Traders efficiently secured slaves for the Atlantic and domestic slave trade, and acquired prestigious European goods because of its vast regional markets and ports of entre that constituted the intricate periodic market system that existed in every Igbo village-group. Igbo markets replicated the ideology of village-group organization. The senior village controlled the main market, while smaller markets operated in smaller outlying villages.³⁵ The market was held every four or eight days (known as the 'big week'). The Igbo called their four-day week *Izu* and each day had a name: *Eke*, *Orie* or *Olie*, *Afo* or *Aho*, and *Nkwo*. All of the village group clusters participated in periodic markets that rotated among constituent villages. The market place was generally located between villages rather in the middle of one particular village. The markets opened on a rolling basis so that long distance traders could visit several over a period of time. The

³² Thurstan Shaw, *Unearthing Igbo-Ukwu: Archaeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 85.

³³ David Northrup, "The Growth of Trade among the Igbo before 1800," *The Journal of African History* 13, no. 2 (January 1, 1972): 218.

³⁴ *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society ; 2nd Ser., No. 79; Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society ; 2nd Ser., No. 79 (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1937).

³⁵ Northrup, "The Growth of Trade among the Igbo before 1800," 226.

peoples who lived along rivers and at the coast mainly traded fish, and participated in 'early morning daily markets'.³⁶

Biafra's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade was associated with the emergence of the Aro, an Igbo clan in the Cross River. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Aro were the premier group of middlemen that organized and executed slave transactions that led to increased numbers of Africans being sold at the coast. The Aro 'adopted' key markets and trade routes, and dispensed 'colonists' to form villages. Between 1700-1900 they established a trade diaspora of more than 150 settlements across the across 80,000 square miles of the Bight of Biafra.³⁷ Arochukwu, near the Cross River, was their capital and spiritual home.³⁸ It is also where the Aro housed the important oracle – *Ibn Okpabi* or *Ibini Okpabi*.³⁹ Other Igbo groups that wanted to settle disputes or who sought personal advice visited the Aro who acted as representatives of the oracle. Because of the oracle all of Southeastern Nigeria considered the Aro "God men" and afforded them protection as they traveled.⁴⁰

The Aro developed a complex trade system in the Biafran hinterland.⁴¹ They secured slaves from the interior and filtered them through the network of markets, houses and satellite villages to the coast during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴² As the demand for slaves increased with the development of plantations in the New World, the

³⁶ B. W. And U. I. Ukwu Hodder, *Markets in West Africa Studies of Markets and Trade Among the Yoruba and Ibo*, 1st Edition (Ibadan University Press, 1969), 128–130.

³⁷ Ibid., 2.

³⁸ Ibid., 54..

³⁹ A E Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929* (Humanity Press/prometheus Bk, 1972), 9.

⁴⁰ Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 48.

⁴¹ Ibid., 217.

⁴² Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885. An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria*, 28.

Aro refined and expanded their trading networks.⁴³ They also deployed mercenaries from among the warrior groups, the Ohaffia, Abam, and Abriba of the Cross Rivers area, who communicated their intention to purchase slaves to surrounding areas.

Aro dominance resulted from their ability to establish alliances with many ruling groups, to secure ‘safe passage’ on dangerous routes, hire mercenaries and kidnappers, and grow their trade relationships. Marrying women in each of the Aro satellite villages was especially useful because it expanded and maintained Aro influence in the region.⁴⁴ The process of inserting themselves into the villages throughout the hinterland enabled them to supply thousands of humans from inland regions to slavers at the coast.⁴⁵ The Niger, Cross Rivers, Benue River and the Bight of Biafra coast served as natural boundaries for the Aro trading diaspora.⁴⁶

The Aro specialized in kidnapping, dispatching mercenaries to capture prisoners of war and in hiring kidnappers⁴⁷ even as the palm oil trade flourished at the end of the transatlantic slave trade era. Many anti-slavery proponents believed that the end of the transatlantic slave trade would result in the end of slavery altogether.⁴⁸ However, in 1849, a Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionary explained that the value of domestic slaves increased as coastal patrols sought to prevent slave ships from reaching the coast. The missionary’s personal assistant reported that, “a price would be set upon every man’s head and no human being would be safe.”⁴⁹ The palm trade generated the increased

⁴³ Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*, 51, 66.

⁴⁴ Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*, 173.

⁴⁵ Kenneth O. Dike and Felicia Ekejiuba, *Aro of South-Eastern Nigeria, 1650-1980: Study of Socio-Economic Formation and Transformation in Nigeria* (African Books Collective, 1995), 2–3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1–2.

⁴⁷ Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*, 131.

⁴⁸ Rev. H. Townsend, “Letter from Reverend H. Townsend to Captain Trotter, R.N., on the African Coast Blockade,” January 31, 1849, 4, MF-653 CMS Nyanza and Yoruba, Center for Research Libraries.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

separately from the local markets.⁵¹ The Arochukwu trade reached as far north as Idah, as east as Isiokpe and as far south as Itu and southeast at Calabar.⁵² The trade also extended as far as Awka and north-eastwards to Nike. Another route spanned from Arochukwu northwards through Afikpo and Uburu to the Ezza and Izzi country, and to Bende and Uzuakoli. There were big markets and even fairs. The Aro, home based and those abroad, coordinated their business at the fairs, which attracted many other traders from throughout the hinterland.⁵³ Arochukwu also established villages strategically placed along these routes. This provided a trusted and seamless network for exchanges of goods and in people and especially children by the early twentieth century.

It is important to note that although the Aro managed much of the inland trade in slaves and eventually palm oil, other considerable traders existed, including Awka blacksmith slave traders and women.⁵⁴ In 1832, British trader MacGregor Laird arrived at Aboh on the bank of the Niger River where they met with a chief and a 'big woman' (a wealthy trader) to discuss trade prospects. The cheerful businesswoman told the traders about her vast trade capabilities. She noted her slaves in excess of 200 and explained that they assisted her with her business dealings in palm oil and yams.⁵⁵ It is likely that the mistress maintained trade relationships with village groups in the north and received most of her slaves from the kingdom of Igala.⁵⁶ Her 'big woman' status derives from her

⁵¹ Ibid., 133–5.

⁵² Gloria Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900-1960* (Routledge, 2004), 43.

⁵³ Hodder, *Markets in West Africa Studies of Markets and Trade Among the Yoruba and Ibo*, 136.

⁵⁴ G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (Nonsuch Publishing, 2006), 142. Blacksmiths from Awka also traveled throughout Igboland two-thirds of any given year before the colonial era.

⁵⁵ MacGregor and Oldfield, R. A. K., *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa, by the River Niger*, 100.

⁵⁶ Richard N. Henderson, *The King-in-every Man; Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha-Ibo Society and Culture*, by Richard N. Henderson (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1972), 52.

ownership of many slaves, including numerous women and canoes used for trading, and because her trade extended to the north and south of Aboh.⁵⁷

The Aro developed considerable settlements throughout the region based on trade, administering justice, offering protection, and intermarrying with local ruling families as a way of cementing alliances.⁵⁸ At the turn of the century, the Aro encountered little resistance as they evoked fear in non-Aro groups by promoting the *Ibiniukpabi* oracle, which the non-Aro thought to be very powerful.⁵⁹ One informant recalled how the Aro remained safe travelling throughout the dangerous regions at that time.

The Aro in those days were immune to all forms of harm. They were feared and respected. The mere mention of the word Aro struck fear into the heart of the people. Nobody dared touch an Aro even when the Aro was alone in the desert. The Aro were the government of the time. They had settlements everywhere in Igboland and they were able to maintain order without a standing military of police force for they could easily call in the services of mercenaries.⁶⁰

But the Aro employed the Abam, Abiriba, Awhawfia and the Ada people from the eastern Cross River as mercenaries to kill anyone who opposed Aro trade efforts or who had killed anyone working on the Aro's behalf.⁶¹ The Aro also employed these mercenaries as kidnappers. CMS Reverend and doctor S.R. Smith⁶² recounts the natives' efforts to avoid the Ada and Abam in a town northeast of Onitsha in 1891.

I noticed that every large tree in a prominent position had a recently-erected wooden platform in the topmost forks, which were to serve in case of an Ada attack; a point of vantage for shooting, and also a refuge for property, women and

⁵⁷ MacGregor and Oldfield, R. A. K., *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa, by the River Niger*, 100.

⁵⁸ Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*, 67.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶⁰ "Mazi Onyeje Okorafo, aged c. 73, in Umuaku Isuochi, 20 July 1972," in *Igbo Worlds*, 115.

⁶¹ Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885. An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria*, 39.

⁶² Francis Anyika, "The Genesis of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) Medical Mission in Igboland 1893-1911: A Historical Analysis," *Nsukka Journal of the Humanities* 14 (2004): 59.

children....⁶³

As a reflection of the times, the mention of a special hiding place for women and children emphasize the propensity of the Aro and their counterparts to seek out and kidnap them. The Aro responsible for the expansion of the slave trade continued to be prominent in child trafficking throughout the colonial period.

The areas that would eventually become Colonial Provinces known as Calabar, Ogoja, Onitsha, Owerri and Rivers, housed the major market towns where both the sale of slaves for transatlantic trade and the subsequent sale of domestic slaves, especially in children, took place. Specific market towns and source areas for child dealers included Awka, Onitsha, Udi in Onitsha Province; Aba, Owerri, Bende, Owerri, Okigwi, Owerri, Orlu, and Uzuakoli in Owerri Province; Uburu, Calabar and Cross River in Calabar Province; Degema in Rivers Province; and Afikpo, Ikom, Obubra in Ogoja Province. Many of these regions also provided slaves to the city-states along the Delta supplying the canoe Houses with thousands of slaves who manned canoes and in the case of Calabar, worked on palm plantations.⁶⁴ When completely dependent on the transport of goods along rivers and other waterways, the Aro cooperated with the Efik, the Opobo and Bonny people.⁶⁵

⁶³ "A journey to Nsugbe and Nteje, 1897 (S.R. Smith)," in *Igbo Worlds*, 204.

⁶⁴ George Thomas Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria: An Account of the Curious & Interesting Habits, Customs & Beliefs of a Little Known African People*, 1st ed., new impression (London, Cass, 1966, n.d.), 28.

⁶⁵ Hodder, *Markets in West Africa Studies of Markets and Trade Among the Yoruba and Ibo*, 138–9.

The Coastal Peoples: Centuries of Contact with Europe

As a result of the contact with Europe, the societies of the Niger Delta region were organized in autonomous city-states.⁶⁶ These included Bonny, Opobo, Okikra, New Calabar (Elem Kalabari), Warri, Calabar (Old Calabar), and Brass all of which had evolved from small fishing villages to communities based on and dependent upon trade. The swamp-like nature of the Delta prevented inhabitants from developing large farms.⁶⁷ The Brass⁶⁸ and Bonny people sold salt and dried fish to people in the north in return for most of their food.⁶⁹ Efik and Igbo-speaking populations, including the Aro, inhabited the Cross River region in the southeast.

During the slave trade some men became wealthy and powerful by forming very large households, referred to as a 'big compounds'. The size of the compound became the indicator of wealth because it meant the head could deploy the labor of many wives, children and slaves in farming or trade. The head could appropriate the labor of each member of his compound for *orie*-day work, meaning one day of the four or eight day Igbo week.⁷⁰ This type of power was a symbol of elite masculinity. As masters of the household, the senior male had the right to control the labor of junior males residing in the compound as well. Upon his death, the eldest son, brother or male relative assumed control over all dependents and property, which included marrying the widow(s) of the

⁶⁶ K. Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885. An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (Oxford University Press, 1962), 25. The city-states were established by the sixteenth century.

⁶⁷ This argument is made in Robin Horton, "The Olu System of Slavery in a Northern Ibo Village Group", *Africa* 24 (1954) 311-36.

⁶⁸ Northrup, "The Growth of Trade among the Igbo before 1800," 224.

⁶⁹ E. J. Alagoa, "Long-Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta," *The Journal of African History* 11, no. 3 (January 1, 1970): 321-3.

⁷⁰ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 40.

deceased.⁷¹ Widows generally could not object to the marriage because they rarely had an alternative way to support themselves.

The political system of the Niger Delta city-states (mainly Ijo and Efik⁷²) varied. Some were monarchies while others were republics. Each was fiercely independent. Every waterway entry point and trade post housed its own ruler who controlled all aspects of trade.⁷³ The ruler would negotiate with European traders and work with satellite villages in the interior. In response to the demand for slaves during sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the kinship based village system developed a corporate trading and political institution called the 'House' or 'Canoe house'. The House was a trading enterprise and governing body that included a head, always a prosperous man, his family and a series of dependents. Their main purpose was to conduct the trade that connected suppliers of slaves and later of palm products, with European traders on the coast. Dependent members of the House included slaves who manned trade canoes, conducted trade on behalf of the House head, and who engaged in warfare with competing houses. Other dependents included indigent free people, pawns, children born to residents of the House, and elders who were unable to care for themselves and offered themselves to the House as dependents.⁷⁴

The House system depended on the existence of credit, which allowed the head to secure slaves or oil from the interior villages. Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson argue that the city-state of Bonny came to dominate the trade in slaves in the early

⁷¹ Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, n.d., 31.

⁷² Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 28.

⁷³ K. Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885. An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (Oxford University Press, 1962), 30-1.

⁷⁴ Doro, "Letter from Doro, Head Chief and Political Agent, Warri, Nigeria to Unknown Colonial Representative," April 27, 1914, 1-2, CSE 8/7/39 : Slave Dealing : Extension of Jurisdiction of D.C.'s to hear and determine cases sitting with Native Court or with selected Assessors-Requests, 1912-1914, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

decades of the eighteenth century precisely because of their ability to access credit, which was reinforced by the secret association *Ekpe*.⁷⁵ Child pawns increasingly became part of the moneylending system that allowed middlemen to secure the goods that they used in the interior to buy slaves for Europeans on the coast. As we saw in the example of Peter, by the nineteenth century this system was highly unstable and subject to violations. It is within this context that children, who may not originally have been vulnerable to enslavement, fell victim to failed moneylending agreements.

A fundamental contradiction of pawnship is that the pawn is someone who is both a dependent within a kinship network and part of an economic transaction. Kinship relationships connect individuals who are related by blood that over generations became constituent of a lineage group. These groups were held together through social relationships that were maintained by trust and mutual responsibilities. Kinship also provided a moral code that facilitated community cohesion and linked village inhabitants together through a form of social contract. Pawnship, as a credit system, relied on the protections that kinship relations provided.⁷⁶ However, by the nineteenth century many of these conventions and mores collapsed under the pressure of the Atlantic trade. As we have seen with the story of Peter and with Robin Johns, pawnship connected indigenous moneylending agreements to the slave trade while at the same time making pawns more vulnerable to slavery.⁷⁷ As a result, a break down of trust and of the protections provided by kinship relations often occurred and threw children, like Peter, into the trade.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 371-2. Lovejoy and Richardson claim that Bonny's trade was largely due to its ability to secure credit with Europeans and inland traders.

⁷⁶ Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, "The Business of Slaving: Pawnship in Western Africa, c. 1600-1810," *The Journal of African History* 42, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 72.

⁷⁷ Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, "The Business of Slaving: Pawnship in Western Africa, c. 1600-1810," *The Journal of African History* 42, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 68-9. Lovejoy and Richardson

Family Structure and Kinship

The Igbo, Ibibio, Efik and Ijo shared similar family and political structures.⁷⁸ A man, along with his wives, sons, and cousins lived in a homestead, the *obi*. Wives took charge of their own sections in the back of the compound that consisted of a room, kitchen and storeroom and lived with their young children. Before the twentieth century, slaves usually lived in homesteads that directly faced those of their owners.⁷⁹ The household hierarchy was both gendered and age related: father, senior wives, junior wives (if fertile), unmarried children, elder sons, daughters and domestic servants and slaves.⁸⁰

The political structure of most of the peoples living in the Biafran hinterland was based on the ideology of kinship, which created social cohesion and defined their corporate identity. The kinship group or *ummuna* were patrilineages composed of descendants of a common ancestor. Individuals lived in extended families and were considered members of the same village group or 'town', with the oldest village being established by this 'founding ancestor'. Member villages in the village-group were offshoots of the original village and were founded by the descendants of the founder. In this way all the villages in a group were 'related' through an ideology of kinship. The founding village held ritual significance and its members were regarded with respect by the constituent villages. In addition, since the *ummuna* was the main land-holding body, membership in a particular kinship group influenced where a person lived, what land he

note the use of human pawns did not dominate slave trade transactions in every city-state, particularly Bonny.

⁷⁸ Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 14.

⁷⁹ Cyril Daryll Forde and Gwilym Iwan Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria* (International African Institute, 1950), 17.

⁸⁰ Raphael Chijioke Njoku, *African Cultural Values: Igbo Political Leadership in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1996*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2006).

had to cultivate, etc. Kinship, whether real or fictive, provided for the safety and wellbeing of the community and for its various free and unfree dependents. The laws, conventions and prohibitions associated with kinship, helped to regulate politics and establish laws that governed the community.⁸¹ However, by the nineteenth century the governing power of the village group saw signs of stress.

In Igboland, the spatial representation of the *ummuna* includes clusters of homesteads, *ezi* or *obi*, which belong to the localized patrilineage.⁸² Usually, kinfolk lived relatively close to one another but in separate compounds. An individual compound had a head, *Onye new ezi* who was a father, his wife or wives, unmarried children, boys and girls, and occasionally slaves.⁸³ The head of the *obi*,⁸⁴ had responsibility for performing many customary rituals, and for enforcing cosmic, ethical, and legal responsibilities. No other compound member acted in a political capacity without the expressed permission of the *obi*.⁸⁵ In the village influence also reflected age. The eldest man of the lineage, the *okpara*, acted as the intermediary between his forefathers and his lineage.⁸⁶ However, by the nineteenth century, this system of seniority was under pressure by the group of brash, wealthy and reckless men – the ‘merchant-warriors’. In this way the Atlantic commerce became a destabilizing force in local politics.

Most Igbo organized themselves into three main age-grades that coincided with the life span. The most senior was *ndiche*, *ndioke*, or *ndinze*, meaning “The Elders” who governed the community. The middle-aged group called *ndi nwoke*, for men and *ndi*

⁸¹ Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria*, 16.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸³ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 40.

⁸⁴ There's a lot of variation in these terms in Igboland. In some places an ‘obi’ is a building where the man sleeps and located in the front entrance of a walled compound.

⁸⁵ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 40–41.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

nwanye for women, managed the collective work of the community. It was assumed that their experience would allow them to make wise decisions. The junior males were called *okorobia* and the junior females, *nwabogo*.⁸⁷ The young men were the warriors and were assumed to lack experience to make wise decisions leaving the village under the direction of the elders.

Young people could only ascend to adulthood through initiation, and an entire age-grade group went through the initiation at the same time. Each village had its own particular way of advancing young boys and girls to the next level of adult maturity, but the overall concept remained the same. Formal induction into an Igbo male or female age-grade happened between ages fourteen and eighteen, men and women held certain responsibilities. The Efik age-grades included everyone born within the same year. After a prolonged period of individual preparation, group tasks and special rituals, the entire community came together for a festival or ceremony to celebrate this movement to adulthood. Most men married after the festival marking their adulthood.⁸⁸

As was the case with many of the people in this area, marriage was not an institution solely between a man and a woman, but between two lineages of senior and junior men and women. The prospective groom's family negotiated the bride price, in some form of wealth or service, to the bride-to-be's family. This exchange represented a formal contract and it gave the man the rights to his wife's labor and to that of the children produced in the marriage.⁸⁹ Young men depended on their fathers and other elders to negotiate the brideprice for a future wife while the bride depended on the older

⁸⁷ G. I. Jones, "Ibo Age Organization, with Special Reference to the Cross River and North-Eastern Ibo," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 92, no. 2 (July 1, 1962): 193-4.

⁸⁸ Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, 2006, 68-78.

⁸⁹ G. I. Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division, South Eastern Nigeria, 1905-1912: With a Commentary* (African Studies Centre, University of Cambridge, 1986), 91.

and more senior men in her lineage to negotiate on her behalf. While it seemed that in many cases the elders in each family took charge of brideprice negotiations before a couple could marry, women could decide when and to whom they would be married. However, this was not the case with the betrothal of infant or very young girls. The vulnerability of girls was especially acute because they were often betrothed as infants. In the early decades of the colonial period marriage became an important tool that disguised child trafficking.⁹⁰

In the case of Nnobi, Southeastern Nigeria, anthropologist Ifi Amadiume notes that women who married into patrilineages and lived in their husband's village, nonetheless, remained in close contact with their own patrilineages lineages. Upon death, if a man did not have a son to whom he could leave his property his daughter could become a 'male daughter'. This innovation had nothing to do with biological sex. Instead this gender flexibility allowed for the maintenance of wealth and power within the lineage. The daughter could also take on female wives as a way to increase her own wealth and assume the position of *Obi*.⁹¹ Exceptions also existed when women became slaveholders or accomplished traders in their own right. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards some women chose to leave their villages to live at a mission station if they did not want to live with the inheritor of the deceased man's property.⁹²

⁹⁰ A. E. Afigbo, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885-1950* (University of Rochester Press, 2006), 72.

⁹¹ Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (Zed Books, 1987).

⁹² "Appendix to Calabar Report," in *The General Missionary Conference of South Africa*, Church Missionary Society Archive. Section VII: General Secretary's Papers: Part 1: Papers Relating to Africa, 1847-1950 (University of California, Los Angeles, n.d.), 53, BV 2500C488 Reel 1, UCLA, Southern Regional Library Faculty.

Commerce and Biafra's Changing Economy

The Bight of Biafra's economy underwent significant change in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the United Kingdom passed the *Slave Trade Act of 1807*, a law that outlawed the slave traffic in the open waters.⁹³ For the remainder of the century the British unsuccessfully tried to convince other European nations to sign treaties to end the slave trade. It was during this period, the nineteenth century that the Biafran hinterland became even more intensively involved in the trade. The creeks and rivers were excellent hiding places for smuggling and the terrain proved very difficult for patrolling boats. Abolition of the slave trade overlapped with the increase of palm production in the region. The last century of the slave trade and the expansion of trade in palm oil, gum and kola nuts, among other items in Nigeria during the first half of the nineteenth century, prompted the need and growth of internal slave labor⁹⁴ and eventually led to the Delta's oil wars in the 1870s and 1880s.⁹⁵

Old Calabar and Bonny are examples of fishing villages that developed into autonomous mercantile communities made up of family-based merchant Houses. In the first decades of the eighteenth century Efik in Old Calabar had become a small yet important group that sold slaves.⁹⁶ As their trade families grew they began to branch out to places like Creek Town, Old Town and Duke Town, which are located on the Cross River estuary. The Efik dominated trade relations with Europeans, especially slave transactions. Their tendency to learn English and purchase European guns gave them overwhelming advantage over the hinterland region and leverage when dealing with the

⁹³ Suzanne Miers, *Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade*. (New York: Africana Pub. Corp., 1975), 9.

⁹⁴ Susan M. Martin, *Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History of the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800-1980*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 11.

⁹⁵ Martin Lynn, "The West African pal oil trade in the nineteenth century and the crisis of 'adaptation,'" 59.

⁹⁶ Forde, *Efik Traders of Old Calabar*, 4.

middlemen who delivered the slaves.⁹⁷ By the mid-eighteenth century, the Efik came to incorporate slaves who worked on the House heads' canoes as rowers and traders, on farms, in their Canoe Houses, and allow them to conduct the House head's commercial activities. Even though slaves appeared to be "outsiders," slaves often shared common interests with their masters and fought on their behalf. In time, some slaves became rich, gained respect, and even held slaves of their own. As the House populations increased, slaves cleared land and built huts for freemen, wives, apprentices, and other slaves. These spaces or wards, called *ufok* grew dramatically during the nineteenth century.⁹⁸ Generally, an *Obong* became a leader of a large House and represented his lineage in commercial transactions with Europeans.⁹⁹

Between the 1830s-1850s, Old Calabar exported the most oil among the Delta ports. Soon afterwards, Calabar and Bonny exported the largest amount of oil. The increase in oil exports is in direct correlation to the increased demand for slaves given the need for labor in palm production in the region.¹⁰⁰ Unlike Calabar, Bonny and the other city-states had almost no arable land and relied almost entirely on trade for their food.¹⁰¹

Bonny was the political and economic epicenter of the Bight of Biafra during most of the nineteenth century,¹⁰² and its history offers unique insight into how the House system provided slaves with avenues to attain great economic and social power. This can be seen in the example of one Igbo slave, JaJa, who became a powerful trader in Bonny.

⁹⁷ Ibid., viii.

⁹⁸ Behrendt, Latham, and Northrup, *The Diary of Antera Duke, an Eighteenth-Century African Slave Trader*, 16.

⁹⁹ A. J. H. Latham, *Old Calabar, 1600-1891: The Impact of the International Economy upon a Traditional Society* (Clarendon Press, 1973), 43-45.

¹⁰⁰ Law, *From Slave Trade to "Legitimate" Commerce*, 47.

¹⁰¹ Lovejoy and Richardson, "'This Horrid Hole,'" 365.

¹⁰² Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885. An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria*, 31.

Jaja's experience illustrates a slave's ability to become a wealthy trader through the House system although he was politically marginalized because of the prohibition of slaves to hold political office. The House heads ensured that their political systems would not be controlled by their subordinates even when some slaves were allowed to accrue wealth.

Jaja was born in 1821 in Amaigbo, located in current day Imo state. He was sold to a House head at Bonny when he was approximately twelve years old. The head thought he was stubborn and insubordinate and gave him away to a prominent trader in the Anna Pepple House in Bonny. But, stubborn or not, Jaja excelled at his trade as a slave, and by 1861 he ranked as one of the House's top traders. When he was denied political office, he left and founded Opobo, his own trading state with the intention of competing with Bonny and eventually became the King of Opobo.¹⁰³ Jaja was a remarkable exception as an example of a slave who forged his own success in trade.

Prominent Efik traders controlled much of the trade activity along the Cross River until the 1890s.¹⁰⁴ British explorer and Colonial administrator, Harry H. Johnston, wrote that as he traveled the Cross River in 1888 even the children of Old Calabar armed with machetes and knives would stand guard in the river awaiting anyone who dared travel without permission.¹⁰⁵ Though much of the Efik's wealth and power depended on the success of the trading Houses, the Efik also invested in working the land. Unlike the trading firms at Bonny and Opobo, the Efik turned arable land into palm oil plantations,

¹⁰³ Ibid., 183.

¹⁰⁴ Latham, *Old Calabar, 1600-1891*, 90.

¹⁰⁵ H. H. Johnston, "A Journey up the Cross River, West Africa," *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography* 10, no. 7 (July 1, 1888): 438.

such as Akpabuyo¹⁰⁶ and other types of produce farms at Duke Town and Creek Town¹⁰⁷ that needed slave labor.¹⁰⁸ This was one of the few examples of slave plantations on the West African coast.

The Era of Merchant Warriors: 18th -19th Centuries

The Bight of Biafra underwent enormous economic, social and political changes during the nineteenth century, which resulted in political shifts that subordinated gerontocracies to groups of emerging younger elite and non-traditional rulers. The slave trade had left its mark on the interior and newly formed title societies transformed longstanding systems of government. Violence erupted in the Biafran hinterland when kidnappers and mercenaries operated without restraint in their search for slaves. Additionally, there was increased social stratification throughout the area as new elites emerged and challenged old governing traditions and mores.¹⁰⁹

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were an extremely turbulent time. Nwokeji describes the period of the Atlantic slave trade and the period that followed as one that departed from old value systems and resulted in new levels of violence.¹¹⁰ Previous forms of accountability based on kinship and social relations broke down. Former democratic forms of political involvement eroded as wealthy men overruled older men in village councils. Men no longer achieved political power or social influence through seniority. A new system of validation, title-taking emerged and institutionalized the power of merchants. An elder offered the following description:

¹⁰⁶ Latham, *Old Calabar, 1600-1891*, 86.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 96.

¹⁰⁸ Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibilio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria*, 91.

¹⁰⁹ Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 15.

¹¹⁰ Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*, 178.

As time went on, this gradation of authority right from the town to the family unit, depending on age as a criterion, gave way to the authority of the wealthy. These people were rich enough to take the highest titles of the town. Such title taking ranged from *Igbū Efī*, *Imā Anyinyà*, *Imē Ōhà*, and in one or two places, *ichī Ozō*. The prerequisite for the possession of these titles was wealth, as they are bought with money. These titled men became the governing council of the town and now seem to have taken over the function of the elders.¹¹¹

The process by which a person garnered authority was now based on personal wealth.

By the nineteenth century the markets of even the same village groups were spaces of distrust, danger and threats, and became increasingly unsafe. An elder gave an account of this danger in a prominent market for slaves in the northern Igbo area of Agbaja.

Because some of our people traveled to Arochukwu and some riverain areas, and saw wealth, they returned home with the burning zeal to get rich quick. The only available medium of attaining such an ideal was to hunt for slaves by any means. It was this trade in slaves that gave rise to our famous market of *Nkwo Agū*. During the market sessions in *Nkwo Agū* in the olden days, one could not go to another town's sector of the market without being led by an armed elder. Any lapse in this protection might lead to a person's enslavement.¹¹²

The power of the Aro should not be undervalued. Their far-reaching trade operations penetrated much of Igboland and their social and political power went unmatched in the interior.

Transition of Power: Seniority Gives Way to New Wealth

The ethnic groups that populated Biafra, pre-Atlantic slave trade, lived in communities that were often democratic, overseen by senior men and women who usually belonged to secret societies committed to appeasing deities, and operated with the

¹¹¹ Noo Udala, aged c. 102, in Umuaga, 1973, in *Igbo Worlds*, 73.

¹¹² Oral interview with Paul Nwanba, the oldest local inhabitant in Umuaga, 16 June 1973 in *Igbo Worlds*, 75–6. Isichei notes that Nwanba was around 20 years of age when the Europeans first arrived.

understanding that they must care for their dependents. Very few acted as aristocratic rulers. Rather, each village group self-governed their communities through the creation of specialized entities.¹¹³ Age-grades, secret societies, herbalists, and *dibias* served their communities in specific ways. Specific age-grades were tasked with looking out for potential attackers while others might be responsible for watching for signs of a slave rebellion.

During the period of the nineteenth century slave trade, certain men gained commercial and administrative power by participating in the slave trade. Even though villages were still subject to a council of elders, younger men served as judges and acquired wealth by demanding fees for services. The younger men bought their way into secret societies and created new title societies. In addition, the newly wealthy men sold delinquent debtors into slavery. These newly created title-making entities and secret societies differed by community. At first, only freeborn people could belong to such societies. Membership required a fee. Privileges included presiding over civil disputes and making political decisions.¹¹⁴

Wealthy men, and to some extent women, formed the exclusive title associations to conspicuously display their wealth or to protect their dominance in trade. One such association was the *Ozo* title society. The importance of the *Ozo* title remained relevant from the eighteenth into the nineteenth centuries. This was a graded title society in which wealthy men paid expensive dues to join and progress through the ranks. Northern Igbo

¹¹³ Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 39.

¹¹⁴ Forde and Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria*, 18–9.

title holders often subscribed to *Ozo*. The Nri priests¹¹⁵ are thought to be the originators of the *Ozo* society for the purpose of political and social advancement.¹¹⁶ Nri men who earned the *Ozo* title, which is largely linked to purification ideologies, enjoyed the privilege of travelling freely in Igboland. As they traveled they purified the land and people of social evils through ritual activities.¹¹⁷ They also earned income by dispensing yam medicine, ensuring its edibility.¹¹⁸

In the Ngwa area the Aro developed the secret society of *Okonko*, which traded in slaves and operated in the palm belt in the nineteenth century.¹¹⁹ *Okonko* organized the underground trade in people. Any man, even if young, could pay a fee for admittance. Representing a departure from earlier norms, a man's association did not require seniority within a specific lineage or the approval of elders.¹²⁰ This shift in power is even more evident by the 1920s when the British gave *Okonko* members warrants to rule as chiefs who governed court cases. The *Okonko* society continued to settle disputes well into the 1930s.¹²¹

A similar society developed in both Igbo and Ekpe areas. Every Efik village had a ruler who held membership in *Ekpe* a secret society of wealthy traders that collected debts and otherwise insured that trade agreements were honored.¹²² The Efik donned special costumes, enforced the laws of a wealthy elite, mediated disagreements, and

¹¹⁵ G. T. Basden, "Notes on the Ibo Country, Southern Nigeria," *The Geographical Journal* 65, no. 1 (January 1, 1925): 37. The Nri Priests were generally from the Agukwu in Onitsha area who held the authority to afford certain men power.

¹¹⁶ Northrup, "The Growth of Trade among the Igbo before 1800," 230.

¹¹⁷ Richard N. Henderson, *The King-in-every Man; Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha-Ibo Society and Culture*, by Richard N. Henderson (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1972), 60–1.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹¹⁹ Martin, *Palm Oil and Protest*, 27.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹²² Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, "Trust, Pawnship, and Atlantic History: The Institutional Foundations of the Old Calabar Slave Trade," *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (April 1, 1999): 336.

assisted with debt recovery.¹²³ Sometimes debt recovery included seizing a debtor's children.¹²⁴ *Ekpe* was a means of controlling most of the women and the most numerous group of men who were in fact slaves. As one of its many sanctions, it had the authority to kill offenders. G.I. Jones claims that the harsh measures with which the slave population was ruled became a source of weakness.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, the switch from previous forms of power based on seniority to power based on wealth would have significant consequences during the twentieth century.

Conclusion

Examining the changes in cultural practices, trade networks, and political systems during the years of the first European intervention allows us to understand what created the conditions for child dealing during the 1920s and 1930s. The Bight of Biafra is unique for being an area heavily involved in the transatlantic slave trade from the 1740s until the mid-nineteenth century.¹²⁶ More than any other region, Biafra drew significant numbers of children into the transatlantic slave trade. As such, the trade played a role in establishing systems for the procurement and post-slavery exploitation of children.

The transatlantic slave trade's final one hundred years saw the normalization of child trafficking. Slaving, kidnapping, and raiding were rampant as was the sale of children. The people of the Bight of Biafra developed many individual and group methods of seizing and employing the labor of children. With no central government to

¹²³ Forde, *Efik Traders of Old Calabar*, 16.

¹²⁴ G.I. Jones, "Political Organization," in *Efik Traders of Old Calabar*, 143.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹²⁶ Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa: 2nd (Second) Edition* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 49.

regulate them, long distance traders developed mechanisms of moving around safely without drawing much attention and without much opposition.

The trade in children intensified in the Bight of Biafra in the twentieth century partly because of the vigorous commerce in children in the preceding two hundred years. The eighteenth and nineteenth century were both periods of remarkable socio-economic change. With the influx of European economic and political influences, indigenous forms of government and social relations changed, as was the case in areas in which wealthy men rose to power at the expense of the older, more experienced men. The nineteenth century was a period of radical change and violent slave incursions that caused fear and insecurity throughout Igboland as mercenaries and kidnappers traveled freely around the Biafran hinterland. Unable to defend themselves for fear of Aro retribution, many lost children to commercial kidnappers. The people of Igboland, who had for the most part lived in societies without chiefs, began to see the ascension of new types of rulers who regarded them and their children as sources of unguarded wealth. The struggle to regain democratic control over their families and communities came to compete with decisions among subject people to compete for survival through the trade and sale and pawning of their own children.

Chapter 2 – Early Contradictions in Imperialist Policies: Pawnship, Moneylending and the Mobilization of Juvenile Servile Labor

[A] majority of slaves were redeemed at their age of 6 years old and they don't know their parent's land...My own cruel parents, they just sold me just to get means as to feed my younger brothers and sisters.

A Canoe House Slave, 1914¹

Some scholars estimate that by the end of the nineteenth century several million slaves lived in Nigeria. When the colony of Nigeria was established British humanitarians intensified their lobbying to force colonial administrators to do more to end slavery in the colony, but officials remained hesitant because they did not want to decrease the power of collaborative, often slave-owning native rulers through which they sought to rule the colony.² Additionally they did not want to deprive the rich export economy of this important labor force. In 1901 Sir Ralph Moor, the first high commissioner of the Southern Nigeria Protectorate, wrote a report for his successors that described the inner workings of the slave trade. Moor explained that in the Bight of Biafra slaves came from a multiplicity of systems: as victims of organized slave raiding, being accused of witchcraft, or as the result of kidnapping or capture during “inter-tribal” conflicts. In addition, given the economic pressures of the new economy – increased taxes, import duties, etc. –parents and guardians were forced to sell children in order to pay off debts, to obtain needed goods. Moor found that in the city-states of the Niger Delta, even freeborn children in the House system could be sold or pawned by the House.³ However, Moor neglected to mention the issue of parents selling and pawning their children to the House heads as slaves, as suggested by the Canoe House slave's

¹ A. Chief, “Concerning the House Rule Ordinance: A Cry from the Central Province of Old Southern Nigeria,” *The Nigerian Chronicle*, September 25, 1914, 5.

² Elizabeth Isichei, *History of Nigeria* (Prentice Hall Press, 1983), 424–5.

³ As cited in A. E. Afigbo, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885-1950* (University of Rochester Press, 2006), 55–6.

statement above. This omission, was not incidental, because he knew that many of the children traveling through internal slavery routes were destined for the oil trading Houses in the Delta. By ignoring this important route into slavery Moor exemplified what would become colonial authorities' persistent neglect of child bondage. The issue of bonded child labor would remain a thorny issue throughout the colonial period.

In the first decades of the twentieth century colonial authorities continued to struggle with defining and regulating coercive forms of labor. They faced a problem. They were supposed to represent 'civilized' principles of 'free labor' but they were not convinced that they could get and retain the labor force they needed to produce crucial colonial exports. Thus they struggled to 'appear' to respond to humanitarian concerns while 'soft pedaling' any legislation that might truly 'free' labor. British colonial authorities noted the existence of human pawns as a form of un-free labor within the servile class, but did so in an apathetic manner. Such was the case in Western Nigeria, as well. In his study of pawning practices among the Yoruba, Olatunji Ojo argues that the British failed to pay serious attention to the system of human pawning until the 1890s because they were reluctant to end all forms of forced labor.⁴ Their hesitance is especially visible in their dealings with unfree forms of child labor, particularly the institution of pawnship. In part, colonial authorities may not have been able to distinguish pawned persons from slaves because they often performed similar duties and, as noted above, a child could imperceptibly pass from one to the other. Even so, there was a real and meaningful distinction between the two statuses. Masters owned slaves, whereas creditors controlled the pawn's labor or only owned the pawning contract. Pawns generally were covered by certain rights and privileges, mainly the right of redemption,

⁴ Olatunji Ojo, "Yoruba Credit and Debt Mechanisms Adjusted, c.1850-1900," November 23, 2006.

while slaves had no legal rights.⁵ Additionally, the pawn's family members could seek legal intervention if the pawn was mistreated or if a dispute arose about the loan, which was not the case for slaves.⁶

The hesitance in ending slavery and other systems of bonded child labor was also obvious in a series of proclamations and decrees made during the opening years of the 20th century. One was the *Masters and Servants Proclamation*, which included provisions to allow the apprenticeship of children. More than men and women, parents often pawned their children as apprentices so that they could learn a trade.⁷ In 1902, Britain used one of its earliest domestic labor laws to regulate apprenticeship and passed the *Masters and Servants Proclamation* of Nigeria. This Proclamation stated that:

The father, or in the case of a fatherless child, the mother, or in case of total orphanage of the guardian of a child above the age of nine years and under the age of sixteen years may, with the consent of such child testified by his or her execution of the deed of apprenticeship, apprentice him to a trade or employment in which art or skill is required for any term not exceeding five years. Whenever a child under the age of sixteen years is without known relatives, and is without a guardian, the Resident of the Province where such child resides or is found may authorize the apprenticing of such child to a trade or employment... and may appoint some fit person to execute the deed of apprenticeship and act generally as guardian for such child.⁸

While initially applied to Northern Nigeria, Moor intended for the Proclamation to be a way for poor hinterland parents to 'legally' give their children to Delta middlemen.⁹ It is likely that many of the pawned apprentices ended up working on public works projects

⁵ Some of the literature on slavery claims that the slaves had limited rights. However, Nwachukwu-Ogedengbe argued that such 'rights' were meaningless because slaves lacked the power to enforce them. See K. Nwachukwu-Ogedengbe, "Slavery in 19th Century Aboh," in *Slavery in Africa*, S. Miers and I. Kopytoff, eds, 113-154, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977.

⁶ Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy, "Pawnship in Historical Perspective," in *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*, 4.

⁷ Felix Ekechi, "Pawnship in Igbo Society," in *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*, eds. Paul E. Lovejoy and Toyin Falola (Africa World Press, 2003), 168, 173.

⁸ Nigeria, Northern Compilations, *Orders in Council and Proclamations* (Stevens, 1905), 439.

⁹ Adiele Eberechukwu Afigbo, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885-1950* (University Rochester Press, 2006), 56.

under the management of a more senior worker or as laborers in the Canoe Houses or House systems.¹⁰ The Proclamation made the removal of an apprentice from his employer punishable by imprisonment up to twelve months or the payment of a £100 fine.¹¹ This rule would have further implications for retaining child labor in the House systems.

The mobilization of unfree labor and moneylending became points of contention between anti-slavery lobbyists and colonial authorities at a time when the colonial office sought labor and revenue from the indigenous populations. The legal status of slavery was abolished in the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1901, however colonial officials allowed certain native rulers to legally keep children as forced laborers either as slaves, domestic servants, apprentices or pawns.¹² As these internal inconsistencies prevailed, both British subjects in the colony and Europeans outside of it began to share an increasing concern about the use of child labor in Nigeria. The prevailing contradiction in colonial policies between the desperate need for labor and Britain's claim to oppose all forms of 'unfree' labor exacerbated the vulnerability of children. Moneylending practices, and officials' reliance on slave-holding House heads and local chiefs (appointed by the British) to control local government were prime factors that contributed to child dealing.¹³

¹⁰ K. Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885. An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (Oxford University Press, 1962), 34. The Canoe Houses or House systems were co-operative trading firms and a native governing institution.

¹¹ Compilations, *Orders in Council and Proclamations*, 440.

¹² Suzanne Miers, *Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade*. (New York: Africana Pub. Corp., 1975), 301-2.

¹³ Lugardian reforms refer to policies set forth by Lord Frederick John Dealtry Lugard, who served as Nigeria's High Commissioner from 1899-1906 and Governor-General from 1914-1919. He implemented Indirect rule a regional and localized system where local rulers governed their constituents under British colonial law.

British Occupation of Nigeria

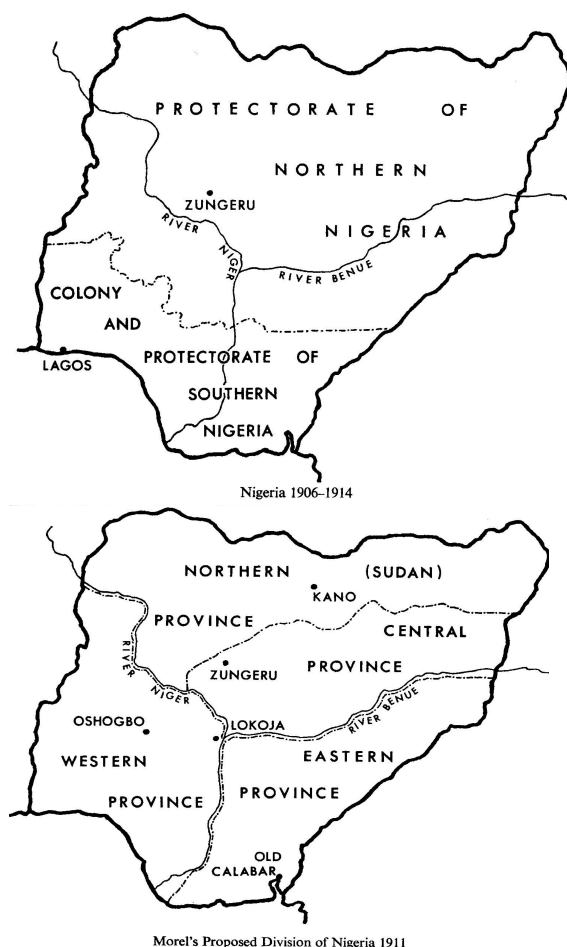
The Nigerian colony evolved in several stages. The first acquisition was the port of Lagos, which in 1861 was annexed as a colony, under the guise of ending the slave trade. The British formalized its occupation of Nigeria between the Anglo-French Convention of 1898 and its amalgamation of the North and South in 1914.¹⁴ In 1900 the area was divided into the Colony of Lagos, and the protectorates of Southern and Northern Nigeria.

In 1904, Sir Walter Egerton was appointed as the High Commissioner of Southern Nigeria and the Governor of the Colony of Lagos, and oversaw the merger of the Northern and Southern administrations. The amalgamation resulted in the development of three focal Provinces in the south with capitals in the Eastern Province at Calabar, the Central Province at Warri and the Western Province of Lagos. Each province had an assigned Commissioner.¹⁵ In 1906 the southern territories were united into the Colony (Lagos) and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. In an attempt to streamline administrative practices across Nigeria, the British enacted a plan to unify the colony by establishing 'Native Rule', a system in which indigenous leaders were allowed to form local governments in the southwestern, eastern and central parts of the country. By 1906 Southern Nigeria's governing structure was comprised of four District Commissioners, three District Officers and nine Divisional Commissioners all of whom worked under the High Commissioner.

¹⁴ John M. Carland, *The Colonial Office and Nigeria, 1898-1914*, 1st ed. (Hoover Institution Press, 1985), 2.

¹⁵ F. D. Lugard, *Lugard and the Amalgamation of Nigeria: A Documentary Record, Being a Reprint of the Report by Sir F. D. Lugard on the Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria and Administration, 1912-1919* (Frank Cass & Co., 1968), 4.

Map 1.4 Nigeria 1906-1914



Source: Lugard and the Amalgamation of Nigeria¹⁶

In 1912 Northern and Southern Nigeria were administered as a colonial territory. In 1914 the Colony of Lagos and the two Protectorates of Southern and Northern Nigeria became the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. Thus by World War I the political boundaries and administrative structures had been established. The formal creation of the colony of Nigeria intensified the transformation of the Bight of Biafra's economy and radically changed the indigenous forms of governance.¹⁷ Since colonies were to be self-supporting, the administration moved quickly to develop the infrastructure that would

¹⁶ Ibid., 45.

¹⁷ A. E. Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929* (Humanity Press/Prometheus Bk, 1972), xiii.

create an export-oriented economy. One of the first priorities was to introduce systems of compulsory labor for public works projects.¹⁸ Forced labor was necessary because most people were able to sustain themselves and their families through farming. The problem then was how to get people who were basically self-sufficient to leave their farms to work for a foreign power. The British needed a cheap labor force to clear bush for roads, construct railways, and serve as porters. Everyone was pressed into forced labor: freeborn, slaves, and former slaves were all drafted to work in these projects. In particular, British Residents extracted labor from coastal Canoe Houses,¹⁹ and commissioned village leaders, some of whom they designated as 'colonial chiefs' to supply personal slaves, pawns and other dependent persons to work on public projects.²⁰ This attracted the protests of anti-slavery humanitarian groups in England and sparked a debate within the Colonial Office about the wisdom of using *corvée* labor.

In the midst of the ongoing public and legal debates about coerced labor in the Colony, concern about child labor in Britain grew. In 1889, in reaction to scandals about the use of children in factories, thirty-one British cities and towns had formed organizations to protect children from cruelty, making separate pleas for legislation to protect children.

Any person over sixteen years of age, who, having the custody of a child, being a boy under the age of fourteen years or being a girl under the age of sixteen years, willfully ill-treats, neglects, abandons, or exposes such a child or causes or procures such a child to be ill-treated, neglected, abandoned, or exposed, in a manner likely to cause a child unnecessary suffering, or injury to its health, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor [sic].²¹

¹⁸ David Seddon, "Popular Protest and Class Struggle in Africa: An Historical Overview," in *Class Struggle and Resistance in Africa*, ed. Leo Zeilig, (Haymarket Books, 2009), 62.

¹⁹ Houses or Canoe Houses refer to trading firms.

²⁰ Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, 1st ed. (University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 42–3.

²¹ Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, *Children in English Society: From the Eighteenth Century to the Children Act 1948*, vol. 2 (Routledge and K. Paul, 1973), 623.

According to the Children's Charter of 1908, child abuse and neglect, including "the evils associated with baby-farming, exposure of young children to drunkenness, immorality," and "the hazards attached to the employment of children in certain occupations," should end at all costs.²² This collective concern created a reformist interest that promoted legislation to monitor the treatment of children in England. However, British authorities did not pay similar attention to Nigerian children. Nigerian children in the colony seemed to incur more violent treatment than even the poorest of British children. However, it is in this context that we see anti-slavery lobbyists and humanitarians highlight contradictions in British policy that dealt with compulsory labor systems in the Colony, especially with relation to children.

The economy also experienced a shock when the colonial government began to demonetize 'native' currencies (i.e. cowries, manilas) and replace them with British sterling. In so doing the government unintentionally created a dual currency in which moneychangers dictated exchange rates. This negatively affected family economies.²³ During this time, poor men continued to borrow from native credit lending bodies made up of kinsmen. Generally, individuals who had made payments to the lending societies would then have the opportunity to borrow when in need. This crisis forced families into debt as they pledged either land or dependents, including children in order to obtain a

²² Ibid., 2:612. Baby-farming refers to parent who paid others, usually nursemaids to keep a baby for long periods of time and sometimes permanently.

²³ Ben Naanen, "Economy within an Economy: The Manilla Currency, Exchange Rate Instability and Social Conditions in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1900-48," *The Journal of African History* 34, no. 3 (January 1, 1993): 425-446.

loan.²⁴ This economic insecurity set the stage for an increase in child pawning as the colonial economy matured.

Trade and Moneylending in the Era of Conquest

The growth of commercial transactions in Nigeria during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century incentivized the sale of children into slavery and the exchange of child pawns or pledges for collateral and funds.²⁵ Pawnship also appears to have increased between the 1820s-1840s, the time when the trade in palm oil was gradually replacing the transatlantic slave trade.²⁶ This produced changes in the nature of pawning during the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Early accounts show how slave traders primarily accepted pawns as a form of credit when they advanced guns, alcohol and other goods to local “big” men and traders who were middlemen in the supply of slaves.²⁷ However, nineteenth and early twentieth century archives offer more evidence that common folk also pawned dependents to fund marriages, burials, pay court debts and eventually pay colonial taxes. As represented in the quote by a canoe House slave, children often ended up in the canoe House systems along the coast when their parents could no longer afford to provide for them.²⁸

The expansion of the palm oil trade changed Nigeria’s economy during the last half of the nineteenth century and the widespread and increased use of the steamship

²⁴ Walter I. Ofonagoro, “From Traditional to British Currency in Southern Nigeria: Analysis of a Currency Revolution, 1880-1948,” *The Journal of Economic History* 39, no. 3 (1979): 626.

²⁵ Felix K. Ekechi, “Pawnship in Igbo Society,” in *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003).

²⁶ Robin Law, *From Slave Trade to “Legitimate” Commerce: The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

²⁷ Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, “‘This Horrid Hole’: Royal Authority, Commerce and Credit at Bonny, 1690-1840,” *The Journal of African History* 45, no. 3 (January 1, 2004): 363–392.

²⁸ A. Chief, “Concerning the House Rule Ordinance: A Cry from the Central Province of Old Southern Nigeria.”

brought with it many advantages and disadvantages for oil traders. It increased the capacity for long standing traders of the Houses to expand along the Delta states and limited the influx of smaller scale traders with limited resources. However, some new traders participated in the palm oil business. They ran low cost operations, accepted small profit margins and became successful in the oil trade during the second half of the nineteenth century. Martin Lynn asserts that these newcomers increased competition at a time when the market was contracting.²⁹

The 1860s was an especially turbulent time for the more established traders and suppliers as there were constant struggles over access to oil-supplying areas in the interior and over the price. During this period the demand for credit increased and it is in this context that we see African brokers and small-scale traders looking for ways to access credit. The increased need for large deposits of capital spurred demands for credit by small-scale traders. As moneylending transactions increased, disputes over loans did as well. In 1856 the British established a Court of Equity in Calabar to monitor and rule on disputes between the traders and British firms.³⁰ For example, “attempts were made to use the Court of Equity to make traders pay large deposits before they could trade in Old Calabar.”³¹ This Court of Equity, and similar courts continued to operate well into the twentieth century as debt cases continued to demand colonial intervention.

By 1870, there were Courts of Equity in Calabar, Opobo, Brass, Okrika, along the eastern Delta and in the western areas from Bonny to the Benin River. The Courts’ aim was to maintain “a certain amount of law and order among the wild “gentleman of the

²⁹ Martin Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³⁰ Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 97.

³¹ Law, *From Slave Trade to “Legitimate” Commerce*, 66–69.

commercial community of the coast.”³² The Court of Equity continued to settle disputes over trade and debts between European merchants and African traders.³³ The Court intervened in transactions, in part, because the British disapproved of the large amount of credit that German merchants gave to African traders and the resulting disputes. In 1894 the British introduced a new credit policy, which ordered that,

No assistance will be rendered by the Consular courts of the protectorates in recovering trusts issued by the European traders to the natives after 1st December, 1894. Proceedings may be taken in the Consular Courts for the recovery of 'Trusts' issued by European Traders to Natives prior to the dates above mentioned and each case shall be dealt with on its merits. Such proceedings must be taken before 1st July, 1895, after which no 'Trust' can be recovered through the Consular Courts of the Protectorate.³⁴

In 1900 Britain imposed the *Recovery of Credit Proclamation*, which prevented British intervention in recovering debts for other European traders. It read as follows,

It was considered that ‘trust’ was given out to such an extent, and so recklessly, that legitimate trade was being seriously damaged by it: and with the small staff at the disposal of the Administration, it was found impossible to collect these ‘trusts’ through the consular courts and it was also deemed advisable to discourage the giving out of ‘trust’ in every way possible.³⁵

The initial disputes that gained British attention were those that existed between Europeans and Africans. However, reoccurring concerns regarding debts caused the development of policies, laws and institutions that monitored moneylending between Nigerians as well.

Palm oil prices hit bottom during the 1880s resulting in bankruptcy for some of the largest European trading firms. This was a direct consequence from the National

³² Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 39.

³³ Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885. An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria*, 126.

³⁴ As cited in Chibuike Ugochukwu Uche, “Foreign Banks, Africans, and Credit in Colonial Nigeria, C. 1890-1912,” *The Economic History Review* 52, no. 4, New Series (November 1, 1999): 688.

³⁵ Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 56.

African company (later the Royal Niger Company) that established a monopoly on the palm oil trade on the Niger River, which lowered prices.³⁶ In addition, a partnership comprised of nine of the most prominent firms in the Delta region by 1889, the African Association Ltd., formed the Oil Rivers Protectorate (ORP) in 1891. The creation of the ORP established comprehensive control over the interior trade and was allotted governing power by the British government.³⁷

By 1914 the final structure of Nigeria as a colony had been established. The elaboration of the governing structure was a key task assumed by Lord Frederick John Dealtry Lugard, who served as Nigeria's High Commissioner from 1899-1906 and Governor-General from 1914-1919.³⁸ Lugard refined the system of local government in Southeastern Nigeria, called 'indirect rule' which appointed local men as warrant chiefs, who were given a document, called a warrant. British administrators imagined a colony in which indigenous rulers would govern their own populations while Britain maintained military control over the region and could collect taxes and manage public works projects by employing commissioners, residents and British police officers to oversee the system. This form of rule mirrored what Britain had employed in the Islamic North. The British selected natives who they thought were traditional leaders and issued each one a 'warrant'. The warrant allowed them to function as judges over Native Courts. However, imposing indirect rule upon Igboland was very problematic because, unlike the North, Igboland consisted of small autonomous units without chiefs. The indigenous

³⁶ Isichei, *History of Nigeria*, 100.

³⁷ Law, *From Slave Trade to "Legitimate" Commerce*, 72.

³⁸ Margery Perham, *The Diaries of Lord Lugard: Vol. 4: Nigeria, 1894-5 and 1898*. (London: Faber 1963), 11, 18-9, 26-7. Lugard was born to a British army chaplain who worked in Madras, India and whose mother was a missionary of the Church Missionary Society. He served as a British soldier in India and then travelled to East Africa he worked as a British administrator in 1897. He also worked on behalf of the Royal Niger Company. In West Africa he also commanded the West African Frontier Force.

system was largely based on councils of men, and sometimes women related by kinship, lineages, and seniority in spiritual and professional capacities.³⁹ The warrant chief system and Native Courts did not replicate native governing practices.⁴⁰

At the time of Lugard's appointment as Governor General, the Southern Protectorates were a patchwork of colonially-structured polities: some monarchies or republics in the Niger Delta, chieftaincies in the West, the colony of Lagos, in which westernized Africans had advisory roles, and the scattered 'Native Courts' of the southeast. To his 'orderly' military mind, this was chaos. Lugard initiated governing changes that sought to create a common, rationally organized local governing system. His specific goal agreed with a common sentiment shared by leaders of the Royal Niger Company that, "the coast ought to pay for the development of the interior." In 1905, Lugard issued a memorandum that mapped out his goals, which included the development of a railway system, a plan to regulate trade in natural and agricultural resources, and perhaps the most often written about—the development of a judicial system based on a "uniform policy."⁴¹ Lugard's policies along with his counterparts' would have severe economic consequences and labor implications for Southeastern Nigerians.

In 1908 High Commissioner Sir Egerton outlined six points by which he intended to develop the colonial economy. He wanted to establish peace throughout the region; ensure that each district implemented its own governing entity; create new pedestrian trails and improve old ones; build roads through highly populated districts; clear creeks and rivers for easier water travel; and finally, he wanted to extend the railways.⁴² These

³⁹ Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 16.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 6–7.

⁴¹ Lugard, *Lugard and the Amalgamation of Nigeria*, 6.

⁴² Carland, *The Colonial Office and Nigeria, 1898-1914*, 108.

goals had specific implications for labor allocations for colonial works projects. Given the demand for labor, the colonial office did not enforce stringent laws that would protect the native population from compulsory labor. The consequence of these shared goals eventually provoked international criticism, especially among anti-slavery lobbyists and other humanitarians. These concerns complicated the plans of men like Lugard but failed to ameliorate the exploitation of men, women and children in the new colony of Nigeria.

Anti-Slavery Efforts & the Case of the Native House Rule Ordinance of 1901

One of the most severe examples of Britain's refusal to take on slavery was the approval of an ordinance that reinforced the power of the men who controlled the largest collections of slaves in the Colony. The *House Rule Ordinance of 1901* became the target of British antislavery activists who had been pressuring colonial governments since the mid-nineteenth century.

The development of anti-slavery groups developed a limited amount of influence in Britain's colonies. In 1823 a group of reformers formed the Anti-Slavery Society (ASS) who sought to end slavery in the British Empire.⁴³ In 1835, philanthropists and reformers formally created a Select Committee of the House of Commons for the purpose of securing the rights of the native populations in Britain's colonies. This Committee formed the Aborigines' Protection Society (APS) in 1837. While it received a fair amount of public attention and support at the end of the nineteenth century, the Society began to lose momentum at the beginning of the twentieth century. By 1909, both the APS and the ASS lacked the economic resources to operate independently and united in an effort

⁴³ Ronald Rainger, "Philanthropy and Science in the 1830's: The British and Foreign Aborigines' Protection Society," *Man* 15, no. 4 (December 1, 1980): 705. Founding members included Quakers and other philanthropists, including William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson.

to preserve their larger humanitarian cause. Kenneth Nworah points out that collectively the two groups wanted to end all forms of slavery including the servile labor of children. Thus in 1909 the London Auxiliary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Rights Protection Society (AS&APS) was born.⁴⁴ Within one year, the London AS&APS invited similarly minded supporters in Lagos to create a sub-committee in Nigeria. This organization was committed to addressing the mounting grievances aired by Africans throughout the Colony. In Lagos a number of westernized Africans were anti-slavery proponents agitating for the government to eradicate slavery. As Britain's colonial empire expanded the AS&APS operated as champions of morality in Britain and in the colonies, and pressured others to support their anti-slavery stance.⁴⁵

Members of the AS&APS had to contend with long-standing policies relating to the use of forced labor in Nigeria. One of their immediate targets was *Native House Rule Ordinance of 1901*, which allowed forced labor to continue in Nigeria even though British had abolished the trade in slaves in 1807. The British abolished 'slavery' as a legal category in 1901 in Nigeria.⁴⁶ However, there was one exception: dependent populations residing in 'Canoe Houses'. The Canoe House trading firms were comprised of free people, slaves, pawns, apprentices and the elderly indigent. The law prohibited the newly freed House slaves from leaving the Houses in order to maintain trade revenue. Leaving the House was not an option under almost any circumstance. Severe punishments for slaves who fled became the norm and discouraged others.⁴⁷ The *Native*

⁴⁴ Kenneth D. Nworah, "The Aborigines' Protection Society, 1889-1909: A Pressure-Group in Colonial Policy," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 1971): 89.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁶ Lord Lugard, "Memorandum from Lord Lugard High Commissioner: Memo No. 6-Slavery Questions," September 1906, <http://www.tubmaninstitute.ca/sites/default/files/file/memo6.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Miers and Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, 24.

House Rule Ordinance of 1901 served the trading interests of the House heads and the British trading firms up until the beginning of the First World War. The *1901 House Rule Ordinance* reads as follows,

“House” means a group of persons subject to Native law and custom by the control, authority, and rule of the Chief, known as Head of the House. Every member of the House shall from and after the commencement of the Ordinance be subject to Native law and custom. Every member of the House who refuses or neglects to submit himself to the control, authority, and rule of the Head of his House in accordance with Native law and custom shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding fifty pounds, or imprisonment with or without hard labour for any term not exceeding one year, or both. Where a member of the House is charged upon the oath of the Head of a House or the representative with an offence under the last preceding section, the Commissioner before whom the charge is made may issue a warrant directing the person wanted therein to arrest and bring before him such member of the House to be dealt with for the offence with which he is charged. Any person wandering abroad and having no means of subsistence may be arrested By any Officer of any Court within the district in which such person is found without a warrant and brought before the Commissioner of such district and questioned about his means of subsistence and in which House he belongs. Any person who resists or obstructs the lawful apprehension of himself or any offender under the Ordinance, or escape from any custody in which he is lawfully detained shall be liable to a fine not exceeding fifty pounds and imprisonment with or without hard labour.⁴⁸

The British drafted these provisions of the *House Rule Ordinance* to defer to native law and custom because it ensured the existence of a longstanding labor population. By making the escape from a House a punishable crime, the government dissuaded anyone who would have otherwise left. The Ordinance did not mention persons who pawned themselves or their dependents to the House even though it was known that “relations, pawns and slaves” lived in the Houses.⁴⁹ However, anti-slavery proponents recognized this omission and worked to secure the rights of pawns in addition to the slaves who remained in the Houses.

⁴⁸ J.H. Harris, “The Native House Rule Ordinance,” *The Nigerian Chronicle*, August 11, 1911, 8.

⁴⁹ “The Native House Rule Amendment Ordinance Discussed,” *The Nigerian Chronicle*, February 16, 1912, 2.

The local affiliate of AS&APS Lagos AS&APS⁵⁰ made the repeal of the *Native House Rule Ordinance of 1901* its first point of business.⁵¹ One AS&APS member attempted to explain the AS&APS mission as,

The Society is not intended to oppose the Government but to help it and to prevent British rule from being justly regarded by subject Native Races as oppressive and British honor and prestige being trailed in the mud by heartless and conscienceless Moneygrabbers [sic]. Connections with the cosmopolitan Society would broaden our sympathies and widen our interest in our fellow humanity in Africa and elsewhere.⁵²

J.H. Harris, the secretary for the Lagos AS&APS referred to the House heads as ‘money grabbers’ because the head controlled and benefited from pawn and slave labor.

Moreover, we can see that AS&APS members truly believed it was their duty to act as the colonial government’s moral guide. The efforts of the AS&APS generated enough support to change the language of the Ordinance. In 1912, the amended Ordinance gave slaves the right to buy their freedom. As support grew to end slavery in the Houses altogether, the *Native House Ordinance* was eventually repealed in 1915.⁵³ However, during the almost fifteen years that the Ordinance was in effect, it generated an ongoing debate regarding the use of servile labor in House systems and illuminated internal British tensions.

The Lagos AS&APS worked hard to repeal the Ordinance, which allowed the continuation of the Houses’ oppressive rule over servile populations. The Lagos AS&APS wanted to call attention to the lesser known and perhaps the least understood forms of labor procurement—pawning. Pawning, we know, is a system by which one

⁵⁰ The Lagos AS&APS was established in 1910.

⁵¹ Rina Okonkwo, “The Lagos Auxiliary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Rights Protection Society: A Re-Examination,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 15, no. 3 (January 1, 1982): 423–4.

⁵² “The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society Formation of the Lagos Auxiliary,” *The Nigerian Times*, September 6, 1910, 4–5.

⁵³ “The Native House Rule Amendment Ordinance Discussed,” 5.

pawns himself or a dependent for the purpose of securing a loan. Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy have elucidated that the status of a pawn is defined by legal and social dependency.⁵⁴ Children, once pawned, could live in the House systems for years working for the House heads.

AS&APS members and other reformers began to focus on the children who resided in the Houses. One such reformer, concerned with slavery in Nigeria was Richard Edward Dennett (1857-1921). Dennett was born in Valparaiso, Chile and was educated at Marlborough.⁵⁵ As an employee of a trading firm, Thomas Wilson, Sons & Co., he worked and lived in Kingston upon Hull in England during the 1870s and for the Hatton & Cookson trading company in 1879 in the Congo.⁵⁶ In 1902 he was hired by the Colonial Office to be a Forest Service Officer, allowing him to travel throughout Nigeria. During his tenure in Nigeria, he wrote about the local customs of the Igbo, Ibibio, Yoruba and Hausa. In particular, his interest focused on the ways by which a person might lose independence to a House head. In September 1911, he wrote an article entitled, “Development of Governments in Southern Nigeria” in which he highlighted the distinct difference between the European understanding of slavery via ‘slave trafficking’ and the native custom of pawning. He argued that pawnship was a condition that few of his countrymen fully understood.⁵⁷

Dennett believed that elders mainly pawned the young as security for debts and that children formed most of the pawn population.⁵⁸ He criticized his fellow officers for

⁵⁴ Lovejoy and Falola, *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*, 3.

⁵⁵ Marlborough was an institution that catered to ministers’ sons.

⁵⁶ Tabitha Cadbury, “A Trader in Central Africa: The Dennett Collection at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter,” *Journal of Museum Ethnography* no. 20 (March 1, 2008): 109.

⁵⁷ R.E. Dennett, “Development of Native Governments in Southern Nigeria,” *The Nigerian Chronicle*, September 29, 1911, 3.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

completely overlooking the various institutions that mobilized child forced labor,⁵⁹ which continued to prevail in the country.⁶⁰ In fact, Lugard wrote about the use of children by saying that,

It is rather curious to see that the joint opinion of the D.Cs tend to show that slave-dealing that is now in existence is mostly in connection with children (principally girls). The main object for the continued demand for slaves by the Bonny, Opobo, Degama [sic], I may say all the big coastal towns inhabited by middlemen is to obtain the necessary labour for their trading canoes-the people required are boys not girls.⁶¹

Lugard's statement suggests that when the District Officers reported the existence of numerous enslaved boys and girls, they realized that there was a difference in how guardians used girls versus boys. While the conversation about female slave dealing usually dealt with what colonial officials believed to be child marriage, the attention to boys in the House system usually referred to the slave population. However, both boys and girls entered the Houses as pawns. Boys often worked as porters, apprentices and canoe paddlers—one of the most demanding types of labor.⁶² Girls often assisted with agricultural efforts, domestic work, trade and were kept for purpose of procreation. For example, a Divisional Court prosecuted Chief Ben Stowe of Bonny for holding a girl against her and her parents' will for three years.⁶³ It is likely that the girl had been seized

⁵⁹ Marie Rodet, "Under the Guise of Guardianship and Marriage," in *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake*, eds. Lawrance and Roberts, 86, 95. Rodet argues that children's social mobility increased (moving from one home to another) as a result of the end of the slave trade, and that pawnship was one way through which child labor was mobilized during the colonial period.

⁶⁰ Dennett, "Development of Native Governments in Southern Nigeria," 3.

⁶¹ *Slave Dealing: Extension of Jurisdiction of District Commissioners to Hear and Determine Cases Sitting with the Native Court*, 1914 1912, CSE 8/7/39, National Archive of Nigeria Enugu.

⁶² Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885. An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria*, 36.

⁶³ "Letter from the District Commissioner R. C. Bayton at Aba to the Provincial Commissioner at Calabar," September 11, 1911, CSE 8/7/39 : *Slave Dealing : Extension of Jurisdiction of D.C.'s to hear and determine cases sitting with Native Court or with selected Assessors-Requests, 1912-1914*, National Archive of Nigeria Enugu.

over an unpaid debt and remained there until her parents complained to the District Officer.

Lugard was not alone in his inability to understand or refusal to admit the distinct social and legal statuses that existed in the Houses. Referring to House members, District Commissioner F.E.G. Johnson wrote that, “The rights of members never have been, and now possibly never will be satisfactorily defined.”⁶⁴ As a consequence, colonial authorities were hesitant to prosecute House heads when they had a large number of children in their possession owing to the number of excuses given for having them.⁶⁵ To make matters even more complicated, House heads claimed that when they took a young person in, they “cared for supported, trained and assisted” them “in many ways,” and that by freeing all House dependents, they would be left alone in their old age with no means of support.⁶⁶ Referring to the common ideology that defines family and kinship responsibilities, House heads believed that any dependent that he supported while the dependent was young owed him service in his old age.⁶⁷ Owing allegiance to the House heads, who provided labor and revenue resources the colonial state, the British were hesitant to address the anti-slavery lobbyists’ concerns.

In order to draw attention to this complex issue, Dennett published opinion pieces in the *Nigerian Times* as a way to highlight the legal and moral conflict that existed

⁶⁴ “Letter from District Commissioner F.E.G. Johnson to the High Provincial Commissioner,” November 13, 1911, CSE 8/7/39 : Slave Dealing : Extension of Jurisdiction of D.C.’s to hear and determine cases sitting with Native Court or with selected Assessors-Requests, 1912-1914, National Archive of Nigeria Enugu.

⁶⁵ Cyril Punch, *Slave Dealing: Extension of Jurisdiction of District Commissioners to Hear and Determine Cases Sitting with the Native Court-Precis of Views by Officers in Regard to Difficulties experienced Containing Conviction before the Supreme Court.*, November 15th, 1911, CSE 8/7/39 : Slave Dealing : Extension of Jurisdiction of D.C.’s to hear and determine cases sitting with Native Court or with selected Assessors-Requests, 1912-1914, National Archive of Nigeria Enugu.

⁶⁶ Chiefs Nathaniel of Brass, Benjamin of Warri, et al., Ibid. Even though these were chiefs from the Western Province, their opinion mirrored that of the chiefs residing in the eastern region as well.

⁶⁷ Isichei, *History of Nigeria*, 259.

between the abolition of the slave trade, the denunciation of domestic slavery, and the codification of the *Native House Rule Ordinance of 1901*. Dennett openly criticized the Government's implementation of the Ordinance on the grounds that it allowed and encouraged House heads to rule as coercive despots, holding people, who should have been legally free, as slaves. Having a deep understanding of the way that pawnship operated in the Congo, Dennett wrote about "children in pawn" as distinct from those who were slaves or children of slaves. Dennett explained the intricate relationship between the debtor, lender, and pawn and how the pawned child could be redeemed even after many years had passed.⁶⁸ However, obtaining freedom under the Ordinance remained illegal. Slaves' inability to leave the Houses or even to buy their own freedom continued to be a long-term concern. Dennett's objection to the House systems was widely publicized.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, colonial authorities defended the Ordinance, arguing that a supply of cheap labor had to be preserved.⁷⁰

House heads also joined the debate about the Proclamation. In April 1914, Head Chief Dore Numa, native political agent of Warri, described the different types of members that resided in the House systems throughout Southern Nigeria in a letter to the Governor's office. In the case of pawns, he wrote that people lent out their relatives for money "in the same way as the whiteman [*sic*] places articles of value in security for money borrowed." Numa further explained that all of the pawn's labor or profit acquired from labor paid the interest on the initial loan.⁷¹ At the time a borrower redeemed his

⁶⁸ Richard Edward Dennett, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind* (General Books LLC, 2009), 40–1.

⁶⁹ Dennett, "Development of Native Governments in Southern Nigeria."

⁷⁰ "The Native House Rule Ordinance in Southern Nigeria," *The Nigerian Chronicle*, October 13, 1911, 2.

⁷¹ Chief Dore Numa, *Slave Dealing: Extension of Jurisdiction of District Commissioners to Hear and Determine Cases Sitting with the Native Court*, April 27, 1914, CSO 8/7/39, National Archive of Nigeria Enugu.

pawn, the pawn left with a shaved head and naked except for a loincloth for which his relatives have to pay 6/-. In the case of repayment, pawns could claim their freeborn heritage. According to Numa, pawns generally preferred to follow the custom of repayment rather than be freed outright. Any other path to freedom would stigmatize them, disallowing their return home to their home village.⁷² Other chiefs claimed that freeing all dependents from the House systems would increase crime rates.⁷³ This specter of hundreds of freed former slaves also concerned men like Lugard who were always concerned with social control in the new colony.

In addition to Chief Dore, one chief who was also a slave,⁷⁴ also argued for the *Native House Rule Ordinance*. In 1914, he responded to rumors that the Ordinance might be repealed, the man referred to the Biblical story of Joseph as proof that God ordained slavery. He wrote that when Joseph was a slave, he was able to enhance his personal wealth and became a rich man. Therefore slaves did not need to be freed because they also could become rich without obtaining their freedom. Furthermore, they had no land to which they could return, and freedom might actually be a detriment to a slave's survival. He claimed that many of the House slaves had large holdings of silver, gold, livestock and even slaves. Using himself as a prime example, he argued that he was a slave and a wealthy man and that if he gained freedom he would be forced to give his slaves to his master.⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ *Slave Dealing: Extension of Jurisdiction of District Commissioners to Hear and Determine Cases Sitting with the Native Court*.

⁷⁴ In the newspaper article he calls himself a chief. This probably refers to the fact that he had acquired status through his successful trade ventures.

⁷⁵ A. Chief, "Concerning the House Rule Ordinance: A Cry from the Central Province of Old Southern Nigeria." Jealous of Joseph, his brothers captured him and threw him in a cistern in the middle of the Canaan desert. Ishamaelites, Midianite traders (nomadic peoples related to Israelites), discovered

Trying to convince his counterparts, the House slave continued, “Oh, slaves in Nigeria are alright[.] [T]hey should remain as the[y] are, live [*sic*] us to remain as we are.”⁷⁶ Self-interest is clear in this example. There was a ranking of slaves in the House. House heads allowed certain slaves who had become successful traders to hold a percentage of their profits. This slave had accrued some wealth while trading on behalf of his master. This appears to be a modification of the system by incorporating incentives to retain the support of willing slaves. However, everything that he owned was ultimately owned by his master because the master owned the slave.

Moreover, perhaps his master treated him well. It might have been that this slave, having become a chief in his own right, was not relegated to the colonial labor teams sent to build railways or roads. It is conceivable that a slave who owned slaves sent his own slaves when the British demanded that chiefs provide a certain quota of laborers.⁷⁷ It is more likely that this particular House dependent did not want to lose all of his worldly possessions upon leaving. Having grown up in the House system since he was six years old it is also possible that he had no familial village to which he could return.⁷⁸

When publishing this letter from the Nigerian slave, the editor of the *Nigerian Chronicle*, a westernized African, Christopher Komulu Johnson, made sure to note that he did not share the view offered by the slave,

We do not in any way agree with his views or arguments. We do not believe that a custom, however good it may be to the native when he was isolated and not exposed to the crashing wheels of modern civilization, when land-hunger and the

Joseph and took him to Egypt and sold to one of Pharaoh's officers. Joseph would become a powerful man, second to Pharaoh even though he was a slave.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 4–5.

⁷⁷ Carolyn A. Brown, “Testing the Boundaries of Marginality: Twentieth-Century Slavery and Emancipation Struggles in Nkanu, Northern Igboland, 1920-29,” *The Journal of African History* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 51–80.

⁷⁸ A. Chief, “Concerning the House Rule Ordinance: A Cry from the Central Province of Old Southern Nigeria.”

spirit of exploitation had not driven foreigners into our shores, ought to be allowed to continue when they are being taken advantage of and used by aliens against the true interest of the nation. We in conjunction with other local contemporaries and notably the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society of London and its Organising [*sic*] Secretaries the Rev. J. H. and Mrs. Harris have for years called public attention to the objectionable and inhuman change that has come upon the House Rules System since it has been backed up by Southern Nigeria Ordinance.⁷⁹

The opinion piece cited above is representative of the types of competing interests that dominated much of the printed news in 1914, highlighting the views of the AS&APS, the Colonial Office, sympathizers like Dennett, native leaders, and other dependent populations. The issue of dependent status was complex. It was not an issue that pitted the British against Nigerians, but an issue with which everyone in the colonies had to be concerned.

Prosecuting House heads for slave dealing became very difficult in the years between 1901-1914. According to the *House Ordinance*, if House heads acquired a slave before 1901, he could legally retain the slave. This loophole enabled some House heads to obtain slaves after 1901, but to merely claim that he had received the slave earlier. Some British authorities believed that according to the Ordinance, that all slaves were made House 'members', reversing their and their children's former slave status. If a child's parents did not reside in the Houses, heads commonly claimed that a sick child was given to them to be healed. Heads also maintained that parents often died while the child remained in House and as a result he continued to care for the child. Upon questioning, a head often agreed to free the child, but claimed that he needed to recoup

⁷⁹ Christopher Kumolu Johnson, "Editor's Response to 'A Cry from the Central Province of Old Southern Nigeria,'" *The Nigerian Chronicle*, September 25, 1914, 5.

the expenses paid on the child first.⁸⁰ How those expenses would be paid made the child's freedom impossible in many cases. In 1912 District Commissioner Reginald Hargrove also commented that prosecuting slave dealers remained difficult because the child was too young to effectively testify against the accused. Moreover, he believed that any witness had probably taken part in the transaction, leaving justice unattainable. The co-existence of the abolition of slavery as a legal status⁸¹ and the *Native House Ordinance of 1901* made it virtually impossible to prosecute expected slave dealers.⁸²

By August 4th, 1914, at the outbreak of World War I, the British AS&APS turned their attention to Europe. The committee of humanitarians believed that the war would be short-lived and that they would soon return to their human rights efforts.⁸³ This was not the case. The years following 1914 featured an increased incidence of forced labor with children becoming increasingly incorporated into the growing system of pawning.

Moneylending Regulations and the Omission of the Status of Child Pawns

As the colonial administration and the AS&APS, fought over the *Native House Rule Ordinance of 1901*, the issue of pawnbrokers in Southern Nigeria came into question as a result of ongoing moneylending disputes. On June 2nd, 1912 the Attorney General introduced the *Pawnbroker's Bill*, which paralleled the *United Kingdom's*

⁸⁰ *Slave Dealing: Precis of Views by Officers in Regard to Difficulties Experienced in Containing Conviction before the Supreme Court and Suggestions Submitted for Remedying Detection and Conviction More Effective.*, May 13, 1912, CSE 8/7/39 : Slave Dealing : Extension of Jurisdiction of D.C.'s to hear and determine cases sitting with Native Court or with selected Assessors-Requests, 1912-1914, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

⁸¹ Miers, *Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade.*, 301-2.

⁸² *Slave Dealing: Precis of Views by Officers in Regard to Difficulties Experienced in Containing Conviction before the Supreme Court and Suggestions Submitted for Remedying Detection and Conviction More Effective.*

⁸³ Kevin Grant, *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slavery in Africa, 1884-1926* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 141-2.

Pawnbrokers Act of 1877,⁸⁴ to the Legislative Council for the purpose of regulating moneylending agreements in Southern Nigeria.⁸⁵ British administrators realized that the native system of pawning lacked formal documentation or bookkeeping. As a result, colonial officials could not easily identify who traded and who received children as collateral. This became especially problematic when disputes over moneylending came before the Native Courts in 1914.⁸⁶ The increase in the number of debt cases brought to the Native Courts initially occurred among the Yoruba in the Southwestern region.⁸⁷ However, Native Courts in the southeast began to see an unusual number of debt cases brought before the courts as well.

British oversight of moneylending practices was an early twentieth century continuation of the concerns of the Courts of Equity that dealt with larger trade agreements during the mid-nineteenth century. When moneylenders and traders brought loan disputes cases before the courts they created a system in which individuals began to initiate British systems of governance. Initially, administrators in Lagos created the Petty Debt Court in 1863⁸⁸ where the Court mediated loan disputes up to £50, but by 1864 the amount was decreased to £20.⁸⁹ And in 1912 the *Pawnbroker's Bill* enforced the regulation of loans between 40 shillings to £20 when borrowers exchanged a pawn or pledge. The Bill carefully defined a 'pawnbroker' as any person whose business it is to take goods or animals in pawn. The Bill also described a 'pledge' as an item pawned to

⁸⁴ Charles Mwalimu, *The Nigerian Legal System*, vol. 2 (Peter Lang, 2005), 416. The Bill was also referred to as the Money Lenders bill.

⁸⁵ "On The Pawnbroker's Bill," *The Nigerian Chronicle*, June 7, 1912, 1.

⁸⁶ In January 1914 all native courts were abolished and replaced by one native court assigned to each district. See Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs*, 138.

⁸⁷ Ojo, "Yoruba Credit and Debt Mechanisms Adjusted, c.1850-1900."

⁸⁸ "Glover to Newcastle," October 9, 1863, CSO 1/1/1, #87, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

⁸⁹ "Glover to Administrator in-Chief, Sierra Leone," February 11, 1870, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

the pawnbroker, and a ‘pawner’ as the individual who is offering the pledge to the pawnbroker. In addition, the inclusion of ‘shop’ in the Bill suggests that the colonial administrators believed that pawnbrokers often worked out of one primary place of business.⁹⁰

The purpose of this Bill was to document trade and moneylending. It also required that moneylenders display signs in their place of business, issue pawn tickets with which borrowers could redeem the pledged items or chattel, and make the pledged item(s) available for one year and seven days after they were pawned. The Bill limited the potential interest or profit that could be charged.⁹¹ This was the most significant change concerned the accruable interest on the loan. The Bill attempted to limit moneylenders from profiting from their economic ventures above and beyond specific amounts.⁹² For the purpose of oversight, a moneylender was required to purchase a yearly license and pay an excise duty in order to conduct business. Moreover, should a dispute arise regarding the terms of a loan, a local officer had the right to investigate the moneylender’s business affairs and subpoena the broker’s records.

The government argued that introducing the new Ordinance aimed to end “oppressive and excessive rates of interest” levied upon borrowers.⁹³ This Ordinance and the rules and consequences set forth therein could only be applied to those individuals who openly acknowledged their work as moneylenders. When concerns regarding persons who casually lent money to a friend (with or without a pledge) arose, officials assured the public that such concerns were unnecessary and that the rules only applied to

⁹⁰ “The Pawnbrokers Bill,” *The Nigerian Chronicle*, June 7, 1912, 4.

⁹¹ Ojo, “Yoruba Credit and Debt Mechanisms Adjusted, c.1850-1900,” 4.

⁹² “The Pawnbrokers Bill,” 5.

⁹³ “The MoneyLender’s Bill,” *The Nigerian Chronicle*, June 21, 1912, 2.

those individuals who were professional pawnbrokers who never lent more than £20. All other moneylenders were left unregulated. The Legislative Council eventually passed the Bill in June 1912.⁹⁴

The *Pawnbroker's Bill* did not legally bind moneylenders who took no material pledges nor did it explicitly deal with moneylenders who took human pawns. Those who did operated in a shadow economy that was hidden from official view. Yet, documentation, such as the official correspondence about the use of pawns in the House system, points to the fact that many colonial administrators knew that human pawning existed.⁹⁵ Moreover, the loan amount for human pawns usually fell within the 40s to 20£ range⁹⁶ so it would seem reasonable that some reference to human pawning would appear in the 1912. Colonial officials had been deeply engaged in conversations about pawning during this period, so the omission of pawning in the Ordinance seems intentional.⁹⁷

The absence of regulation that dealt with human pawns led to oppressive moneylending practices resulting in inequitable moneylending agreements. By 1913, increased efforts to mitigate the interest that could be exacted from a debtor were evident in the amended *Pawnbrokers Ordinance*:

The Pawnbrokers Ordinance by an Order of the Executive dated 9th January has been made to apply to the Sanitary Districts of Lagos and Calabar. License for a period not exceeding twelve months has been fixed at £12. The profit allowed is one half penny for every two shillings or part of Two Shillings on a pledge for every calendar month or part of a calendar month if the loan exceeds Two Pounds. One farthing shall be paid for every two Shillings on a pledge for a fraction of a calendar month not exceeding fourteen days provided the loan is less than Two

⁹⁴ "News of the Week," *The Nigerian Chronicle*, June 28, 1912, 1.

⁹⁵ *Slave Dealing: Extension of Jurisdiction of District Commissioners to Hear and Determine Cases Sitting with the Native Court*.

⁹⁶ Toyin Falola, "'My Friend the Shylock': Money-Lenders and Their Clients in South-Western Nigeria," *The Journal of African History* 34, no. 3 (January 1, 1993): 408.

⁹⁷ *Slave Dealing: Extension of Jurisdiction of District Commissioners to Hear and Determine Cases Sitting with the Native Court*.

Pounds.⁹⁸

In an attempt to set some standards for pawning, the government attempted to regulate the amount of time a pledge remained with the creditor and dictate precise amounts that could be earned in interest. It is likely, however, that when a debtor gave a child in pawn, that he could not enforce the rules listed in the *Pawnbroker's Ordinance*, leaving him subject to the moneylender's demand for overpayment.

The issue of pawnship attracted the attention of the well known journalist and human rights advocate, Edmund Dene Morel (1873-1924).⁹⁹ Morel was a member of the Congo Reform Association (CRA)¹⁰⁰ and often wrote articles and published several books about what he considered colonial atrocities, especially those committed by King Leopold of Belgium, independent ruler of the Congo. In 1913, David Livingstone transcribed a public address Morel delivered entitled, "How a Native Race May be Harmed." The text included the view that there were,

more ways than one of injuring native races. Physical enslavement, systematic oppression, ruthless exploitation and [odious] cruelties--these are not the only agencies, although they are, of course, the most flagrantly bad, which can be set in motion for the undoing of the native race. There are many and more subtle, more indirect, methods by which an immense amount of harm can be done to natives, it may be with the very best intentions in the world, by a European Power which controls their destinies. Among those dangers I would class as the most insidious, an undue interference in native custom and modes of thought, and legislative action calculated to undermine the economic independence of these people, and to reduce them from the position they, in many cases, now hold of free men working their own hereditary [*sic*] natal lands, into hired labourers.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ "Pawnbrokers Order in Council," *The Nigerian Chronicle*, February 21, 1912, 1.

⁹⁹ Morel was born to a Parisian father and an English mother. Morel spent the first few years of his life in Paris and returned to England with his mother at the age of four. He enjoyed the privilege of formal schooling until the age of fifteen and eventually engaged in trade activities. Morel was famous for his critique and denouncement of King Leopold's rule and atrocities in the Congo.

¹⁰⁰ Grant, *A Civilised Savagery*, 135.

¹⁰¹ David Livingstone, "Treatment of Native Races. The Heritage and Duty of the British People. Address Delivered by Mr. E.D. Morel at Birkhead," *The Nigerian Chronicle*, June 13, 1913, 3, MF 749 CAMP.

Morel's interactions with traders for whom Africa was a lucrative business and with individuals, such as Mary Kingsley,¹⁰² shaped his understanding and opposition to British colonial policies abroad. He often criticized colonial operations in the Congo and Morocco, but his general argument about the treatment of Africans spanned the continent. Morel spoke out against systems of forced labor at a time when the colonial administration placed labor needs above humanitarian concerns, a practice reformers like Morel and Dennett attempted to reverse.¹⁰³ Even with rising criticism, institutions like pawnship and slavery and other forms of coerced labor and nefarious moneylending agreements continued to prevail.

Currency reform also exacerbated domestic conditions in Nigeria. In addition to policies to monitor moneylending and debt disputes, the British introduced a colonial currency. Sterling added to the complex economic changes to which Southeastern Nigerians had to adjust. The British believed that the complex Nigerian monetary system of manilas, cowries, iron bars, Maria Theresa dollars, etc.¹⁰⁴ to be autonomous, and 'primitive' leaving key monetary transactions outside the control and 'eye' of the colonial state.¹⁰⁵ However, for Nigerians the items used for monetary exchange were valid forms of currency. Colonial policies, which dictated the introduction of non-native currencies would have devastating economic effects for many families in Igboland.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Kingsley (1862-1900) was an English ethnographer who traveled throughout West Africa.

¹⁰³ See also, Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

¹⁰⁴ For an in depth discussion of changes in currency usage in Nigeria, see Olufemi Ekundare, *An Economic History of Nigeria, 1860-1960* (Methuen, 1973). pp. 85-86.

¹⁰⁵ G. I. Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division, South Eastern Nigeria, 1905-1912: With a Commentary* (African Studies Centre, University of Cambridge, 1986), 31.

¹⁰⁶ Ofonagoro, "From Traditional to British Currency in Southern Nigeria."

The Transition from Manillas to the British Sterling and Paper Notes

The transition to the British sterling during the early-twentieth century produced a number of unexpected consequences. The manilla dominated the area from Calabar to Owerri and remained in use until 1948.¹⁰⁷ The manilla, shaped like a horseshoe, co-existed with copper rods, brass, and cowries and the pound sterling from 1901 onwards. The sterling-manilla exchange rate fluctuated with global trade and village households had to contend with the consequences of a dual currency that made them constantly translate the value of their income against the cost of necessities.

Photo 2.1 Okpoho Manilla



Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manillas>

¹⁰⁷ Ben Naanen, "Economy Within an Economy: The Manilla Currency, Exchange Rate Instability and Social Conditions in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1900-48," *The Journal of African History* 34, no. 3 (January 1, 1993): 425-428.

The British first introduced the shilling in the Aro region, between the Niger and the Cross River. Initially, the government permitted native currencies to continue to flourish alongside the new currency, but in 1902 the British government attempted to regulate exchange rates. Four brass rods equaled the value of one shilling, four Perekule (okpoho) manillas to one shilling, six Awirawu manillas to one shilling, and twelve Atorni manillas to the shilling.¹⁰⁸ The problem with trying to regulate the exchange rates was that moneylenders often used brokers who frequented major markets to offer loans. Often, it was the broker who had true control over the exchange rate.¹⁰⁹

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the British did not recognize the hardships Southeastern Nigerians suffered because coins of small-denominations were relatively rare.¹¹⁰ Yet, as early as 1909, some British authorities insisted on introducing a paper note as an experiment even though authorities knew there was little chance of its introduction being successful.¹¹¹ The larger concern here had to do with the level of trade and revenue. In 1907 Southern Nigeria was conducting £8,000,000 in trade and earning £1,860,000 in revenue annually.¹¹² The Governor of Southern Nigeria Sir Walter Egerton argued that the level of commercial activity produced the need for paper currency. He maintained that, "The existence of such currency would be the greatest convenience to Merchants and individuals...".¹¹³ The Secretary of State for the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 429. There were a variety of manillas used depending on the exact location.

¹⁰⁹ Ofonagoro, "From Traditional to British Currency in Southern Nigeria," 617.

¹¹⁰ Naanen, "Economy within an Economy," 446.

¹¹¹ C. P. Lucas, "Letter from C.P. Lucas, The Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office (London) to the Secretary to the Treasury," Treasury Papers, December 31, 1909, PRO TI/11226/26021, Public Records Office, London.

¹¹² Treasury Papers, Southern Nigeria: Proposal to establish a government currency note issue, March 26, 1908, Public Records Office, Pew, England

¹¹³ Walter Egerton, "Letter from Governor Sir Walter Egerton of Southern Nigeria to the Earl of Elgin, Secretary to the Colonies," Treasury Papers, Southern Nigeria: Proposal to establish a government currency note issue, November 30, 1907, PRO TI/11226/695, Public Records Office, London.

Colonies, the Earl of Elgin, agreed by saying that, “It is seldom that a country reaches the stage of development in trade and revenue arrived at by Southern Nigeria with out establishing a paper currency. It is perhaps even more remarkable that the country has developed so large a trade on a very narrow basis of cash transactions.”¹¹⁴

Table 3.3 1900-1907 Imports/Exports for Southern Nigeria *Currency in British Pounds*

Year	Imports	Exports
1900	201, 150	50, 900
1901	217, 466	75, 767
1902	194, 270	5, 747
1903	217, 492	90, 037
1904	247, 934	11, 341
1905	122, 919	Nil.
1906	160, 579	10, 269
1907	441, 647	3, 202
Total*	1, 803, 457	247, 263

Source: Treasury Papers, Southern Nigeria: Proposal to establish a government currency note issue, March 26, 1908, Public Records Office, Pew, England

British officials who supported the continued use of British sterling and the eventual introduction of the British note based their argument on the financial data listed above. Trade generated an increase of £194,524 worth of British coins used by 1907. The majority of commercial activity was based on merchants in Lagos and Calabar, who issued debt notices, pieces of papers known as “books,” and paid cash when the traders

¹¹⁴ “Letter from the Earl of Elgin, Colonial Secretary to Sir Walter Egerton,” Treasury Papers, Southern Nigeria: Proposal to establish a government currency note issue, March 26, 1908, PRO TI/11226/695, Public Records Office, London.

turned them in.¹¹⁵ European trading firms established cash stores in coastal trading ports, leaving the interior regions subject to the manipulation of independent moneychangers. Moreover, the existence of independent moneychangers and eventually moneylenders became increasingly significant to moneylending practices and pawning in the inland communities. The introduction of a ‘national currency’ was directly linked to the eventual imposition of taxation on Southeastern Nigerians,¹¹⁶ which had consequences in its own right as it related to pawning.

The Bank of British West Africa reported that it shipped £3,159,433 worth of silver between 1893 and October 1909,¹¹⁷ eager to dominate the currency market. Even so, their plan was unclear. Bank officials solicited opinions from colonial officers about what course of action they should take to ensure native use of the currency, both in coin and paper.¹¹⁸ Even though the Colonial Office agreed to import sterling, they did not believe that introducing a paper note would benefit the colonial economy.¹¹⁹ Moreover, because the native population did not overwhelmingly use the British shilling, it was argued that the introduction of a note would bring even more challenges. However, the dissatisfaction expressed by the Bank of British West Africa did not mirror the sentiments of one representative of London Chamber of Commerce. He insisted that, “A country that in eight years can absorb one and a half million sterling of currency can

¹¹⁵ “Insert from a Letter from Lord Crewe to Sir Walter Egerton,” Treasury Papers, Southern Nigeria: Proposal to establish a government currency note issue, August 7, 1908, PRO TI/11226/695, Public Records Office, London.

¹¹⁶ “Letter from the Earl of Elgin, Colonial Secretary to Sir Walter Egerton.”

¹¹⁷ Lucas, “Letter from C.P. Lucas, The Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office (London) to the Secretary to the Treasury.”

¹¹⁸ J. Cooper, “Letter from J. Cooper, Bank of British West Africa Limited, to the Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office,” Treasury Papers, Southern Nigeria: Proposal to establish a government currency note issue, April 18, 1908, PRO TI/11226/695, Public Records Office, London.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

hardly to be said to be too backward for the introduction of a Note Issue.”¹²⁰ Colonial officials and banks did not share a common plan of action with regard to the introduction of British currency, most likely because it was difficult to reconcile the production of regional revenue and indigenous trade based practices. The lack of regionally specific knowledge eventually created a series of missteps that caused the value in native currencies to rise, rather than fall, which only benefited a select group of individuals. However for most Nigerian families the introduction of the British sterling would prove costly.

In 1911 colonial authorities refused to recognize native currencies as legal tender and completely prohibited the use of native currencies in official transactions. But manillas continued to circulate in local markets when it profited European interests. For instance, Ben Naanen explains that European trading firms accepted native currencies, but only delivered goods valued at 20 percent of the currency value. Even though the government discouraged any use of the manilla, the European firms earned such substantial profit that they had no interest in discontinuing their acceptance of it. This ensured the continued use of the manilla. As a result, moneychangers set their own exchange rates in each of their respective markets in the manilla belt.¹²¹

Southeastern Nigeria's commercial activity influenced the value of the manilla and sterling, and their value was linked to the growth and fall of the export palm oil trade. In fact, the value of the manilla increased as more British currency entered into the market. Consequently, the exchange rate for British currency fell. Thus fewer manillas fetched more British currency. The appreciation of the manilla occurred because of its

¹²⁰ "Insert from a Letter from Lord Crewe to Sir Walter Egerton."

¹²¹ Naanen, "Economy within an Economy," 429.

growing scarcity, especially after the tender was made illegal after 1911. The increase in value only benefited moneychangers and traders.¹²² In order to conduct every day business at the local markets, Nigerians whose earnings were paid in British sterling had to exchange their wages for manillas. This eventually caused a financial crisis for some families because they lost money with every exchange when traders demanded manillas.¹²³

Conclusion

The story of the Nigerian man who recounted being sold into slavery at the age of six by his own “cruel” parents in the late nineteenth-century in order to provide food for his younger siblings¹²⁴ is indicative of the coping mechanisms poor families in Southeastern Nigeria employed during colonialism. Confronted with unimaginably hard choices, inland and coastal communities were forced to pawn and sell children when unfortunately necessary.¹²⁵ These individual stories demonstrate some of the ways in which the welfare of Nigerian children was sacrificed in the interest of Britain’s Nigerian colonial economy.

In the years between the 1870s and the second decade of the twentieth centuries, debates ensued and political struggles emerged over conflicting legal policies relating to servile labor and moneylending, both of which directly affected the wellbeing of

¹²² Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division, South Eastern Nigeria, 1905-1912*, 31.

¹²³ Ibid., 434–436.

¹²⁴ A. Chief, “Concerning the House Rule Ordinance: A Cry from the Central Province of Old Southern Nigeria,” 5.

¹²⁵ Miers and Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, 24. See also ; Nigeria. Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbance in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929., *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbance in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929 / [microform] Aba Commission of Inquiry*. (London: Waterlow & Sons, 1930, n.d.), No. 3596, 186.

children.¹²⁶ In fact, the *Native House Ordinance of 1901*, the *Masters and Servants Proclamation*, and the *Pawnbroker's Ordinance of 1912* undermined the goals of the United Kingdom's anti-slavery reformers and the nation's claim to be on a 'civilizing' mission. The conflict between the *Slave Trade Act of 1807*, the abolition of slavery as a legal status, and the *Native House Ordinance of 1901* left people open to increased abuse and forced labor. The omission of 'human pawns' from the *Pawnbroker's Bill* also left the terms of pawning unregulated.

The increased need for indigenous labor for the purpose of producing and trading palm products and new regulations that forced the use of the British sterling resulted in intensified economic instability among many Nigerian families.¹²⁷ The introduction of the new currency enhanced the power of moneychangers, who often doubled as moneylenders and benefited from the disproportionate manilla-sterling exchange. Ultimately, the colonial government's internal conflict about policies concerning labor, the status of House members and moneylending set the foundation for decades worth of inconsistent policies that made children the most likely demographic to become part of forced labor systems.

By virtue of being a dependent, a child's status in a House system was difficult to change. If pawned, the child was under the control of the moneylender until the loan was repaid. If a child's parents sold the child to the House, the House head could hold on to the child indefinitely. Moreover, the expectation for someone to pay for the expenses incurred by the House head to care for the child (even though it is clear that the child's labor enhanced the House profits) would make freedom impossible. For all of these

¹²⁶ Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 5.

¹²⁷ Eno J Usoro, *The Nigerian Oil Palm Industry: Government Policy and Export Production, 1906-1965* (Ibadan University Press, 1974), ix,3,6,8-9.

reasons, children remained the most vulnerable population in the House and the least likely to gain their freedom.

Chapter 3 – No Justice for the Poor: Child Pawns in Lugard's Nigeria

The owing of very trifling sums may lead to this catastrophe in a child's life.

George T. Basden was an Anglican missionary who joined the Church Missionary Society Niger Mission (Onitsha and Awka) in 1900, Anglican Missionary, 1900s¹

Many of the warrant holders are irresponsible boys, some are ex-criminals, ex-slaves or rogues. District Officer of Ahoada, 1922²

Nigerians in Igboland pawned their children during the colonial period, just as they had in the pre-colonial era. However, between 1896 and the 1920s pawnship as an institution changed in Southeastern Nigeria when colonial economic policies inadvertently increased the number of debt litigants and forced impoverished persons to mortgage their women and children to settle court fines and other debts.³ Corrupt native court members, including court clerks and warrant chiefs often accepted payment in women and children, as pawns, to cover court fees or fines. Women and children pawns were extremely vulnerable during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because pawning, which often required the woman or child pawn to leave their natal home and live with the moneylender, exposed them to the risk of being sold into domestic slavery. The safety net of kinship networks, which during the pre-colonial period had assisted in the prevention of sale of family members, had begun to fail.

The consolidation of Nigeria as a colony exacerbated pawning practices during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Contributing factors included the colony's economic decline, the selection of corrupt non-traditional rulers as warrant chiefs, the

¹ George Thomas Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria: An Account of the Curious & Interesting Habits, Customs & Beliefs of a Little Known African People*, 1st ed., new impression (London, Cass, 1966), 107; Dmitri van den Bersselaar, "Missionary Knowledge and the State in Colonial Nigeria: On How G. T. Basden Became an Expert," *History in Africa* 33 (January 1, 2006): 435.

² *Annual Report of Owerri 1921*, 1921, 12, CSO 26 No. 03928, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

³ A E Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929* (Humanity Press/prometheus Bk, 1972), 190.

decrease in authority of elders and secret societies who previously ruled on debt cases, and the Aro's continued participation in child trafficking. Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy assert that while pawnship was connected to poverty, poverty did not pre-determine indebtedness.⁴ However by the early twentieth century, some Southeastern Nigerians used pawnship to gain access to currency or other goods. It remains difficult to quantify how often Southeastern Nigerians pawned children for loans, but personal accounts and colonial records offer some perspective on the trade in children in those cases dealing with slavery, pawning, various forms of servile labor, and in marriage customs.

In Southern Nigeria indirect rule,⁵ consisted of three main elements: the installation of warrant chiefs; the creation of Native Courts; and the eventual implementation of direct taxation in 1926.⁶ Colonial officials granted warrants (official papers) to local men whom they designated as chiefs, which empowered them to rule over indigenous matters in court.⁷ However, the Igbo, Ibibio, Ijo and Efik people did not live in politically centralized areas and, in most instances, did not have chiefs.⁸ Rather, the political process was diffuse and complex. Councils of men and sometimes women led by village elders and secret societies played a role in maintaining democratic oversight in their respective communities. Assuming that these communities had chiefs, the British initially sought out 'traditional' rulers, but often ended up with men who

⁴ Paul E. Lovejoy and Toyin Falola, "Pawnship in Historical Perspective," in *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*. eds. Toyin Folola and Paul Lovejoy (Africa World Pr, 2003), 2.

⁵ Sir Claude Macdonald of the Foreign Office Protectorate and his successor, Sir Ralph Moor (1896) began the work of instituting the warrant chief system under indirect rule.

⁶ Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 151.

⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁸ Ibid., 7.

lacked any form of seniority or status, former slaves,⁹ and Aro. To make matters worse, the British often appointed warrant chiefs in charge of courts who were from different ethnic groups than the people over whom they presided.¹⁰ Many Igbo immediately expressed their discontent arguing that the new warrant chiefs were guilty of multiple abuses and often rose in protest. As early as 1907, an Igbo man burnt down court buildings in Okomoko in protest against the ongoing abuses.¹¹ During World War I many villages in northern Igboland rose up and killed or removed these chiefs in these unpopular courts. These three elements of indirect rule would have a direct influence on child pawning in Southeastern Nigeria.

Even though most Igbo speaking people denounced child trafficking, the practice still prevailed. Fathers, uncles, mothers, relatives, traders, moneylenders, long distance traders-including the Aro, clerks and chiefs participated in child dealing. Some individuals acted as moneylenders and accepted children in pawn, some bought girls under the guise of marriage, while others bought and sold child slaves. The level of involvement depended on one's access to children, knowledge of networks that facilitated the trade, and proximity to trading centers. However, male household heads, usually the senior uncle in matrilineal societies and father in patrilineal societies, could authorize the pawning of children. Similar to pledging a farm, the senior male had the right to pledge his daughter or niece to a moneylender until he repaid his debt.¹² Even though the senior household head generally maintained authority over his female dependents, there is

⁹ Carolyn A. Brown, "Testing the Boundaries of Marginality: Twentieth-Century Slavery and Emancipation Struggles in Nkanu, Northern Igboland, 1920-29," *The Journal of African History* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 52.

¹⁰ Ibid., 58, 170.

¹¹ Ibid. Okomoko is located in Rivers state.

¹² Mr. Devonshire, "Letter from Mr. Devonshire to Sir Hugh Clifford, Governor," December 12, 1922, CSO 26/1 #06827. Vol. I. Pawning 1920s, NNAI.

evidence that court members, including clerks and warrant chiefs often took advantage of their position by forcefully taking other men's female dependents for their own purposes.

The Colonial Court System

The *1900 Native Court Proclamation* created two types of Native Courts. At the top were Native Councils presided over by political officers that operated in each of the districts' headquarters. The Native Councils ruled on disputes involving damages of up to £200 and audited the Minor Courts' records. At the bottom were the Minor Courts, which were presided over by 'native authority' or a local chief and were located throughout the districts. The Minor Courts dealt with disputes, including debt cases of up to £25 and inheritances cases of up to £50.¹³ District Officers served as president of the Native Courts¹⁴ and ensured that all members maintained the rules of the court.¹⁵ Because both courts ruled over matters that touched family matters, including debts and inheritance, men and their dependents became vulnerable to warrant chiefs who presided over the courts.

In 1901 the British administration attempted to strengthen the courts and made it illegal for the council of elders or secret societies to openly intervene in indigenous disputes.¹⁶ The council of elders was comprised of the most senior age-grade in a community.¹⁷ Membership in a secret society was usually based on seniority, gender, social status, and personal skills. While members were open about their participation, the inner workings of the society remained secret. Charged with religious and financial

¹³ Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 84-5.

¹⁴ Ibid., 162.

¹⁵ Cases in each court could be appealed at the highest level in the District court.

¹⁶ Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 90.

¹⁷ Ibid., 14-5.

responsibilities, these groups were an integral part of their communities. Male secret societies, such as the *eze*, *obi*, and *Ekpe* (*Egbo*) became quite powerful because they were comprised of men who had become wealthy as a result of the trade in a wide variety of goods including slaves.¹⁸ In particular, the *Ekpe* among the Efik in the Cross River region monitored pawning cases and assumed responsibility for enforcing repayment of debts.¹⁹ The new regulation forced these secret societies, including savings clubs and the council of elders, to avoid colonial detection.

Unable to operate openly, the secret societies lost power to the new colonial court system. One unintended consequence included the rise of moneylenders, many of whom were court clerks and warrant chiefs. Clerks and warrant chiefs often encouraged the losing parties to appeal, offering loans at exorbitant rates as a way to increase their personal wealth.²⁰ The powers of the warrant chiefs and court clerks went largely unchecked when Lord Frederick Lugard ruled as Governor-General from 1914 to 1919. Lugard's administration changed indirect rule by reducing supervision of colonial officials and pitting indigenous court members against one another, which caused chaos in the Native Courts and increased opportunities for corruption, while preventing any single official from rising to an inordinately high position.

The 1914 Lugardian changes to the colonial court system and the aftermath of the First World War resulted in the loss of the German palm oil market.²¹ As Nigeria's economy began to weaken, London could not afford to employ European District

¹⁸ Axel Harneit-Sievers, "Igbo 'Traditional Rulers': Chieftaincy and the State in Southeastern Nigeria," *Africa Spectrum* 33, no. 1 (January 1, 1998): 60.

¹⁹ Lovejoy and Richardson, "Trust, Pawnship, and Atlantic History: The Institutional Foundations of the Old Calabar Slave Trade," pp. 335, 337, 349.

²⁰ Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 107.

²¹ German traders were extremely popular in SE Nigeria because they offered higher prices for oil and, also, because the main processing plants were in Hamburg. The sudden disappearance of this market brought hardship to most SE palm producers.

Officers to serve in each of the Native Courts, which resulted in less oversight.²²

Furthermore, Lugard felt that the chiefs and clerks in the local courts required more rather than less power. When the *1914 Provincial Court Ordinance* went into effect, it formalized the boundaries of the Eastern Provinces, which were comprised of Calabar, Ogoja, Onitsha and Owerri. Each Province was split into Divisions, and each Division was broken into subdivisions. Commissioners oversaw the Provincial Courts, which generally heard cases regarding violations of British law and land disputes.²³ The Provincial Court now served as a buffer between the Native Courts and the Supreme Court. Only big towns, such as Calabar, Port Harcourt, Degema and Bonny continued to have Supreme Courts. The separation limited Nigerians' ability to appeal to a higher authority, leaving many who lacked the funds to travel great distances at the mercy of the warrant chiefs, clerks and other court members. Lugard abolished the local Native Courts, which previously retained up to six members and a District Officer. He created *one* Native Court for each District and appointed one warrant chief to be in charge of the court. The new Native Courts, subject to native law, only ruled on cases dealing with personal offences and petty crimes.²⁴ He also removed the district officer from the courts but introduced Paramount chiefs to serve as the new presidents of the Native Courts. Paramount chiefs, warrant chiefs and court clerks ruled without British intervention and used their positions to increase their personal wealth.²⁵

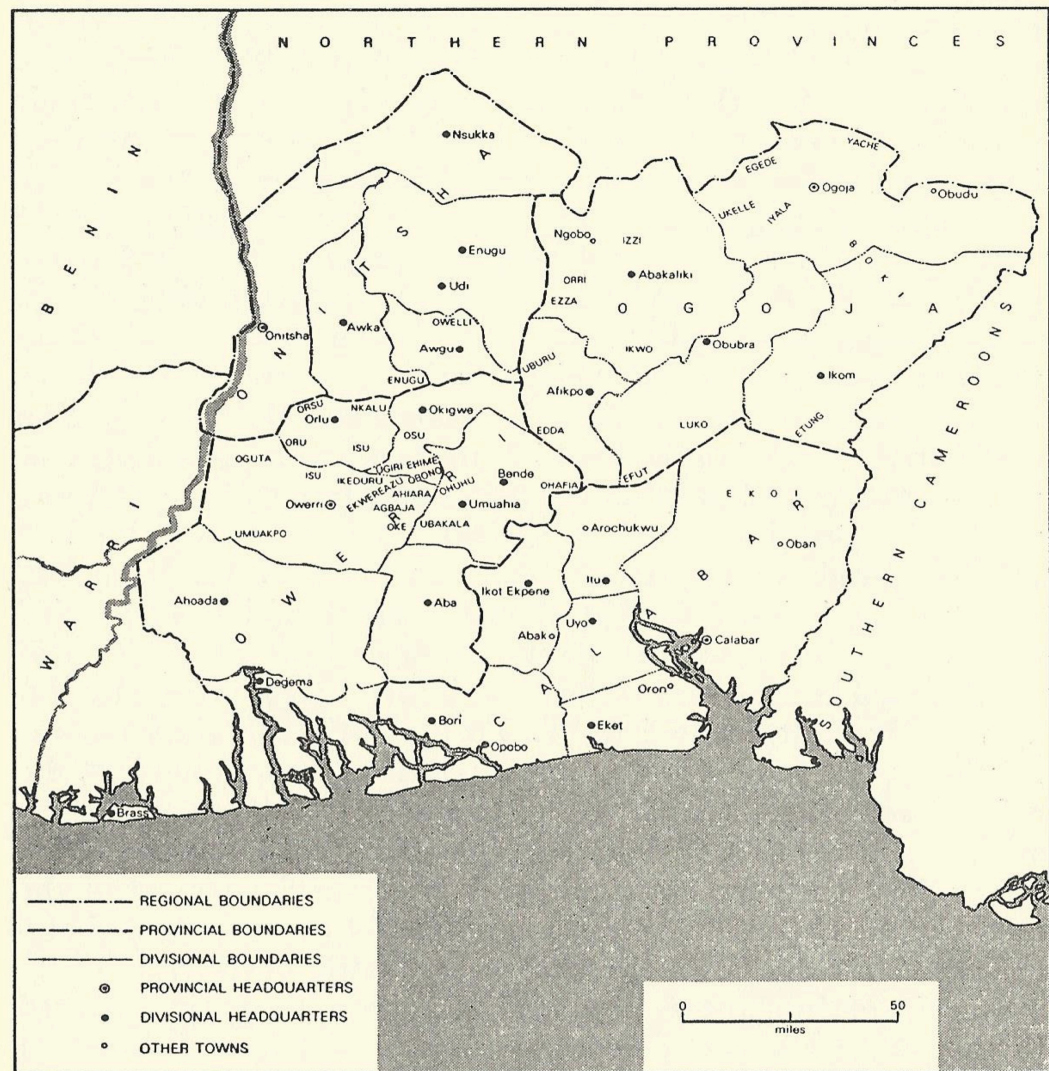
²² Ibid., 147, 154. Legal practitioners were barred from the Provincial court, leaving appeals to be heard in the Supreme court.

²³ *Annual Report of Owerri 1921*, 6.

²⁴ Ibid., 131. The court ruled on offences related to slavery, firearms, wild animals, witchcraft, the murder of twins, etc..

²⁵ Ibid., 109, 162, 170.

Map 1.5 Eastern Provinces in 1922



The Eastern Provinces in 1922

Source: Reprinted from A.E. Afigbo's *The Warrant Chiefs*²⁶

Many of the newly appointed court members saw the reconfiguration of the court system as a prime opportunity to enhance their personal wealth. Lisa Lindsay notes that among the Yoruba in Nigeria, along with age and marriage, the measure of a man's masculinity

²⁶ Ibid., 114.

could be assessed by his wealth.²⁷ The same can be said about Southeastern Nigerian men. The development of the post-1914 court system created divisions based on greed and envy between court clerks and warrant chiefs. Warrant chiefs had been granted the power to rule over cases and clerks were charged with the responsibility of writing up summonses, managing the court messengers who delivered them, and accepting and documenting court fees and fines. The warrant chief should have been the senior court member, but their inability to read and write caused a power shift wherein many court clerks often acted with more authority than the warrant chiefs.

The colonial administration appointed court clerks who could read and write English. The clerks' literacy in many ways trumped the authority of the presiding warrant chief. A.E. Afigbo argues that warrant chiefs, who were often illiterate, had to defer to their clerks.²⁸ In fact, most litigants feared the clerks more than the chiefs because of the clerks' power to document the outcome of a case and their propensity to extort money from litigants. Even though cases heard under Native Courts should have been determined according to indigenous law, often warrant chiefs and litigants were subject to the clerks' explanation of a ruling according to the 'white man's' law.

In addition to the clerks' propensity to subvert indigenous law, warrant chiefs and clerks accepted bribes, such as chickens, goats, money, women and children, in exchange for desired outcome. However, clerks received the lion's share of those bribes. Warrant chief Obiukwu explained, “*Ma ukpara erigh ibe ya o nagh ebu*,” meaning to ‘grow fat, an insect must feed on other insects.’²⁹ Chief Obiukwu shamelessly admitted that in

²⁷ Lisa Lindsay, *Working with Gender: Wage Labor and Social Change in Southwestern Nigeria* (Heinemann, 2003), 41.

²⁸ Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 185.

²⁹ As cited in Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 308.

order to enhance his personal wealth he had to prey on his constituents. In sum, the reorganization of the Native Court system with decreased British oversight allowed the warrant chiefs, clerks and court members to abuse and extort their constituents, intensifying the vulnerability of women and children.

Colonial officials recognized that some court members abused their power in order to gain increased wealth. For example, in 1914 Lugard raised the clerks' salaries in order to decrease corruption. Instead of eradicating fraud, the pay increases provoked warrant chiefs to seek new ways to increase their own personal wealth. In so doing, the warrant chiefs exploited litigants by demanding even higher bribes and extra payments.³⁰ Claiming 'customary' rights to demand labor from constituents, warrant chiefs demanded personal services as well. One Elder Chief Ugwu Nwangwu remembers that men were forced to be, "carriers of goods, porters, some of them die[d] on the way carrying goods and properties of the white people."³¹ Court member abuses resulted in wide-ranging consequences.

Court members also participated in trafficking women and children by accepting them as bribes or as payment of fines. Some members married the women or girls while others sold them to willing buyers.³² For example, court member Eze Onyodo of Ichida of the Awka District, sold Akwu Alazie and her daughter to two men in Degema in 1921.³³ At the time he took possession of the woman and child he served as a member of

³⁰ Ibid., 189. In 1928 a Calabar clerk earned £240 while the warrant chief received £132.

³¹ Elder Chief Ugwu Nwangwu Ugwu, Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 5, 2012.

³² Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 190-1.

³³ "Letter from the District Officer of Okigwi to the District Officer of Awka," June 1, 1929, Okidist 4/11/31 : Alleged Slave-Dealing, 1929, 10 pages, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

the Native Court and it is reasonable to assume that he received the woman and her child in lieu of a court fee or fine.

The ineffectiveness of the court and the prevalence of child dealing dominated the 1920s. In 1920 the District Officer of Owerri wrote that, “The development of the new native court system created a self-serving and authoritative class of rulers whom natives rarely respected.”³⁴ He also stated,

Although theoretically the power of the chiefs is derived from Native Custom, the chiefs themselves have done nothing to maintain the native organization[s](if any), and in many cases, in order to maintain their various corrupt and illegal methods in an attempt [to] secure [their] position – that is in wealth – for themselves, they have deliberately disregarded the recognized elders of the town and the clubs.³⁵

In fact, it was the British who empowered the non-traditional rulers to function as warrant chiefs and Lugard himself who had prohibited the council of elders from attempting to settle disputes.

Entire towns exhibited dissatisfaction with the warrant chiefs, and showed that the chiefs had no legitimacy, especially when they were of “no position at all.” In 1921, the Senior Resident of Owerri wrote that, “What has struck me most during my short time in the Province, since I was last in it, is the lack of respect the youths had for the Chiefs.”³⁶ The young and old often refused to respect the status of the warrant chiefs, but they had no choice but to abide by their rules for fear of retribution. One Aba resident explained that, “These [court] representatives were kinsmen but were very shrewd, heartless and inconsiderate in discharging their duties.”³⁷ Even when local residents decided to have

³⁴ Olufemi Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs: Traditional Power in Modern Politics, 1890s-1990s*, Softcover Ed (University of Rochester Press, 2006), 28.

³⁵ *Annual Report of Owerri 1921*, 9.

³⁶ *Annual Report of Owerri 1921*, 10, 3.

³⁷ Thomas U. Asawalam, Interview conducted by Cynthia E. Uche on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s,” August 29, 2012.

warrant chiefs hear their cases, it was not unusual for the hearing to end in a physical fight between litigants.³⁸

Acknowledging the inherent problems in the Native Courts, G.N. Heathcote, the Assistant District Officer of Okwigi, complained that cases would be solved more efficiently if “some white man could” supervise them.³⁹ Heathcote acknowledged that the previous system in which District Officers oversaw each of the Native Courts provided protections that had been lost under the post-1914 court system. The District Officers’ oversight had prevented warrant chiefs and clerks from accepting women and girls for loans that would be used to pay for court fines and fees.

In 1923, Lieutenant Governor Sir Hugh C. Clifford requested that Residents and District Officers investigate the nature and prevalence of child pawning in the Southeast. In response, District Commissioner of Bende, Frank Hives, expressed his belief that warrant chiefs and traders were the most likely to trade child pawns for loans.⁴⁰ Warrant chiefs were largely ineffective ruling on debt disputes because they engaged in child pawning. In Enugu, one elder recalled that parents often pawned their children to warrant chiefs in order to educate their other children.⁴¹ However, not all chiefs followed through with their promise to educate young pawns. Warrant chiefs’ who would become principal moneylenders exacerbated child pawning practices. Moreover, the examination of slave

³⁸ *Annual Report of Owerri 1921*, 5.

³⁹ G.N. Heathcote, “Memorandum from Assistant District Officer G.N. Heathcote of Bende to the District Officer of Okigwi,” July 29, 1920, 153, NAE 1/1920 Cases of Slave Dealing. OkiDist 4/2/1, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

⁴⁰ Frank Hives, *Report on the Pawning of Children in the Southern Provinces, Nigeria, as Called for by His Honour Lieutenant-Governor, Southern Provinces, Vide Secretary Southern Provinces’ Confidential Memo No. C.2/23*, January 17, 1923, 54, CSO 26/1 #06827. Vol. I. Pawning 1920s, NNAI.

⁴¹ Elder Abraham Oloko, Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s,” August 2, 2012.

dealing and debt litigation further highlight how court members, mainly warrant chiefs, took advantage of their position in the court system.

Child Dealing

In 1911, H. Bedwell, the Commissioner of the Eastern Province, complained that prosecuting slave dealers remained difficult.⁴² In a report that Bedwell assembled, a colonial representative Mr. Cyril Punch provided an overview of slave dealing in Calabar from 1907-1911 that outlined how difficult it was to prosecute slave dealers who dealt in children. Referring to the *House Rules Ordinance of 1901*, which protected slave holders from prosecution if they acquired a slave before 1901, Bedwell wrote, “The difficulty in bringing home charges of slave-dealing becomes entitled to the benefit of every doubt urged by his Council of every Native Custom brought in defence [sic] under the House Rule Ordinance.” Almost every case dealt with children. If the accused claimed that he had acquired the child before 1901, he cited the *House Rule Ordinance*.⁴³ This colonial law made it nearly impossible to prosecute slave dealers in 1911-12. Mr. Justice Weber at Degema noted that many times the District Commissioner chose not to prosecute slave dealing cases because it “waste too much of time and [was] trouble.”⁴⁴ District Commissioners began to choose a course of least resistance in prosecuting child dealing cases. A person who was in possession of a child who was younger than 15 years old would not be prosecuted if he could ‘prove’ he had the permission of the parent to care for the child.⁴⁵ In other instances, the accused claimed that a girl child had been acquired

⁴² *Calabar Province Slave Dealing, 1907-1911* (Calabar, Nigeria, 1912), 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

by paying a bride price.⁴⁶ All of the methods used to authenticate legal guardianship are unclear, but the pattern of limiting the resources invested in prosecuting illegal guardianship cases is evident.

In the early twentieth century, as in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the status of slaves and pawns depended on the terms of their exchange and the distance they were transported from their natal homes. Technology and the development of the colonial infrastructure, including the expansion of the railway, clearing of roads, and the influx of bicycles contributed to the trading in children. Accepting a loan from a moneylender from outside of one's village increased the chance that the child would be sold into slavery. For instance, around 1915 in a town called Okoko, northeast of Aba, a palm oil trader pawned his brother, Ucheya Aju, to an Aro man. The Aro moneylender immediately sold Ucheya as a slave to another man in the Niger Delta.⁴⁷ However, if the pawn lived close by, the debtor could have frequently checked on his brother. The moneylender should have retained the pawn until the debt had been repaid, but because he lived far from the debtor he sold the pawn without immediate detection.

The number of slave dealing cases in all of the Southern Provinces decreased from 110 in 1913 to 75 in 1914.⁴⁸ However, by 1915 the number had nearly doubled to 136.⁴⁹ It is plausible that some of these children initially taken as pawns were later sold as slaves. This could undoubtedly be because of the hardship caused by disruption of the palm trade during the war.

⁴⁶ "Letter from the Provincial Commissioner at Calabar to the Colonial Secretary at Lagos," October 22, 1915, 2, Calprof 13/6/103, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

⁴⁷ Ogbu U. Kalu, "Primitive Methodists on the Railroad Junctions of Igboland, 1910-1931," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 16, no. 1 (February 1, 1986): 59.

⁴⁸ *Sessional Papers, 1914*, 1914, PRO 657/3, Public Records Office, London.

⁴⁹ *Annual Report on the Police Department of the Southern Provinces of Nigeria for the Year 1915*, *Sessional Papers*, December 7, 1916, PRO 657/3, Public Records Office, London.

Table 3.4 Register of Freed Slaves in Owerri⁵⁰

Name	Age upon Capture	Sex	Origin	Date of Liberation
Lottie	17	F	Aba	March 17, 1908
Ehi Ibe	8	M	Aba	May 16, 1916
Akune	11	F	Ibibio	November 10, 1917
Iwe	12	F	Okigwi	September 18, 1917
Unufuru	10	F	Owerri	September 18, 1917
Daughter of Lechi Uche	10	F	Arochuku	July 5, 1917
Oyibajialu	8	F	Ahoda	June 21, 1918
Obi	15	M	Bende	1919
Mbokwo	4	F	Aba	April 21, 1921
Ukaji	8	M	Okigwi	September 8, 1921
Offor	12	M	Bende	August 18, 1921
Nwane	5	F	Okigwi	September 5, 1921

Source: "Register of Freed Slaves," in the *Annual Report of Owerri 1921*

This account of freed slaves from 1908-1921 documents how difficult it was to redeem large numbers of children.

As colonial 'development' projects refined the transport system they similarly facilitated merchants' movement of enslaved children. Child dealers transported children in a number of ways. In 1920, an increased number of traders utilized the railway as a major form of transportation, drawing larger numbers of children to major market centers.⁵¹ By comparing the list of towns where children had been redeemed to the map of major trading centers it appears that child dealers most likely acquired most of the children at or near a major trading center. As early as 1915, colonial officials recognized that the old slave trading centers, such as the Uzuakoli market in the Bende District and the Uburu market in Afikpo District, facilitated the exchange of young children.⁵²

⁵⁰ "Register of Freed Slaves," in the *Annual Report of Owerri 1921*.

⁵¹ *Owerri Provincial Annual Report for 1921*, 1921, 11, CSO 26/03928, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

⁵² "Letter from the Provincial Commissioner at Calabar to the Colonial Secretary at Lagos," 2-4.

Photo 2.2 “Roadside Market” Igbo Peoples, Nigeria



Source: Reprinted from Kent et al, *The Women's War of 1929* (2011)⁵³

Colonial authorities declared slave dealing illegal in the Southern Provinces, but slavery technically remained legal until 1916, when the *Slavery Ordinance* was enacted.⁵⁴ In part, the *Ordinance* resulted from the ongoing discussions about the nature of child pawning. In 1915 Lugard wrote,

I have spent years trying to stop child-pawning [sic]. If a man borrows money from another & chooses to pledge himself to work for the lender at certain periods of till [sic] the debt is paid off, there can I think be no reasonable objection, but the lender could not (unless a legal contract be made) enforce the pledge in a British Court. If however the terms of the bargain were not reasonable he might probably enforce it in a Native Court as being native law & custom. That a man should not liquidate his debt by the labour of another person-whether a child or an adult-is of the nature of Slavery. It is I think immoral in that the borrower has not the same

⁵³ Susan Kingsley Kent, Marc Matera, and Misty L. Bastian, *The Women's War of 1929* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 162.

⁵⁴ “I. Enactment of Slavery Ordinance, 1916; II. The Slavery (amendment) Ordinance,” 1916, CSO 26/1/03063, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

incentive to repay as he would if he had worked himself. It takes the child away from its own mother... It is mere verbiage that the child may only be pledged or pawned with its own consent. It is pretty obvious it would not be a free agent. So with the phrase that "adequate arrangements should be made for safeguarding the freedoms of the child." Such arrangements in the practice would be impossible. In this connection you are aware, I am entirely opposed to the system of assigning children by "mandate" to "guardians", & hope to repeal this Ordinance soon.⁵⁵

After much resistance from colonial officers in the Southern Provinces, Lugard argued that he did not care how "inconvenient" it was for people to stop the practice of child pawning. He ordered that the *Slavery Ordinance* be redrafted to declare and that all children born in the Southern Province were free.⁵⁶ The eventual repeal of the *House Rules Ordinance* in 1915⁵⁷ should have decreased the trade in children, but Southeastern Nigeria's economic downturn made ending child dealing difficult, especially because of the region's propensity to acquire and appropriate child labor. Therefore, it is important to analyze debt litigation in order to understand the distress of individuals undergoing economic insecurity.

Economic Decline and Debt Cases

The Supreme, Provincial and Native Courts in the Southern Provinces heard 111 debt cases in 1915 that resulted in imprisonment for non-payment of debt.⁵⁸ The post-war trade depression of 1921 and drop income are cited as the most likely causes of civil cases. As such, the Provincial Court heard an increase of appeals on debt cases.⁵⁹ It is likely that litigants appealed so that they might evade the warrant chiefs monetary

⁵⁵ Ibid, Letter from Lord Lugard to L.G.S. December 25, 1915.

⁵⁶ Ibid, Letter from Lord Lugard to L.G.S. January 13, 1916.

⁵⁷ "The Native House Rule Amendment Ordinance Discussed," 5.

⁵⁸ Southern Provinces (Nigeria), *Annual Report on the Prison Department of the Southern Provinces of Nigeria for the Year 1915-1938* (Lagos: Govt. Printer, 1916), 2, <http://dds.crl.edu/CRLdelivery.asp?tid=20048>.

⁵⁹ *Annual Report of Owerri 1921*, 16, 7.

demands for ‘justice’ in Native Courts believing that they would receive a more favorable ruling in the Provincial or Supreme Courts. It is also likely that wayward court members encouraged litigants to appeal, lending them money at exorbitant rates to do so.

The 1921, trade depression resulted in an economic crisis in palm prices and the consequent impoverishment the led to more credit defaults. The downturn was especially visible in Owerri Province. There were thirty-six Native Courts in Owerri Province and court records provide insight into the cases of litigants who sought debt repayment. Owerri Native Court cases that dealt with debts and other contracts soared to nearly 15,000 in 1921,⁶⁰ an increase by almost 9 percent over the previous year.⁶¹ In 1922, 482 debt cases went on appeal to the Provincial and Supreme Courts,⁶² and in 1923 the cases more than doubled to 1079.⁶³ In addition, the amount of debt and contract cases overwhelmingly outnumbered many other types of civil cases in 1921.⁶⁴ It is evident that the economic crisis was having a serious impact on debt and credit defaults.

⁶⁰ "Report on Native Court Cases in Owerri Province" in *the Annual Report of Owerri 1921*. After page 25.

⁶¹ *Owerri Provincial Annual Report for 1921*, 25.

⁶² Southern Provinces (Nigeria), *Annual Report on the Prison Department of the Southern Provinces of Nigeria for the Year 1915-1938*, 2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁴ *Owerri Provincial Annual Report for 1921*, 8.

Table 3.5 1921 Native Court Cases⁶⁵

1921 Division	Native Revenue Ordinance	Matrimonial	Land	Administration of Estates	Debts and other Contracts	Trespass, Assault and other wrongs	Liberation from Slavery	Other Cases	Total Civil Cases
Owerri	0	161 7	84	1	2602	219	0	5058	8614
Aba	0	965	147	1 1	4113	592	0	6277	9246
Okigwi	0	150 4	416	4	3202	685	0	6759	12467
Bende Degema	0	147 4	36	0	2823	114 7	0	5471	8688
Ahoada District	0	164 1	26	0	2032	458	0	4429	7048
Bonny	0	5	3	2	170	18	0	250	423
Total	0	720 6	712	1 8	1494 2	312 9	0	2824 4	46486

Source: "Report on Native Court Cases in Owerri Province" in *The Annual Report of Owerri 1921*

The peak in debt case litigation occurred the same year the colonial administration began actively seeking answers about child pawning. The majority of debtors against whom lawsuits were filed were in the southeast towns of Afikpo, Calabar, Degema, Eket, Ikot-Ekpene, Obubra, and Opobo. During the recovery, from 1924 onwards the debt cases before both the Native and Provincial Courts declined. By 1928 the number of debt cases

⁶⁵ "Report on Native Court Cases in Owerri Province" in *the Annual Report of Owerri 1921*. After page 25.

had dropped to 416⁶⁶ and 303 in 1929.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, for the first half of the decade many Nigerians still had a hard time coping with the new economic conditions.

In addition to the rise in debt cases between 1915 and 1923, four factors highlighted the Southern region's economic distress. First, the majority of individuals in Owerri who were found guilty of an offence chose to serve time in jail in lieu of paying a fine. The 1921 Annual Report notes that, "Under ordinary conditions, persons given the option of a fine instead of imprisonment usually pay the fines, but money being scarce, they have declined to pay fines and have gone to prison instead."⁶⁸ Second, the amount in damages plaintiffs sought in 1921 decreased from 1920 onwards. Plaintiffs knew that they could not demand what people were unable to pay. Third, some moneychangers who had previously held onto the silver began releasing coins back into the market because they needed additional income.⁶⁹ They too needed additional sources of income. Finally, many indigenous middlemen who traded in legitimate goods were forced out of business due to the loss of earnings. Many Nigerians lacked sources of income and access to cash.⁷⁰ All of these factors worsened as the decade progressed and led to an increase of moneylending and child pawning.

⁶⁶ Southern Provinces (Nigeria), *Annual Report on the Prison Department of the Southern Provinces of Nigeria for the Year 1915-1938*, 2.

⁶⁷ Ibid. From 1924 to 1928, some Nigerians enjoyed a reprieve from the economic downturn when the prices of palm products recovered permitting more income.

⁶⁸ *Annual Report of Owerri 1921*, 29.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁷⁰ *Owerri Provincial Annual Report for 1921*, 29.

Moneylending, Child Pawning & the Aro

Most debtors expected to redeem their children once they repaid the loan. Thus in this respect the act of pawning was intended to prevent enslavement.⁷¹ Moneylenders only sold pawns when the debt was long overdue. The norm was for the moneylender to keep the child in his care for an indefinite period of time. In 1900 Archdeacon George T. Basden, of the Church Missionary Society Niger Mission (Onitsha and Awka)⁷² claimed that some Igbos pawned as a last resort.⁷³ Basden told the story of a child who had been pawned by his father for a £2 10s loan. The boy remained a pawn until adulthood. This story illustrates that it was not unusual for moneylenders to retain pawned children indefinitely.⁷⁴ However, by the 1920s the nature of pawning changed when Nigeria's economy weakened and moneylenders began to sell pledged children into slavery immediately after acquiring them as pawns.

Debt recovery practices usually influenced how a child became a pawn or slave. Each area had its own unique process, but there were some general norms. Chief Ohaebulam Ebubedike, an informant from Ngwa describes pawning transactions in Aba during the 1920s:

There was no specific amount for the loan; everything was hinged on negotiation, which varies according to the need of the parents. My father once told me that he lent £40 to a family that presented their able bodied male child for pawning as collateral. The child was left to work in my father's palace as one of his bodyguards. The interest to be precise was paid in labor. Depending on the amount borrowed, it takes parents years to repay such loans and invariably leaves the child

⁷¹ Gwyn Campbell and Alessandro Stanziani, *Debt and Slavery in the Mediterranean and Atlantic Worlds*, 2013.

⁷² Bersselaar, "Missionary Knowledge and the State in Colonial Nigeria," 435.

⁷³ George Thomas Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria: An Account of the Curious & Interesting Habits, Customs & Beliefs of a Little Known African People*, 1st ed., new impression (London, Cass, 1966), 105.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

in service.⁷⁵

His account reminds us that the length of time a child pawn remained with the moneylender always depended on the parents' ability to repay the loan.

The Ogoni people, who lived along the Niger Delta coast, usually pawned a farm or daughter, and men sometimes pawned themselves. The Andoni pledged sons and daughters, and Kwa speaking peoples pawned property or daughters.⁷⁶ An Nguru elder of the Owerri Province described child pawning during the first two decades of colonial rule, "People who were very poor could pawn themselves to a rich man for money or pawn one of their children...as soon as you can pay back the money you borrowed, you are free."⁷⁷ The Orsu Igbos in the Okigwi Division⁷⁸ practiced a form of debt collection that bordered on panyarring common among the Igbo. The colonial officials described the practice as follows:

If a person owed a debt and was unable to pay it his relations were expected to do so for him; if not, any goat, sheep or child seen in the debtor's compound could be seized and held as pledge. If no arrangement was then made after this seizing had taken place the child or animal might be sold. There was no imprisonment for debt. Money was always lent at a very high rate of interest if not repaid the above method of seizing was resorted to. [A] Pledge was accepted in children or goods, but if possible the relations would assist by paying up the debt and taking over the debtor's belongings.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Chief Ohaegbulam Ebubedike, Interview conducted by Cynthia E. Uche on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 31, 2012.

⁷⁶ *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 1922, 6, CSO 26/1/074 Vol. I, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan. I include Kwa of the Cameroon because often Kwa speaking people spilled over into Calabar and/or engaged in moneylending practices with the Efik and others living in Calabar (Peter the pawn, the example in chapter one).

⁷⁷ *Oral Histories. Nguru (L.O. Nwahiri)*, "Five Nguru Elders, in Chief G.A. Waturuocha's Conference Hall, 9 September, 1972," in *Igbo Worlds: An Anthology of Oral Histories and Historical Descriptions* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978), 83. The five chiefs included Chief G.A. Waturuocha, aged 75, Onuoha, aged 90, Edmund I. Waturuocha, aged 70, Chief I. Erege, aged 70, and Chief Oparaocha Anyamele, aged 65.

⁷⁸ The Orsu were located between Enugu and Port Harcourt.

⁷⁹ *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 5.

The seizure of a child or property occurred only if the moneylender did not receive a pledge for the original debt.

There was a clear connection between the inability to pay court fees and fines and child pawning. British authorities prosecuted a man for pawning one of his own children for the purpose of paying a fine and sentenced him to one year in jail.⁸⁰ In 1923, an Awka chief issued a £20 fine upon a man who in return pawned his seven-year old daughter. The chief was expected to keep the child until she was old enough to marry, but instead he sold her. In 1927, an Obowo man pledged his two children, Ahuibe and Ewaenyinya in order to pay a court fine, and was later prosecuted for doing so as well. Subsequently authorities were only able to locate one of his children.⁸¹ And in February of 1929, Oveuebe of Obowo, a former court member of Okigwi, was prosecuted for pawning two children in order to pay a fine ordered by the Umuahia Native Court.⁸² The tendency of families to pawn children added to the likelihood that a court member would accept a child in pawn. In Enugu, one elder described the process by which a child was pawned when an unexpected expense arose:

In the olden days people of Nigeria-they used everything for economic improvement. One can use his own child, either to get income or other things. They didn't take it as any taboo. All they knew is that God has given them 15-20 children and he has a right to loan some...in order to sustain life.⁸³

⁸⁰ "Letter from the District Officer in Awka to the Senior Resident of Onitsha Province, (February 15, 1923)" in "I. Enactment of Slavery Ordinance, 1916; II. The Slavery (amendment) Ordinance", 1916, 35, CSO 26/1/03063, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

⁸¹ "Letter from the District Officer at Bende to the District Officer at Okigwi: Alleged Slave Dealing at Obowo," February 28, 1929, Okidist 4/11/31, 1929, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

⁸² "Memorandum from the District Officer of Okigwi to the District Officer of Bende, 'Alleged Slave Dealing at Obowo,'" February 28, 1929, Okidist 4/11/31 : Alleged Slave-Dealing, 1929, 10 pages, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

⁸³ Oloko, Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s."

Using children as a source of capital provided an economic safety net for those families who had to support many children. It is important to note that we should not assume that the Igbo did not care for or 'love' their children. Almost all of the informants who participated in this project maintained that children held a special place in Igbo society. An elder from Owerri explained that, "One who has a child is greater than a wealthy man,"⁸⁴ creating a complex understanding of the institution of pawnship.

In January 1923, Frank Hives, the Resident of Calabar Province, was skeptical about reports of a decline in child pawning.⁸⁵ He claimed that possible declines in pawning were due to children's growing awareness of pawning as a crime—that they could report to authorities. Second, debtors may have been more likely to seek repayment of debts in Native Courts rather than receive a pawned child because of the risk of facing prison if they were found holding a pawn. Third, Hives suggested that perhaps increased prices for goods sold in Calabar might have reduced local need to pawn children.⁸⁶

Hives also noted that he never received a complaint from a pawned child except in the instance when the child had been sold into slavery. This suggests that children were not inclined to inform a District Officer if they were pawned unless the moneylender had broken custom and sold the child to a third party.⁸⁷ It is possible that Native Courts heard

⁸⁴ Ahanotu Marcellenus, Interview conducted by Augustine Onyemauchekwuwu O. on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 23, 2012.

⁸⁵ Hives, *Report on the Pawning of Children in the Southern Provinces, Nigeria, as Called for by His Honour Lieutenant-Governor, Southern Provinces, Vide Secretary Southern Provinces' Confidential Memo No. C.2/23*, 52.

⁸⁶ *Africa and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History ; a Multidisciplinary Encyclopedia* (ABC-CLIO, 2008), 221.

⁸⁷ "Report on the pawning of Children in the Southern Provinces, Nigeria as called for by His Honour the Liuetenant [sic]-Governor, Southern Province, vide Secretary Southern Provinces' Confidential Memo No. c.2/23 of 17th January 1923," *Ibid.*, 52-3.

more debt cases in Calabar because the court sentences often imposed high interest rates on the loan and imprisoned debtors who did not repay their loans within a specific amount of time.⁸⁸

Yet in late 1923 Hives acknowledged that pawning continued to be a problem in Calabar.⁸⁹ One of the most powerful Efik secret societies, the *Ekpe* continued to preside over moneylending transactions and managed debt collection,⁹⁰ which made ending child pawning difficult. It seems that some Calabar residents continued use the *Ekpe* even though British authorities outlawed the society in 1901.⁹¹ In addition, it remained customary to pawn stubborn or lazy children. In one interview a Calabar woman told the story about her uncle whose parents pawned him because he refused to do farm work.⁹²

Chiefs and traders influenced pawning practices because they were the main debt holders in the exchanges of children.⁹³ Yet, obtaining convictions against these individuals proved difficult.⁹⁴ In 1919, Warrant Chief Ezeonyodu, residing in the Onitsha Province, accused a local resident, named Okanu, and six other men of stealing a goat. While in prison, Chief Ezeonyoda went to Okanu's home and captured Okanu's

⁸⁸ Hives, *Report on the Pawning of Children in the Southern Provinces, Nigeria, as Called for by His Honour Lieutenant-Governor, Southern Provinces, Vide Secretary Southern Provinces' Confidential Memo No. C.2/23*, 52.

⁸⁹ *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 12.

⁹⁰ Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, "The Business of Slaving: Pawnship in Western Africa, C. 1600-1810," *The Journal of African History* 42, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 67-89.

⁹¹ Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, 90.

⁹² Mr. Archibong Ekpeyong, Interview conducted by Ifeoma Obijiaku on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 20, 2012.

⁹³ "Report on the pawning of Children in the Southern Provinces, Nigeria as called for by His Honour the Liuetenant [sic]-Governor , Southern Province, vide Secretary Southern Provinces' Confidential Memo No. c.2/23 of 17th January 1923," in *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 54.

⁹⁴ Hives, *Report on the Pawning of Children in the Southern Provinces, Nigeria, as Called for by His Honour Lieutenant-Governor, Southern Provinces, Vide Secretary Southern Provinces' Confidential Memo No. C.2/23*.

pregnant wife, Akuaghaji, and their four children. Jeremiah, a member of Okanu's household, testified that the chief did indeed take the woman and children whom he either killed or sold.

Okanu continued to search for his family in 1922 and petitioned the Provincial Court to charge Chief Ezeonyodu with stealing his wife and children. The chief, in turn, ordered the arrest of the 44 individuals who testified against him and arrested and ordered the murder of Okanu's brother, Sammy Uzor-Eghelu, whose only crime was assisting his brother.⁹⁵ Chief Ezeonyodu apparently "sold" Okanu's daughters, but claimed that the money he received was merely the brideprice. Okanu apparently tried to kill the Chief with a machete. Since Okanu had very little power over the Chief he was sentenced to three months of hard labor.⁹⁶ Others like Okanu had no recourse when the warrant chiefs abused their power and stole their family members.

In 1922 the colonial government launched an investigation into child pawnship leaving a trove of evidence in the archives. Authorities found that child dealing was prevalent in Onitsha and Owerri in the Eastern Provinces⁹⁷ largely due to the regions' need for agricultural laborers. The Aro, who created a widespread network of satellite villages, maintained their vast pawning networks. It is likely that many of the warrant chiefs and court clerks who received women or children in lieu of a court fee later sold them to the Aro, as did many other middlemen.⁹⁸ During the 1920s Aros operated in Bende and Afikpo Districts. Afikpo (also known as Aroh) is unique because while there

⁹⁵ Okanu of Ochida, "Letter from Okanu of Ochida to the Resident of the Southern Province, Lagos," July 2, 1925, 44–46, CSO 26/1/16100, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

⁹⁶ "Chief Ezeonyodu vs. Okanu," January 21, 1925, 43, CSO 26/1/16100, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

⁹⁷ *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 2.

⁹⁸ A. E. Afigbo, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885-1950* (University of Rochester Press, 2006), 89.

were virtually no reported cases of child pawning at the time, the number of slave dealing cases involving children were numerous. Bende was a key regional market town known for slave dealing during the era of the slave trade, and it continued to operate in the 1920s and 30s.⁹⁹ The Senior Resident of Onitsha reported that the trade in children was universal among some groups.¹⁰⁰ ‘Receiving’ towns¹⁰¹ included the coastal towns of Bonny and Opobo, both areas that used child labor. Other destinations included the Efik palm plantations at Akpabuyo and Azumini, which were only fifteen miles south of the major market town, Aba.¹⁰² The Aro and other middlemen also sold children in Onitsha, the site of West Africa’s largest market located on the eastern bank of the Lower Niger.¹⁰³

Parents whose children were victims of kidnapping or botched child pawning arrangements had little recourse to recoup their lost children. In 1920, the Aro control over child marketing was facilitated by their ownership of the Long Aro Juju oracle (also referred to as *Ibn Okpabi*).¹⁰⁴ Colonial authorities were convinced that fear of the oracle “prevented anyone from reporting their actions, or appealing to the Government for help.”¹⁰⁵ Southeastern Nigerians rarely challenged the Aros for fear of retribution.¹⁰⁶ In addition,

⁹⁹ Ibid., 58.

¹⁰⁰ *Annual Report of Owerri Province 1922*, n.d., CSO 26 No. 03928, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

¹⁰¹ Locations where children ended up.

¹⁰² *Calabar Province Slave Dealing, 1907-1911*, 4.

¹⁰³ Okechukwu Edward Okeke, *A Political and Administrative History of Onitsha, 1917-1970* (Africa World Pr, 2009), 1–3.

¹⁰⁴ B. W. And U. I. Ukwu Hodder, *Markets in West Africa Studies of Markets and Trade Among the Yoruba and Ibo*, 1st Edition (Ibadan University Press, 1969), 133–4. As mentioned in chapter one, non-Aro respected and feared the Aro status as “God men” due to their affiliation with the oracle.

¹⁰⁵ *Owerri Provincial Annual Report for 1921*, 7.

¹⁰⁶ K. Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885. An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (Oxford University Press, 1962), 39.

debtors could not use Native Courts to mediate pawnship disputes because the courts wanted to avoid any connection with child pawning.¹⁰⁷

Study of the Owerri Province, which was the preeminent district in the lucrative Palm Belt, provides some insights into how child dealers operated. In 1923, the Assistant District Officer of Bonny wrote that Okigwi (also known as Okigwe), Orlu, Bende, Aba and Degema in Owerri Province stood out as key towns where child pawning occurred.¹⁰⁸ All were located in the Palm Belt, and housed large markets where moneylenders and child dealers operated. The demand for labor in the palm farms was one of the main incentives for farmers to acquire child pawns.

Reportedly, there were four ways in which child dealing operated in Owerri: pawning, child marriage, the outright seizure of children, and sale of a child.¹⁰⁹ The most common reasons for pawning included, second burial¹¹⁰ expenses, settling deceased father's debts, the cost to set up a farm, title making, financing public feasts, court fees, paying fines for committing adultery, and meeting the cost of hiring a medicine man (*dibia*).¹¹¹ Pawning a female child often led to the marriage of the child to the moneylender or to one of his or her family members. In this case the initial loan was cancelled and served as the bride price payment to her family. Additionally, strangers as

¹⁰⁷ "Pawning of Children: Report by Mr. G. E. Murphy, District Officer in Charge of Ahoada District (February 15th, 1923)," in *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 88.

¹⁰⁸ "Pawning of Children: Report by Captain J. Ashley, Assistant District Officer in Charge of Bonny District (March 5th, 1923)" in *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁰⁹ "Letter from the Resident of Owerri Province to the Secretary of the Southern Provinces at Lagos (March 23, 1923)," in *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 77.

¹¹⁰ Lorna McDaniel, "An Igbo Second Burial," *The Black Perspective in Music* 6, no. 1 (1978): 49. Second burials include a spiritual process whereby the deceased is honored in a ceremony. Some claim that in addition to animal sacrifice, children were sacrificed after the initial burial.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, "Letter from the District Officer of Onitsha to the Divisional Office," February 25, 1923, 31–2.

well as relatives participated in the outright seizure and sale of children in order to obtain money. Children seized under these circumstances rarely returned home. Colonial officials successfully prosecuted more individuals for the outright sale of children, rather than pawning. But the vulnerability of children was gendered: child dealers who dealt in female children often claimed that they had paid the bride price according to custom, making it virtually impossible to prosecute them.

In 1921, Owerri officials recorded the release of only four slave children. It is likely that the numbers of freed slaves reported for the Owerri Province are underrepresented because by virtue of being pawns, those children were not identified as slaves.¹¹² Of the four reported, one was a male child younger than fourteen years old, and the remaining children were three girls under fifteen, two of whom were returned to their parents.¹¹³ Nevertheless, the majority of trafficked children did not return home.

Pawning: Innocuous or Harmful?

From the early twentieth century until the late twenties, British colonial officials adopted confusing patterns of action with relation to pawning. Sir Walter Egerton and Lord Lugard had both attempted to regulate child pawning. Egerton's officials argued that strong action against pawning would be "premature," and Lugard did not want to distract from the war effort.¹¹⁴ In December 1924, Governor Hugh Clifford (1919-1925) argued that short-term pawning was not abusive and was an "essential feature of the

¹¹² Many conflated slave and pawn. Even G.T. Basden used the terms interchangeable when describing a pledge.

¹¹³ *Owerri Provincial Annual Report for 1921*, 43.

¹¹⁴ *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 96.

fiscal, economic and social system,” and that abolishing pawning altogether would, “plunge innumerable families into financial embarrassment.”¹¹⁵

In 1925 W.A. G. Ormsby-Gore, Assistant to the Secretary of State, urged Governor Clifford to take forceful action against child pawning. He gave two reasons for his request. First, Lugard was now a member of the newly formed League of Nations Commission on Slavery, which focused on female pawning, and needed to fight the practice in his own country and its colonies. Second, the League was attempting to persuade the President of Liberia, a country, whose domestic slavery policies received international attention, to condemn child pawning. It was therefore essential that Nigeria lead the international movement to end pawning.¹¹⁶

In response to the 1923 inquiry, colonial authorities offered varying opinions about the quality of life pawns experienced.

There was, nor would there be now, any hardship in being a pawn as his master would look after him very well, being responsible for him, he would not only be well fed and clothed, but would be allowed, if he desired to do so, visit his parents whenever he wished, and very often his parents lived in the same or adjoining towns. No stigma of being a slave was or is attached to a pawn.¹¹⁷

But this conflicted greatly with the testimony of an elder who recalls how the Igbo in Aba preferred pawned children who came from far away towns rather than those from nearby. The wealthy men who accepted children as pawns believed that, “the pawned

¹¹⁵ "Letter from Governor Hugh Clifford to Colonel L. S. Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies (December 31, 1924)," in *Ibid.*, 123.

¹¹⁶ "Letter from Mr. Ormsby-Gore, Assistant to the Secretary of State, to Governor Hugh Clifford (March 21, 1925)," *Ibid.*, 126–8.

¹¹⁷ Hives, *Report on the Pawning of Children in the Southern Provinces, Nigeria, as Called for by His Honour Lieutenant-Governor, Southern Provinces, Vide Secretary Southern Provinces' Confidential Memo No. C.2/23*, 53.

child may not render quality services” if they lived too close to their parents.¹¹⁸ In some cases, parents in Aba pawned their children to moneylenders as far away as Lagos.¹¹⁹ And in Enugu, many pawns did not even know where they had come from. Hive’s motivation in offering what he thought was a positive view of child pawning may have been the result of his lack of authority to end this practice and the desire to save the government from embarrassment. Moreover, since the authorities lacked the staff and the funds to end child pawning, they underestimated its effect.¹²⁰

Another informant, Chief Ohaebulam Ebubedike of Aba, remembered that pawns were treated “mercilessly and with contempt.” His father forced child pawns to work on his farm and did not send them to school.¹²¹ More often than not, he explained that his father took the children in because parents begged him for money and some of the children were apparently quite young:

In most cases, my father was reluctant in ceding their demands due to the fact that he spends huge amounts of money through the same kind of transaction. He used to say that some of the pawned children were not strong enough to give commensurate return to the money lent out to their parents, which invariably amounts to waste of resources on his part.¹²²

Chief Ebubedike’s father had a social responsibility to maintain those in his extended kinship system. It is an ironic contradiction when he accepted a child in pawn, even when

¹¹⁸ Cornelius Echeruo Ezinna, Interview conducted by Cynthia E. Uche on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s,” August 29, 2012.

¹¹⁹ Asawalam, Interview conducted by Cynthia E. Uche on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s.”

¹²⁰ Not all pawns suffered at the hands of their master. Some pawns achieved economic success. The most famous example is King Jaja of Opobo. Additionally, there were many pawns who were sent on behalf of their masters to Britain to obtain an education or to learn a trade.

¹²¹ Ebubedike, Interview conducted by Cynthia E. Uche on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s.”

¹²² Ibid.

he did not want to. Nevertheless, recalling his own feelings about the pawned children Chief Ebubedike admits,

Honestly, we considered the pawned children as lesser human; their circumstances obviously made them so no doubt. They were treated with contempt and served us as slaves. Though it is my family involved, the truth must be told. Our father made them serve us like prince[s] and princesses; there was no friendly relationship between us and them whatsoever. Some of today are very prominent individuals and sometimes when I meet them, I feel very shocked and ashamed reflecting on the past.¹²³

Ebubedike's admittance of shame suggests that his father's pawns must have been treated very badly, but it also suggests that the maltreatment of pawns was normal at the time.

According to another account, pawns in Aba "were treated with contempt just like any slave regime. They had no respect, honor nor integrity before their masters," and only saw their parents during holidays. One woman recalls that pawns performed the family's most "heinous tasks", often worked while hungry and only saw their parents when they were redeemed.¹²⁴ Despite the fact that pawns were clearly treated badly, colonial authorities remained hesitant to intervene.

Conclusion

On March 22, 1923, Major Harry Claude Moorehouse, an officer in the British army, opposed ending pawning, and insisted that pawns suffered no loss of status and that it was in no way related to slavery.¹²⁵ Hive's and Moorehouse's claims remain problematic. As Lovejoy has argued, the act of pawning was an attempt to avoid slavery

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Callista Okemmadu Ibgocheonwu, Interview conducted by Cynthia E. Uche on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 22, 2012.

¹²⁵ I. *Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 13.

and should not been seen as synonymous with enslavement.¹²⁶ However, in times of great economic stress, a pawn could be sold into slavery if the debtor failed to repay the debt, as was the case in Southeastern Nigerians during the 1920s and 1930s. The Senior Resident of the Oyo Province (Western Nigeria) argued that the First World War I and the declining economic condition due to the world depression created an environment in which the Igbo, Ibibio, Ijo and Efik were increasingly forced to pawn women and children. Contrary to pre-colonial practices, colonial warrant chiefs and court clerks became moneylenders who often sold pawns into slavery. After the removal of the District Officer from the Native Court, the warrant chiefs and court clerks' were able to overcharge and extort litigants, trick them into filing appeals, and then lend them money at high interest rates to finance them. They also became notorious for other abuses such as the kidnapping women and children.

By the 1920's their corruption had created distrust and chaos in the court system. The fear of imprisonment for a debt often persuaded guardians to pawn children. In addition, long distance traders, middlemen and the Aro controlled the networks that circulated child pawns and sold them as slaves throughout the entire colony. Their centuries of engagement in the transatlantic slave trade allowed them to use old slave routes and market centers, to distribute pawned children distant from their natal homes, making it near impossible for parents to retrieve them.

Charged, quite ironically, with Lugard's request in 1916 to end the practice of child pawning, and under increased pressure from international humanitarian groups, colonial authorities were forced to pay closer attention to child pawning. While some

¹²⁶ Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy, "Pawnship in Historical Perspective," in *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2003), 1–26.

British representatives attempted to end the practice, others were inclined to let pawning die out on its own. The colonial state's failure to end child pawning during the early 1920s could be blamed on British attempt to secure sufficient labor for the palm industry, ambivalence and feigned ignorance about the true nature of pawning, and a general willingness to gloss over it. Whatever the reason, the inability to prohibit pawning enabled court members and other child dealers to sell pawned women and children into domestic slavery. Ironically Lugard, who had championed efforts to end child pawning, implemented policies under indirect rule that inadvertently ensured that children of the poor often ended up as pawns, and slaves. But parents were concerned with the loss of their children and by the end of the second decade, the colonial government would be confronted with an uprising from the least anticipated quarter – the women traders.

Chapter 4 – The *Ogu Umunwaanyi* (1929 Women’s War)

The number of those killed in rioting in Southeast Nigeria, British West Africa, has now grown to at least forty-three women and one man. The exact cause of the riots has not been definitely ascertained.

*New York Times*¹

In 1929, Southeastern Nigeria erupted in a violent insurrection led by thousands of militant women. The event so challenged assumptions about African women’s lack of political sophistication that for the past 50 years scholars have been investigating the deeper causes of what Igbo women call the *Ogu Umunwaanyi* (1929 Women’s War) and others erroneously called the ‘Aba Riot’.² Fortunately, we have the voices of these women, many of which were educated, who gave eloquent testimony in the subsequent commission called to examine the 1929 *Ogu Umunwaanyi*.³ What we do know is that women from all the major ethnic groups in Southeastern Nigeria were experiencing the economic and political hardships that were unleashed by colonial policies in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

While the idea that African women could conceptualize grievances and organize a response that threatened the local foundations of the entire colonial project was unimaginable, the women themselves voiced their grievances throughout the performance of their protest and even more clearly, in the public hearings of the investigative commission that followed. At the top of their list of complaints was their suffering at the

¹ “African Riot Toll Now 1 Man, 43 Women: British Under-Secretary for Colonies Tells Common Cause Is Still Unascertained,” *New York Times*, December 24, 1929, 5.

² M. M Green, *Ibo Village Affairs*, (Praeger, 1964).

³ Many of the women who participated in the 1929 Women’s War were educated and married to men who worked for the colonial administration. They were aware of the women’s movements, especially the suffragist movements in Britain and the United States and felt that that colonial administration should have understood that their protest was an immediate request for action securing their rights as women and as mothers. Their attention to what women were doing abroad deserves more consideration as scholars continue to analyze the 1929 Women’s War. See also Ekwere Otu Akpan and Violetta L. Ekpo, *A Popular Uprising in South Eastern Nigeria: Preliminary Study* (Printed by the Government Printer, Calabar: Nigeria, 1988).

hands of the corrupt warrant chief system and the economic crisis of the 1921 depression. Thus by examining their involvement in the 1929 Women's War we can get a glimpse into the particular ways that women experienced the disruptive economic and political transformations that characterized the opening decades of colonial rule. Their protest was so effective it forced a total reorganization of the warrant chief system, though it did not force the colonial state to rethink its assumptions about the alleged political naiveté of Igbo and other African women.

The revolt, perhaps the most famous and extensively examined example of African women's political activism, is usually attributed to the rumor that Igbo, Ibibio and Efik women were to be taxed like the men in their families, just at the time, 1929, when the world economy plunged into the Great Depression. Many contemporary observers thought it was inconceivable that African women could conceptualize grievances and organize a response that threatened the system of indirect rule through which the British governed their colonies in Africa.⁴ But the women themselves sharply voiced their grievances throughout their demonstrations and expressed themselves even more clearly at the public hearings that followed. At the top of their list of complaints was their suffering at the hands of the corrupt warrant chiefs (the young male judges and tax collectors) the British had introduced to administer local government. In the end, the women's mobilization was so effective that it forced the British to reconsider the system of warrant chiefs as well as its assumptions about the alleged political naiveté of Igbo and other African women.

Colonial observers, including Margery Perham and Sylvia Leith-Ross, argued at the time that women's independence led them to take matters into their own hands when

⁴ The British implemented indirect rule in India as well.

they encountered economic hardship during the Depression.⁵ Leith-Ross was one of the first anthropologists to recognize that Igbo women played a major role in the economic development of their country and that their economic status was affected by the newly established Native Court system that the warrant chiefs dominated.⁶ This connection seems to have been initially unnoticed by the colonial authorities before 1929. British authorities, drawing upon their own patriarchal notions of women's political backwardness lacked an in-depth understanding of women's rights in the Southeast, which was largely based on their assumptions and previous knowledge about women in Islamic societies in northern Nigeria.⁷

Over the past forty years, the development of the field of women's studies has led scholars to examine the uprising and its causes in greater depth. Judith van Allen, a graduate student in political science at the University of California at Berkeley, came across a reference to the "women's war," and wrote an article "'Sitting on a Man': Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women" that appeared in 1972 and captured the interest of feminist scholars.⁸ Van Allen's scholarly revision of the earlier Leith-Ross and Perham analyses claimed that women who participated in the 1929 Women's War transformed a practice sometimes used in their polygamous society to force men to treat all wives equally. Van Allen argues that women who participated in the

⁵ Margery Freda Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria* (Oxford University Press, 1962); Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1939; New York: AMS Edition New York, 1978).

⁶ Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 20–1.

⁷ Margery Freda Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria* (Oxford University Press, 1962), 19–21, 30. Leith-Ross and others have argued that the failure to acknowledge the social and economic importance of women was largely caused by their assumptions and previous knowledge about women in Islamic societies in northern Nigeria.

⁸ Judith van Allen, "'Sitting on a Man': Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 6, no. 2 (January 1, 1972): 165–181.

1929 Women's War used an accepted 'traditional' process called 'sitting on a man' or 'make war on a man' in which they expressed their discontent with an individual man who they felt violated social norms or traditions that affected them.⁹ A Nigerian scholar, anthropologist Caroline Ifeka-Moller, disagreed and argued that "sitting on a man," was a far cry from what actually happened. The women who "destroyed property, looted factories, dressed in the garb of war, sang of death and blood, gestured most obscenely and became spirit obsessed on occasion," behaved more militantly from those who engaged in the traditional method of "sitting on a man."¹⁰ Ifeka-Moller viewed "sitting on a man," as a domestic practice that equalized the relations between the sexes while van Allen highlighted the political aspects of the Women's War as a case of African feminism.¹¹ Both scholars recognized that women realized that their 'traditional' political institutions were not incorporated into the colonial political system, but were marginalized and ignored in deference to those of their men. They felt disenfranchised by newly implemented colonial laws, especially by the appointment of non-customary warrant chiefs and the decline in income they were suffering as a result of the decline in prices for palm oil and palm kernels, the women's major source of income. As a result, they were angry that families were forced to pawn children and women as way to deal with the worsening economic conditions.

⁹ Judith van Allen, "'Sitting on a Man': Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 6, no. 2 (January 1, 1972): 165–181.

¹⁰ Caroline Ifeka-Moller, "Sitting on a Man: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women": A Reply to Judith Van Allen," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1973), pp. 318.

¹¹ Caroline Ifeka-Moller, "Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt: The Women's War of 1929," in *Perceiving Women*, ed. Shirley Ardener (London: Malaby Press, 1975), 143; Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1939; New York: AMS Edition New York, 1978); Victor Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, First Edition (Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1965).

The previous chapter explores the post war period as a time of economic decline as the value of palm exports plummeted throwing the households of the Igbo, Efik, Ijo and Ibibio people into economic crisis. The degree of the crisis is reflected in the increase of debt cases in court and prison records that coincide with more litigants seeking repayment of debts from 1915 until 1923. In fact, debt cases spiked in 1921 forcing the British to officially investigate child pawning. Village chiefs reported that men became restive as the exactions of colonial chiefs impacted their freedom and economic survival and demanded that the British reinstate old governing customs.¹² Parents pawned their children more frequently as a result of indebtedness. Since the warrant chiefs were the tax collectors as well as the judges, they seemed especially responsible for the increased hardship local people were suffering.¹³ However, the 1929 Women War was not the first time that Igbo women joined together to express their discontent with the social and economic conditions.

According to anthropologist Misty L. Bastian, in 1925 Igbo-speaking women participated in demonstrations called *Nwaobiala* or “Dancing Women’s” movements in which they sang and danced while sweeping public spaces in order to cleanse their environment. Before 1925, women created and practiced songs and dances at meetings that only women attended. Having practiced together in private, the women went outside and performed these dances publicly in order to shame male authorities did nothing to help them. They called this practice ‘making *egwu*’.¹⁴ But in 1925 women invented a new and more public form of *egwu* when they danced and sang their grievances in the

¹² John N. Orij, “Sacred Authority in Igbo Society,” *Archives de Sciences Sociales Des Religions* 34, no. 68.1 (July 1, 1989): 113.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ “Misty L. Bastian, “Dancing Women and Colonial Men: The *Nwaobiala*,” in “*Wicked*” Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa, eds. Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl McCurdy (Heinemann, 2001), 111.

local markets and traveled the ‘pathways’, which led townspeople to the market place. Along the way, women unfamiliar with the songs and dances spontaneously joined in and sometimes joined the original dancers when they moved over to demonstrate at the warrant chiefs’ compounds. This change in behavior to a public performance of a formerly private ritual indicated the deep frustration women experienced.¹⁵ For several weeks the women traveled from town to town to express their dissatisfaction and to solicit support.¹⁶ They began their demonstration at Okigwe (also known as Okigwi) at the center of the Palm Belt and moved between the Okigwe and Bende Divisions, and eventually to Umuahia, which is located along the rail lines.¹⁷ All these towns were major commercial centers and, as noted previously, core collection and sale points for slaves and pawns.

Bastian’s analysis highlights additional reasons for the women’s discontent, all of which reflected their opposition to the economic and political changes of colonial rule that had particular consequences for women. Women wanted to re-adopt old customs. They feared declining fertility, and requested that the customary division of labor based on gender be maintained. Some of their grievances described the exploitation of their men by the chiefs and they argued that poor men should only be prosecuted in Native Courts as a last resort. They were particularly concerned about the reproduction of the household and they attacked the colonialism’s influence on the marriage process. They protested the demonetization of ‘native’ currencies and argued; that bride prices should only be paid in cowries. They also protested the incursion of men into their space – the

¹⁵ Ibid., 114.

¹⁶ Ibid., 113.

¹⁷ Bastian, “Dancing Women and Colonial Men: The Nwaobiala” in *Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, 110-112.

market place. They did not want men to operate in the market place, relegating them to farm work.¹⁸ The roads were also conduits for other forms of suffering. Bastian also writes that,

The roads built by the colonialists with the labor of the colonized people “go missing,” through death, servitude, or complete alienation from Igbo values; they did not bring people together for marriage or trade, as the women’s pathways did. Worse, people who used these new roads returned to their towns, bringing a host of afflictions.¹⁹

This analysis, while appearing to be pure superstition, was actually quite true. Some of their anxiety can be attributed to the spread of the Spanish influenza that had killed 512,000 Nigerians overall, and between 1918 and 1919 killed 250, 000 in the southern provinces alone.²⁰ As the pandemic killed so many otherwise young and healthy people, the Igbo believed that the illness was a “by-product of colonial modernity.”²¹ The Chief Sanitation Officer found that the disease had actually spread *because* of modern transportation. One infected woman who entered Lagos introduced the disease that spread throughout the country when she traveled on the railway.²²

An additional reason for the women’s participation in the 1925 *Nwaobiala* was that women were forced to pawn their children to warrant chiefs in order to meet their own or their husband’s economic liabilities. Local people believed that many of the warrant chiefs had been able to marry well and construct expensive two-story houses because of the wealth they gained from slave trading and child dealing. One newly

¹⁸ Ibid., 116–7.

¹⁹ Ibid., 124.

²⁰ J. Beringer, Sr. Sanitation Officer, *The Influenza Epidemic of 1918 in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria*, September 5, 1919, PRO, CO 583/77, Public Records Office, London.

²¹ Susan Kingsley Kent, Marc Matera, and Misty L. Bastian, *The Women’s War of 1929* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 100.

²² As cited in Carolyn A. Brown, *We Were All Slaves: African Miners, Culture, and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery, Nigeria* (James Currey, 2003), footnote 147, 138.

appointed warrant chief paid a bride price of at least £15 for each of his 130 wives, some of whom were undoubtedly young girls. He also owned “sixty head of cattle, seven bicycles, a double barreled shot gun and numberless sheep, sheep goats and expensive farms.”²³ By participating in *egwu*, women demanded the attention of the local leaders in order to bring notice of their dissatisfaction. As part of their complaints, what seems to be an increase in the number of children pawned most likely contributed to the Igbo-speaking women’s 1925 protest, as well as to the subsequent 1929 Women’s War.

The 1925 and 1929 women’s movements are significant because it shows why women responded to the social and economic changes brought on by colonialism. The consequences of the implementation of indirect rule, especially the appointment of warrant chiefs encroached upon their rights. Moreover, changes in currency usage, taxation, and increased debt decreased their capacity to maintain their economic responsibilities. Women participated in both movements as a way to show their collective grievances and demanded reform.

The interplay between warrant chief abuses and the fear that direct taxation would extend to women are noted as the main reasons for women’s participation in the 1929 uprising.²⁴ Susan Martin and Gloria Chukwu’s research also indicate that women’s income from trade began to decrease during the late 1920s.²⁵ Martin’s study, which investigates the economic reasons why the 1929 Women’s War spread to the Ngwa region, argues that the fall in palm kernel revenues to 33 percent of their 1911-1913

²³ Frank Hives, *Memos. on Native Courts* W 9/19 dated 12.11.20 in C 176/19, Remarks by F. P. Lynch cited in AE Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929* (Humanity Press/prometheus Bk, 1972).

²⁴ Gloria Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900-1960* (Routledge, 2004).

²⁵ Susan M. Martin, *Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History of the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800-1980*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 106, and Gloria Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900-1960* (Routledge, 2004).

levels contributed to women's economic distress.²⁶ Palm kernels were a major source of women's income and she found that men were gradually encroaching upon this trade, despite it being a woman's monopoly. The warrant chiefs' activities as judges and tax collectors brought them into conflict with the increasingly impoverished women.

As early as 1916, Lord Frederick Lugard, Governor General of Nigeria, instituted taxes on all Nigerians except for those in the Southeast, where he anticipated problems and lacked sufficient troops to enforce his will. Lord Harcourt, the Governor of the Southern Provinces, thought it best to wait until his troop strength increased before trying to collect local taxes. In 1926 colonial authorities decided that the time had come to allow the warrant chiefs to collect taxes from men in the Southeast.²⁷

In 1927 the British government began the process of increasing government revenues by having local authorities, mainly warrant chiefs, carry out a census of the property of all adult men in Owerri and Calabar Provinces.²⁸ In 1927 and 1928 colonial representatives traveled throughout the Southeast and attempted to persuade warrant chiefs that the new tax policy would provide the resources to pay natives to work on public projects rather than depending on forced labor, a practice British anti-slavery groups had begun calling "slavery by another name."²⁹ Colonial officials were eager to make this change and believed that the Igbo "would accept the alternative with little or no resistance."³⁰ A native ruler testified that, "We prefer strong boys being made to work on

²⁶ Martin, *Palm Oil and Protest*, 107.

²⁷ Nigerian Correspondent, "The Disturbances in S.E. Nigeria; The Special Commission's Report Reviewed," October 11, 1930, 1415, PRO CO 583/176/10, Public Records Office, London

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 44.

³⁰ Falola and Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929*, 45.

the roads to paying tax. We want tax abolished.”³¹ This statement expresses the expectation that elders in the community had the power to appropriate the labor of young males. It also shows that the indigenous population felt that paying tax to a foreign power was unacceptable.

The imposition of direct taxation triggered resistance.³² Frederick Cooper explains that, “caught between political and ideological limitations on the use of coercion and their limited ability to do without it – trying to hitch their authority to the continued existence and legitimacy of African modes of authority – colonial officials could not directly pose the labor question.”³³ Trouble began when the British ordered non-traditional leaders, the warrant chiefs, to conduct a census and collect taxes.

In 1927 when the census began, British authorities increased the number of police and colonial troops at their disposal. In 1928, the Resident of Calabar anticipated a severe backlash to the new policy since he realized that the people of Calabar were under extraordinary financial pressure.³⁴ Local women, who engaged in petty trade and collecting and selling palm kernel products, were suffering from the economic downturn. The testimony resulting from the investigation into the causes of the Women’s War reveals that, with the new tax placed on men, families had already begun to pawn

³¹ Nigeria. Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbance in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929., *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbance in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929 / [microform] Aba Commission of Inquiry*. (London: Waterlow & Sons, 1930), 279–280.

³² Falola and Paddock, *The Women’s War of 1929*, 45.

³³ Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*, 17.

³⁴ Falola and Paddock, *The Women’s War of 1929*, 46.

children at increasing rates.³⁵ Finally, the warrant chiefs, already known for their abuses, wielded authority not only to carry out the census, but to collect the taxes.

Nigerians and administrators began to express their concern about granting warrant chiefs the power to demand tax payments. The District Officer at Ahoada explained his apprehension about this procedure because:

The persons who hold judicial warrants call themselves chiefs (although they have no right to that title)... Many of the warrant holders are irresponsible boys, some are ex-criminals, ex-slaves or rogues.³⁶

The Ikot Ekpene Division warrant chiefs informed William Edgar Hunt, the Resident charged with the tax campaign, that people's financial solvency declined since the implementation of direct taxation. The chiefs also explained that additional taxation would encourage poor families to sell and pawn even more of their children. Thus the chiefs asked Mr. Hunt to petition the colonial administration to promise not to prosecute anyone who pawned children for the purpose of paying their taxes. The warrant chief's testimony that taxation would cause an increase in child pawning and his request that the colonial government excuse those who engaged in pawning is suspect if not surprising. The chief himself would have been one of the moneylenders needy parents would have approached and he clearly wanted to be sure that he would not be prosecuted if he accepted children in pawn. Nevertheless, the economic side of indigenous objection to taxation was thus important and should not be played down. But it was by no means the

³⁵ A.E. Afigbo, "Revolution and Reaction in Eastern Nigeria: 1900-1929: The Background to the Women's Riot of 1929," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* vol. 3, no. 3 (December 1966): 551.

³⁶ *Owerri Provincial Annual Report for 1921*, 1921, 12, CSO 26/03928, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

*only important factor that determined the reaction of the conservative majority of the people.*³⁷

*In 1929 the Colonial office commissioned an additional census that was to account for the women, children and livestock, as well as the men. On November 23, 1929, Warrant Chief Okugo Ekuma Okezie instructed Mark Emeruwa, a schoolteacher, to count the number of men, women, children, and animals in each compound in the town of Oloko.*³⁸ *When he arrived at a local compound of a woman called Nwanyeruwa, Emeruwa explained that he intended to count all her family's belongings.*³⁹ *Nwanyeruwa immediately expressed outrage that he had come to conduct the census. It was not customary to count the belongings of Igbo women and she later testified that,*

I was in my house pounding palm nuts in the morning. I was then squeezing oil. He

[Emeruwa] asked me to count my goats, sheep and people. I turned around and looked

at him. I said: "Are you still coming last year my son's wife died [sic]. What am I to

count? I have been mourning for the death of that woman. Was your mother counted?"

He held me by the throat. One's life depends on her throat. With my two hands

³⁷ Afigbo, "Revolution and Reaction in Eastern Nigeria: 1900-1929: The Background to the Women's Riot of 1929," 551.

³⁸ Nigeria. Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbance in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929., *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbance in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929 / [microform] Aba Commission of Inquiry.* (London: Waterlow & Sons, 1930), 6.

³⁹ See Margery Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 208. Perham offers an explanation about the implication of counting a woman's animals. The animals that belong to a compound are most often considered the personal belongings of a wife. Hence, if the chiefs attempted to count these possessions, women might conclude that they would be taxed.

covered with oil I held him also by the throat. I raised an alarm, calling a woman...I

asked her to raise an alarm as I did not know what I had done. In the meantime

Emeruwa ran away. As he ran away I followed him shouting.⁴⁰

In Owerri Province, a series of events followed this initial encounter. The first day after the incident, a group of women traveled to the local mission house to ask Emeruwa why he wanted to count women. He suggested that they raise their questions with Okugo, the warrant chief. When they approached the chief's compound, they placed leaves on the ground, insulted him, and demanded that he relinquish his warrant cap. The women were clearly upset by the planned census. On November 25th, nine women accused Chief Okugo of beating them with sticks and by November 26th, the protesting women rushed the Bende District Office. The protests continued and on December 2nd, 10,000 women gathered at Bende and demanded the conviction Chief Okugo for his assaults on the nine women, and on December 4th, a Native Court did just that. Women continued their uprisings even though they succeeded in having Chief Okugo's warrant

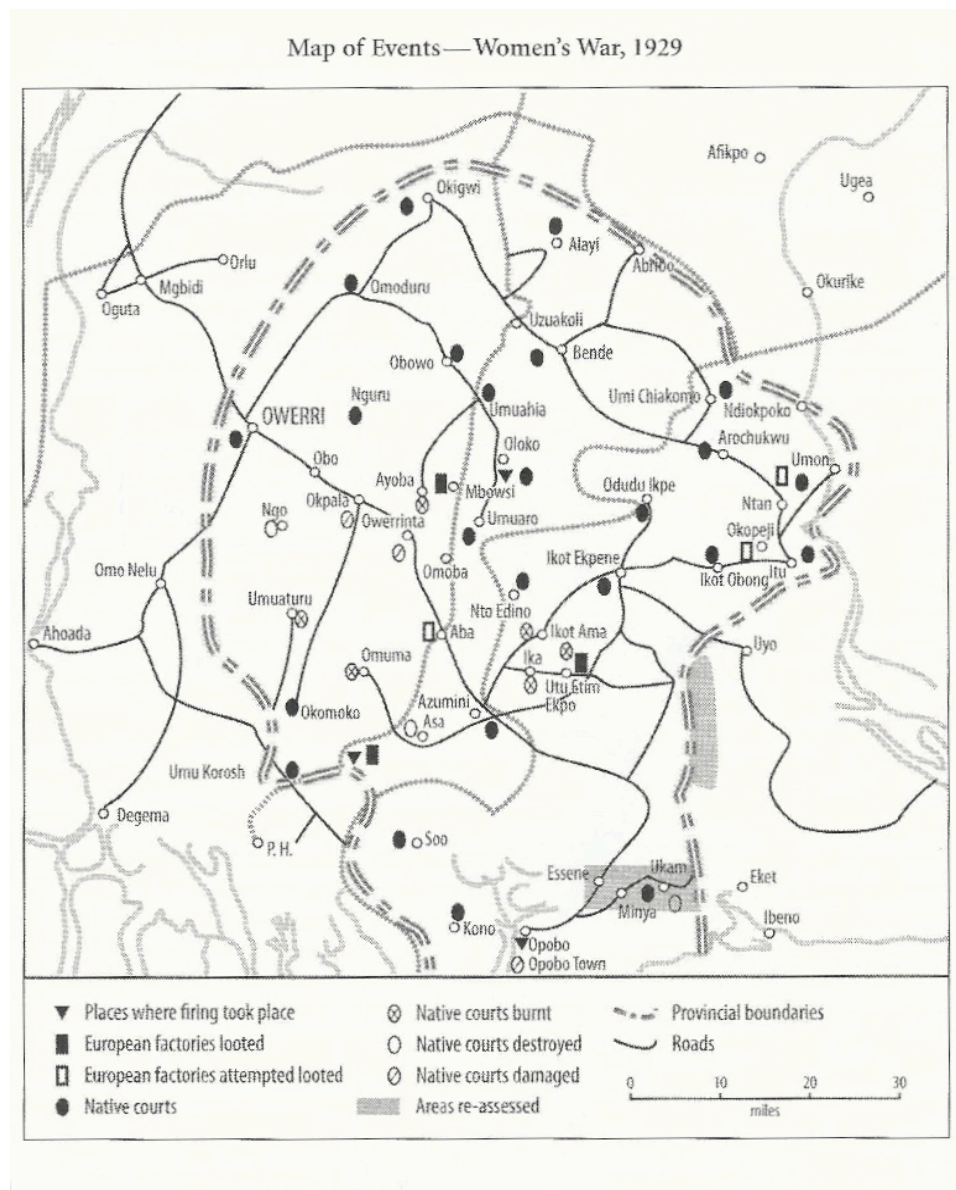
⁴⁰ *Aba Commission of Inquiry. Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December 1929 (January 1930), No. 363, 24-25; Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December 1929 (January 1930), 11-18.*

cap removed. Subsequently, over a series of days and weeks, the protests expanded to other locations, drawing in hundreds of new recruits.⁴¹

By December 6th, the news of the census had reached the Aba Division of the Owerri Province, the location of a large, important market town. Women in Ukam began a disturbance and police urged them to disperse and denied the rumor of taxation. But the protest continued and within days 3,000 to 4,000 women convened in the neighboring district of Owerrinta where they stoned the state magistrate's home and looted three factories on December 11th. One day later at Imo River, the women used similar tactics and burned down Native Courts. Women's activities against the government multiplied. From December 15th until December 28th they continued to meet in Bende, Aba and Owerri. Over 2,500 women carried sticks and palm fronds, symbols of the women's protest, demanded the removal of warrant chiefs. The women continued to loot the property of Native Court members and demanded that their grievances be heard.

Map 1.6 Map of Events – Women's War, 1929

⁴¹ Ekwere Otu Akpan and Violetta L. Ekpo, *A Popular Uprising in South Eastern Nigeria: Preliminary Study* (Printed by the Government Printer, Calabar: Nigeria, 1988), 27.



Source Toyin Falola, Adam Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929* (2011)⁴²

There were similar events in the districts located in neighboring Calabar Province. Many of the most serious attacks occurred in the Palm Belt. By December 14th, machine gun platoons confronted the 3,000 to 4,000 women in the village of Ikot Ekpene. A government intermediary briefly succeeded in pacifying the group, but the protest

⁴² Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929: A History of Anti-Colonial Resistance in Eastern Nigeria* (Carolina Academic Press, 2011), x.

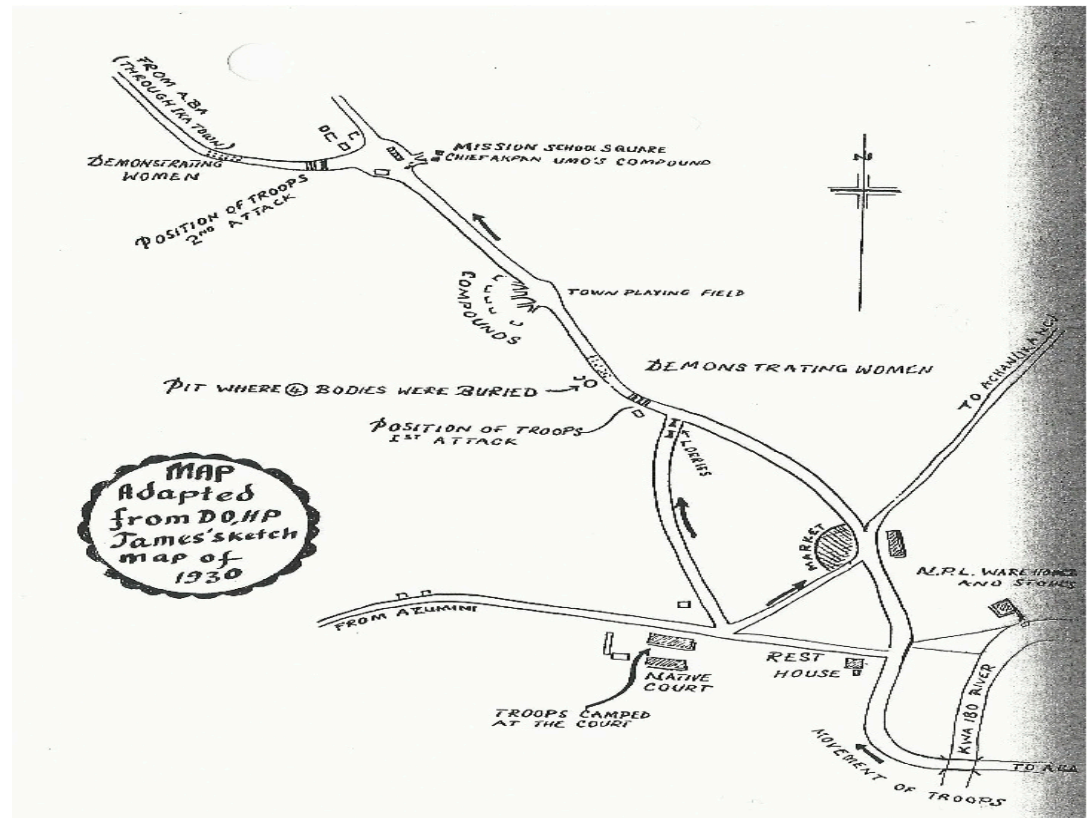
continued and escalated. In other villages, particularly at Utu Etim Ekpo and Utu Etin Abak, in the Palm Belt, women faced severe repression when they burned numerous court buildings and trading houses and destroyed local markets.⁴³ Unrestrained authorities opened fire⁴⁴ and killed up to nine unarmed women, citing the *Ordinance of the Magistrate* that permitted the colonial government “to do all things necessary for preventing riots.”⁴⁵

Map I.7 Utu Etim Ekpo December 15th, 1929

⁴³ Nigerian Correspondent, “The Disturbances in S.E. Nigeria; The Special Commission’s Report Reviewed,” 1437.

⁴⁴ Ekwere Otu Akpan and Violetta L. Ekpo, *A Popular Uprising in South Eastern Nigeria: Preliminary Study* (Printed by the Government Printer, Calabar: Nigeria, 1988), 33-5.

⁴⁵ *Notes*, 2039, p.101; This Ordinance allowed the colonial government “to do all things necessary for preventing riots.”



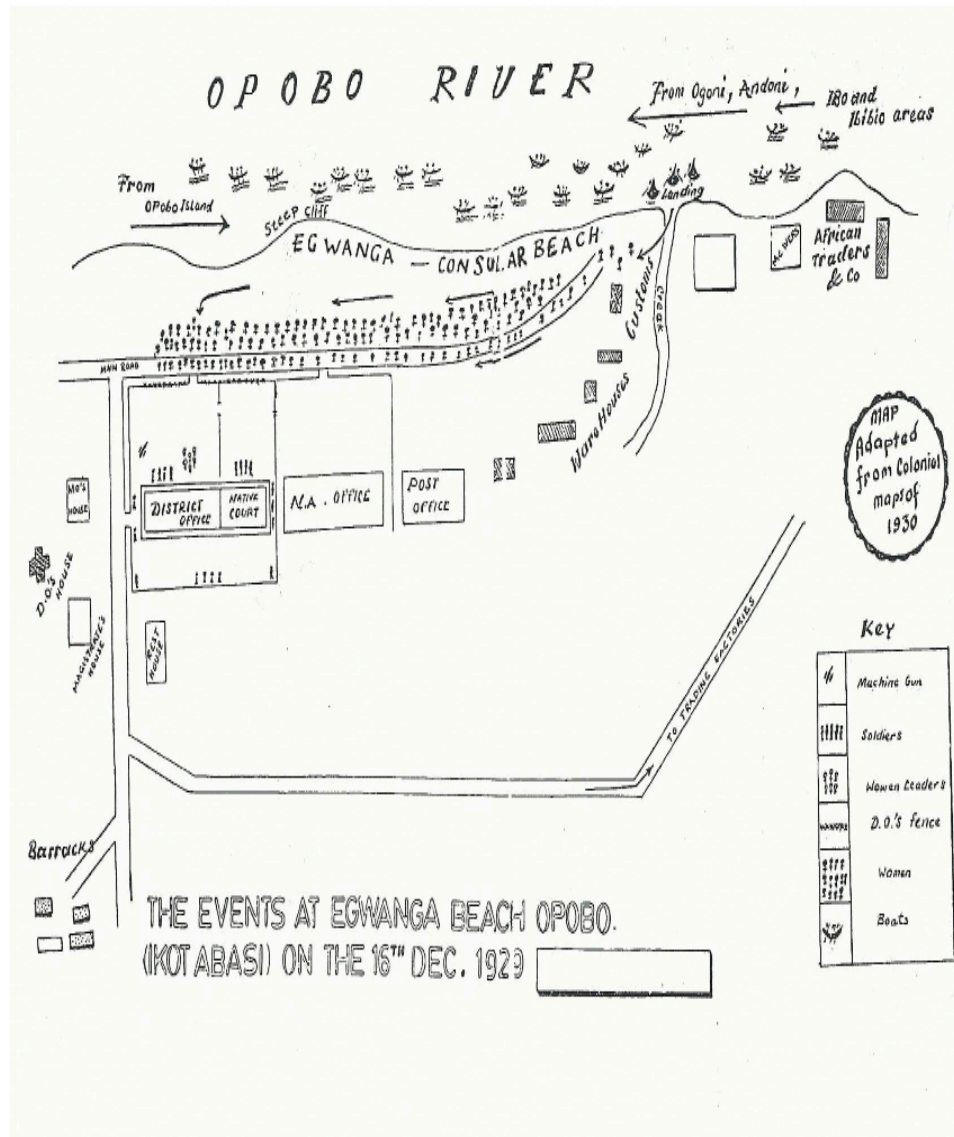
Source: Ekwere Otu Akpan and Violetta L. Ekpo, *A Popular Uprising in South Eastern Nigeria: Preliminary Study* (1988)⁴⁶

The protest spread to the eastern Delta. In the early morning of December 16th over 2,000 women convened at Opobo's District Office. They chanted and shouted their grievances. They smeared their faces with red and yellow clay, and dressed themselves in palm and fern leaves. They carried sticks as they marched along singing, "The puta anyinge me," (Whatever comes, we will face it). As representatives of Opobo Town, Bonny, Andoni and Kwa, the women demanded that the District Officer prepare and distribute a document that among other things, promised not to tax women. Impatient, they began to pound their pestles and sticks on a fence. Lieutenant Hill, who was with the District Officer, panicked and ordered his soldiers to shoot the protesting women.

⁴⁶ Ekwere Otu Akpan and Violetta L. Ekpo, *The Women's War of 1929: Preliminary Study* (Calabar, Nigeria: Government Printer, 1988).

*Madam Adiaha Edem, was the first shot.*⁴⁷ Colonial authorities acknowledged twenty-six deaths while local people claimed 500.⁴⁸

Map 1.8 Opobo District Map



Source: Ekwere Otu Akpan and Violetta L. Ekpo, *The Women's War of 1929: Preliminary Study* (1988)⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Madam Adiaha Edem was the mother of the man who later served as the president of the Ibibio Union and judge, Sir Udo Udoma.

⁴⁸ Ekwere Otu Akpan and Violetta L. Ekpo, *A Popular Uprising in South Eastern Nigeria: Preliminary Study* (Printed by the Government Printer, Calabar: Nigeria, 1988), 41-3.

⁴⁹ Akpan, *The Women's War of 1929*.

In Okigwe, the women sang and danced in order to signal to others that, “they were at war with the government.” They marked themselves with black chalk and ashes symbolizing their “unbearable economic reality.”⁵⁰ These women slapped their stomachs and called for justice. The testimony from the Commission of Inquiry is most revealing in showing articulate leaders fully capable of explaining the reasons for their protest: The Chairman asked, a local woman, Swung Enyidie, to explain “why they danced all night for a matter like that?”⁵¹ She responded, “We danced like that for some people who have wronged us. Okugo brought about all this trouble, and so we sang and danced. We sang: “Who ordered this thing? Who ordered that we should pay tax?”⁵² The women protested the idea that the warrant chiefs would be tasked with demanding taxes from women.

The Women’s War represented a fight against the repression of warrant chiefs, the threat of women being taxed, the economic hardship during the postwar period and the continued loss of children through pawnship and trafficking. At the Commission hearing some colonial officials explained the burden that taxation placed on families already struggling with inflation and the postwar depression. Both colonial officers and Nigerian witnesses testified that in Southeastern Nigeria taxation exacerbated kidnapping and pawning children in the late 1920s. The prominent CMS missionary, Archdeacon George Thomas Basden, explained why the families could not pay the taxes:

In some bush places there is very little money at all. They live on the land, and they do

⁵⁰ Notes, 56.

⁵¹ Nwungo Enyidie was the twelfth witness to testify at the Commission of Inquiry. She was a participant of the Woman’s War on Okugo’s compound.

⁵² Notes, No. 1184, 62.

not work [for wages], as cash is limited. In many cases in order to raise the cash for the tax, they have had to borrow; none of them can pay back and they pawn their children in order to pay their debts.⁵³

Another witness, named China explained how families were often thrown into more debt

by the cost of searching for stolen children, especially girls.⁵⁴

Since the introduction of taxation, people have sometimes gone to bed, and their children have been stolen, owing to poverty. We want to make a report about the children who were stolen. We make reports to Chiefs, but if it is a girl who is stolen it takes nearly all the money that would be paid for her dowry to trace her.⁵⁵

As children vanished, and with no way to redeem them, women lost all trust in the warrant chief system. They desperately needed the help of the colonial administration to check the warrant chief abuses.

⁵³ Ibid., 201.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 221.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

One recent informant, Abraham Okolo of Amoriji, Nike, a major slave holding town near Enugu, recalls how Igbos responded to direct taxation during the late 1920s and early 1930s:

We were paying 3 shillings or \$3 in modern language. Money was hard to get. Somebody who has no such money will have worked for 4 pence a day and paying 3 shillings in a year. If people don't pay tax they will harass him. Someone who is poor will now pawn the child. There were seeing the court messenger as the colonial master. He will use his staff and yell, "Stop! Stop! Stop!" If you don't pay the tax they will beat you like a beast. Then somebody who was poor would run to his neighbor and ask him to lend him 3 shillings to avoid them coming to his compound or destroy his belongings. The court class will come to your house and make an announcement.... All villagers will assemble at the village square. Clerk will come and talk to them. The chief and servants will also be there. They will call roll.

Those who didn't pay they will carry the person to court in Aba. When the clerk finishes the job in that community the community will contribute yams for him. The community will also give him a goat then they will select people from the community to carry the yams to his own town. People will be selected to carry goods and yams to his house. You don't doubt the court clerk because he can send you to jail. Then the warrant chief would give an order that nobody could challenge him. He will just say he will send you to prison.⁵⁶

The fear of public prosecution was enough to provoke increasing numbers of people to seek loans. The known power of the warrant chiefs dictated the responses of those who owed taxes. If a person could not evade the tax collectors they had to find a way of securing the funds. Evidence shows that if a person could not secure a loan from a friend or family member, they would approach a known moneylender, and pay exorbitant interest rates. Okolo claims that the Nike always gave a female rather than male in pawn. If a man did not have a female child to lend, then he would pawn himself and farm the lender's land. When a taxpayer was desperate he might even sell a child. A chief recalled the stories he learned in his childhood, and claimed that the selling of

⁵⁶ Okolo, Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s."

children was rampant during the 1920s and 1930s because of “financial problems- because of dickheadness among children-you sell them.”⁵⁷ In general, Igbos, Ibibios and Efiks were believed to pawn children with character defects in order to avoid the difficulties trying to correct them, but such statements clearly do not get to the heart of the matter.

Once a child disappeared, a parent had to pay a prohibitive £15 to £20 to a warrant chief in order to get assistance.⁵⁸ Parents were left in an untenable position. How could they afford this fee when they could not even afford to pay taxes? Moreover, if the kidnappers were caught, they could easily bribe the warrant chiefs in order to avoid prosecution. China explained that, “In the end there would be no justice at all. The chiefs are always harsh to us.”⁵⁹ Another witness lamented, “We are dependent on men; we have no money to maintain our children, how much more can we afford to pay tax?”⁶⁰

The payment of taxes was a family burden even when women were not directly taxed. Women borrowed from a variety of people in order to help their husband’s pay taxes. Olenga of Umuakpara in Aba claimed that she borrowed money from Nkwerre moneylenders and that the interest owed was continuously increasing.⁶¹ Other women claimed that they borrowed money from their esusu subscriptions (rotating credit associations) and paid interest at 100 percent. For instance, Ejiohu of Owerrinta borrowed 12 shillings in order to help her husband with his taxes and promised to pay an

⁵⁷ Chief Ugwuefi Reuben, “Interview Conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on Behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, ‘A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s’”, August 5, 2012. It is important to point out that many of the oral histories provide reasons why parents chose specific children to pawn. Oftentimes, the choice was based on the child’s character flaws, such as stubbornness, sickness, stealing, lying, etc.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 233.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 260.

⁶¹ Ibid., 665.

additional 12 shillings in interest.⁶² One colonial official claimed that he had witnessed cases where people paid 200 percent in interest.⁶³

As natives testified about the various abuses of the warrant chiefs, they raised the issue of bride prices, which was always implicated in the cases of girl children. Not only did a man have to pay a bride price to the girl's parents, he also had to pay the local chief an equal sum. Since many men ordinarily had to do extra work to raise funds for the bride price, paying additional sums to the warrant chiefs was an unbearable burden.⁶⁴

Colonial records suggest that pawning also figured in the Enugu's Udi Division among the Abajas and Nkanus, two clans with deep historical roots in the slave trade, as victims and merchants respectively.⁶⁵ Mr. T.B. Dew, the District Officer of Enugu, claimed that the majority of child pawns were already classified as "unfree" at birth.⁶⁶ However, colonial authorities claimed that prosecuting offenders was particularly difficult since the warrant chiefs refused to assist their efforts.⁶⁷

Oral testimonies from the Enugu area were especially rich in providing insight into the customs shared by the Igbo in this area. Some accounts suggest that child pawns often went to live with chiefs themselves, who as "strong men," theoretically could protect them. Other children were actually pawned to European officials in lieu of tax payments. One respondent claimed that colonial officials treated these children "as beasts of burden," using them to carry heavy loads ranging from building materials to

⁶² Ibid., 516.

⁶³ Ibid., 701.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 261.

⁶⁵ "Letter from District Officer of Enugu, T.B. Dew to the Senior Resident of Onitsha (February 12th, 1923)" in *Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 37.

⁶⁶ "Letter from District Officer of Enugu, T.B. Dew to the Senior Resident of Onitsha," in *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 38.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 39.

bicycles. One respondent claimed, with some exaggeration, that children would be asked to “carry the white man...on the[ir] shoulder.” And some pawns even died as a result of the heavy workload.⁶⁸

Colonial improvements in transportation encouraged the violation of the customary practices in which pawns remained within their natal area. Increased access to bicycles and motorized vehicles also facilitated the proliferation of long distance trade in pawns. As traders travelled further inland or away from their inland hubs, they learned about the various labor shortages in agriculture, or the need for tailors or brick makers for which child labor might be trained.⁶⁹ Thus as knowledge of regional labor shortages spread the trade in children increased.

Anthony Nwandinko was born in Owerri in 1914, and remembers as a young man how his parents told cautionary tales about the children from his village who had been given to wealthy men in lieu of loan payments. In fact, his parents often heard about the severe abuse that resulted in children who died from “forced labor before the loan was paid.” As did many other informants, he noted that the major cause of the increase in child pawning was additional taxation in the 1930s. In the Great Depression government, in a bizarre policy that assumed that pulling money out of circulation would compensate for the shortage of goods in circulation, increased taxes as a way of withdrawing currency from the economy.⁷⁰ Nwandinko also claimed that in 1930, when he and a friend were sixteen, his friend’s parents, who lived in Onitsha, pawned their son

⁶⁸ Nwangwu Ugwu Ugwu, Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s,” August 5, 2012.

⁶⁹ HRH Igwe Dr. Titus Okolo, Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s,” August 2, 2012.

⁷⁰ Frederick Cooper, “Africa and the World Economy,” *African Studies Review* 24, no. 2/3 (June 1, 1981): 1-86.

to a family in Enugu. Nwandinko claims that the practice of pawning children, to obtain a loan under dire economics circumstances was socially acceptable in many communities.⁷¹ Current scholarship supports Nwandiko's account. Historian Rasheed Olaniyi argues that, in the 1930s tax officials often overestimated the amount of tax due or business partners embezzled money forcing one partner to sell his or her child to pay arrears, thus increasing "trading and trafficking in children."⁷²

Conclusion

In December 1929 colonial soldiers and policemen may have killed hundreds, possibly thousands of Nigerian women in the Owerri and Calabar Provinces. In the aftermath of the colonial tragedy, a British resident described it as, "a Black chapter in our West African History."⁷³ Women united in protest against the native and British administration as a result of the worsening economic conditions and corruption of colonial chiefs and the courts under their control. What began as a protest against a proposed demographic census in preparation for the expansion of taxation to women, ended with authorities wounding and killing many women.

After Lugard removed the District Officer from the Native Courts they became institutions of corruption, extortion and economic exploitation. The use of Native Courts to mediate debt cases quickly provided an opportunity for warrants chiefs to demand bribes from guilty parties and to participate in child pawning and kidnapping. The

⁷¹ Nwandinko, Interview conducted by Ezeji Grace on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s."

⁷² Rasheed Olaniyi, "Economic Crises and Child Trafficking in Nigeria: A Comparative Analysis of the 1930s and 1990s," in *Children and Youth in the Labour Process in Africa*, ed. Osita Agbu (African Books Collective, 2009), 38.

⁷³ Public Records Office (PRO), Kew, London, CO 583/168/14, *Native Unrest in Nigeria* (Letter from Mr. Bottomley to Sir. S. Wilson), December 1929.

elaboration of indirect rule left entire regions at the mercy of nefarious leaders not genuinely regarded as legitimate authorities within their villages nor committed to upholding the rule of law. Exacting high court fees on individuals who attempted to use the Native Courts, chiefs pushed the public, especially women, to their limit.

While communities faced this hardship that tore at their families, British colonial officials treated child pawning in an ambiguous manner during the first quarter of the twentieth century. In 1923, a colonial authority acknowledged that the issue of child pawning in Southern Nigeria had been investigated once under Sir Walter Egerton and again under Lord Lugard. Under Egerton, officials decided to postpone any forceful action against pawning and Lugard did not want to distract the population during the First World War.⁷⁴ In December 1924, Governor Hugh Clifford (1919-1925) defended pawnship as a practice that was not “vicious or liable to abuse; ... that it did not entail any prolonged infringement of the personal liberty of the pawn; ... that it was a very essential feature of the fiscal, economic and social system.” Abolishing pawning altogether would, “plunge innumerable families into financial embarrassment.”⁷⁵ Contrary to what many colonial officials reported in 1923, child pawning existed and was prevalent.

In 1925 Mr. Ormsby-Gore, Assistant to the Secretary of State, urged Governor Clifford to take forceful action against child pawning. He gave two reasons for his request. First, Sir Lugard was the British representative on the newly created League of Nations Commission on Slavery, which had a focus on female pawning. Second, the

⁷⁴ I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents, 96.

⁷⁵ "Letter from Governor Hugh Clifford to Colonel L. S. Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies (December 31, 1924)," in Ibid., 123.

*League of Nations was attempting to persuade the president of Liberia to condemn and cease child pawning in his own country. It was essential that Nigeria served as an example in this effort.*⁷⁶

Pawnship increased radically when direct taxation was introduced in 1928 following a survey to determine tolerable rates. When a second census was commissioned in 1929 to count women, children, and animals, women rebelled. In the hearings following the revolt, several women eyewitnesses testified that they were forced to pawned children to pay taxes levied upon their husbands. Moreover, the traditional institution of pawnship that should have provided safeguards and assured the return of the pawned children did not do so. In the midst of the post-war economic crisis, the increase of colonial taxes, and the misappropriation of power among the warrant chiefs, few children were ever returned. Consequently, the high incidence of child pawning led women from throughout Southeastern Nigeria to rebel. These women, many of whom were mothers, decided to act together in an attempt to make their social and economic burdens known as they lost their children in pawn.

Child pawning undoubtedly contributed to women's decision to resist being taxed. The expectation that a parent could loan out a child in lieu of a loan and regain that child once the loan was repaid was no longer a reasonable assumption. Pawnship networks had spread far and wide, facilitated by the expanding colonial economy and the development of a colony-wide transportation system. Women, as mothers, palm kernel producers, entrepreneurs and managers of their own finances felt economic strain in deeply emotional ways. For some of them, losing children deprived them of loved ones

⁷⁶ "Letter from Mr. Ormsby-Gore, Assistant to the Secretary of State, to Governor Hugh Clifford (March 21, 1925)," Ibid., 126-8.

and weakened the fabric of their family economy. This undoubtedly contributed to their participation in the Aba Women's War.

*The Women's War was a significant historical moment in Nigerian history. In his novel, *I Saw the Sky Catch Fire*, T. Obinkaram Echewa recalls growing up listening to local women recount the War. His novel describes how women moved from one village to another, lurking in the bushes, and spreading the news that women had been shot and killed over disputes over taxation.⁷⁷ Though born a dozen years after the war in a Ngwa village in the core area of the revolt, Echewa asserts that, "Igbo women went to war. This was an actual war, not an intellectual debate."⁷⁸ The women wanted their children back.*

⁷⁷ T. Obinkaram Echewa, *I Saw the Sky Catch Fire* (New York: Plume Printing, 1993), 169.

⁷⁸ T. Obinkaram Echewa, interview by Robin Chapdelaine, handwritten notes, Philadelphia, PA, 16 May 2009.

Chapter 5 – An International Consensus on the Welfare of Children: Girl Pawns, Brides and Slaves, 1920s

The commission has undertaken to get the facts about the traffic in women and children as it exists to-day over the world.¹

William F. Snow,
Chief of the Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children, 1926

After the First World War, pawnship, child trafficking, and slavery came under intense observation. With the establishment of the International Labor Organization in 1919, the League of Nations in 1920 and its Advisory Committee on the Traffic of Women and Children and the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People in 1921, the government in Nigeria faced increased scrutiny. The international committees set a new standard for ‘enlightened’ colonial administration, a standard that Britain especially hoped to achieve. Moreover the devastation of the Great War encouraged a reevaluation of colonial policies, and reform movements emerged in many European countries. These included feminist organizations, humanitarian groups, and anti-slavery lobbyists who worked hard to raise the status of women in Britain’s colonies. African, American, Asian, and European women became active on these committees in hopes of shaping new colonial policies.² Even without regulatory power, the League’s Advisory committees successfully pressured European governments to investigate instances of forced labor and other abuses in the colonies.³ Given the interest of international

¹ William F. Snow, “The Program of the League of Nations Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People,” *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York* 12, no. 1 (July 1, 1926): 414.

² Susan Pedersen, “The Maternalist Moment in British Colonial Policy: The Controversy over ‘Child Slavery’ in Hong Kong 1917-1941,” *Past & Present* no. 171 (May 1, 2001): 164.

³ Paul Gordon Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen*, Third Edition (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 103.

women's groups, in particular, the League responded to the pressure and urged colonial officials to examine trafficking of women and children.

Eventually the organizations concerned with the welfare of children extended its concerns to include how they were affected by slavery and pawnship.⁴ Colonial policy towards slavery and other forms of trafficking was brought under intense scrutiny and officials were forced to examine the forms of coercive labor and human trafficking that they had formerly dismissed as 'customary' practice. Finally, British authorities had to finally admit that child pawns in Southeastern Nigeria could easily become slaves, apprentices, and child brides. In an effort to end child marriage, they intensely investigated pawning.⁵ In doing so, they had to contend with guardians' motivations for pawning children. The authorities confirmed what they had suspected all along - that parents and family members often pawned some children to open opportunities for their remaining children.⁶ Pawning would increase the money available to pay bride prices and colonial taxes.⁷ Officials also investigated and officially acknowledged the complex networks and transport routes that moneylenders and child dealers used in Southeastern Nigeria.⁸ A child was one of the most important assets a parent had, but a child was also a transferable asset. Despite parents' best intentions, and colonial and missionaries interventions, the political and economic transformation of colonialism precipitated a series of events that unintentionally increased child dealing through pawnship, child marriage and slavery. In the investigations following the League's inquiries, British

⁴ Judith A. Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940* (Heinemann, 2002), 136.

⁵ I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents, 1922, CSO 26/1/074 Vol. I, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁷ A.E. Afigbo, "Revolution and Reaction in Eastern Nigeria: 1900-1929: The Background to the Women's Riot of 1929" III, no. 3, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (December 1966): 551.

⁸ *Annual Report of Owerri 1921*, 1921, 42, CSO 26 No. 03928, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

authorities and other humanitarian groups discovered that the trafficking of women and children was integrally related to Nigeria's colonial economy.

League of Nations on Child Labor Policies

In the United Kingdom, the reform of child labor policies actually began in the mid 19th century when the abuses of children in the Industrial Revolution became evident. The laws designed to protect children beginning in the 1830s, set a pattern for Britain's widespread reform movement.⁹ By 1880, reformers defined childhood as the period extending from birth through fourteen years of age.¹⁰ Activists lobbied for stricter guidelines as a way to decrease what they believed to be abuses of children.¹¹

Following the First World War, child labor increasingly concerned the International Labor Organization (ILO) established in 1919. The ILO, though armed only with advisory powers, tirelessly worked to end inhumane labor practices. They encouraged governments and employers to increase wages and limit the number of hours

⁹ Douglas A. Galbi, "Child Labor and the Division of Labor in the Early English Cotton Mills," *Journal of Population Economics* 10, no. 4 (October 1, 1997): 358.

¹⁰ Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society, 1880-1990* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1; The creation of the Factory Acts began in 1833 banning children under the age of nine from working in steam or water powered textile mills. The 1833 act also limited 9-12 year old work week to 48 hours. The 1844 Act dictated that children could work half days but also had to attend school half day. It also lowered the age limit to 8. The 1874 Factory Act changed the age limits to 10-13 years old.

¹¹ Clark Nardinelli, "Child Labor and the Factory Acts," *The Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 4 (December 1, 1980): 739-755; See also Clark Nardinelli, *Child Labor and the Industrial Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) and Harry Hendrick and Economic History Society, *Children, Childhood, and English Society, 1880-1990* (Cambridge [England]; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

employees were forced to work.¹² Concern about working children led them to insist that children under 14 not be employed.¹³

The Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children was formed after the 1921 League of Nations International Conference on the Treatment of Women and Children. Meeting in Geneva, the Convention drafted the call for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children.¹⁴ In January 1922 the Council of League of Nations' Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children was placed under the League's Social Section, which dealt with international social issues.¹⁵ The Committee was largely concerned with women and children who had been trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Although the Committee lacked enforcement power, its representatives offered advice about social policy and implementation. Their goals included raising the legal age of marriage in various countries, shutting down houses of prostitution, securing homes for homeless children, and providing services for disabled children.

In 1924, the League of Nations approved the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child and formed the Child Welfare Committee to develop programs to improve children's lives.¹⁶ Eglantyne Jebb, an English school teacher, social reformer and the

¹² K. T. Samson, "ILO [International Labor Organization]," *Human Rights* 9, no. 2 (October 1, 1980): 32. This entity was established by the Treaty of Versailles.

¹³ Michael Huberman and Christopher M. Meissner, "Riding the Wave of Trade: The Rise of Labor Regulation in the Golden Age of Globalization," *The Journal of Economic History* 70, no. 3 (September 2010): 664.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁵ Snow, "The Program of the League of Nations Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People," 411. United States representative, William F. Snow served as the chair of the committee. Other members included an Englishman, a Frenchman, a Belgian, a Swede, an Uruguyan woman who was a physician and professor, an Italian woman, and a Japanese man.

¹⁶ "Health and Social Questions Section," 1946 1919, <http://biblio-archive.unog.ch/detail.aspx?ID=405>; and Paul Weindling, *International Health Organisations and Movements, 1918-1939* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

founder of the Save the Children organization, drafted the Declaration.¹⁷ The Declaration said that children should be provided with the resources to enjoy happy, prosperous lives; they should be cared for; they should receive relief services when needed; they should be trained to work, but sheltered from exploitation.¹⁸ The Declaration initially targeted European countries, but Jebb wanted to extend the protection of children to African and Asia.¹⁹ The League supported the mission and strongly urged governments to insist on protecting all children.²⁰ Jebb's mission had long-lasting effects, and motivated the 1931 conference on "The African Child".²¹

In 1925 conditions of women and children in the colonies led the League to focus on, various forms of slavery. In 1925 the League appointed the Temporary Slavery Commission for the purpose of putting an end to the traffic in African slaves. The Commission came to focus on children, child marriage and pawning, which it viewed as intertwined. The Commission conducted a survey and prepared a report on conditions throughout the colonies. The report resulted in promoting the Slavery Convention of 1926 that insisted that members work to end all forms of slavery, defined as "the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised."²²

¹⁷ Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights*, 110.

¹⁸ "Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child" (League of Nations, September 26, 1924), <http://www.un-documents.net/gdrc1924.htm>.

¹⁹ Evelyn Sharp, *The African Child; An Account of the International Conference on African Children*, Geneva (Negro Universities Press, 1970), 4.

²⁰ Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights*, 120.

²¹ Sharp, *The African Child*.

²² Suzanne Miers, "Contemporary Forms of Slavery," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 34, no. 3 (January 1, 2000): 716.

Social activists became increasingly involved with the League in its efforts to improve global working conditions for women and children.²³ A number of British women's activist became active in the Committee. In 1926, Eleanor Rathbone, feminist social reformer, independent member of the British Parliament, and an active member of the women's international organizations²⁴ served as an advisor to the Child Welfare Committee.²⁵ In 1928 Miss Margaret Ada Beney, a member of the research staff member of the National Industrial Conference Board of the United States, led an investigation into the labor conditions of women and children.²⁶ By 1929, Rathbone, Duchess Katharine Marjory, a British noble woman who served as the Scottish Unionist Party member of Parliament, and humanitarian Josiah Wedgewood formed the Committee for the Protection of Coloured Women in the Crown Colonies. With eight additional members, this Committee focused on clitoridectomy and bride price practices throughout the colonies. These individuals, and many others like them, persuaded the League members to take a more activist position in improving the livelihoods of women and children throughout the world.²⁷ In the course of doing its work, this committee forced the League to study conditions in Europe's colonies.²⁸

²³ National Industrial Conference Board, *The Work of the International Labor Organization*, Studies of International Problems (New York: National Industrial Conference Board, Inc, 1928), 1–2, <http://dds.crl.edu/CRLdelivery.asp?tid=15989>. Early iterations of the ILO included The Second Internationale, The International Conference for Labor Protection, and The International Association for Labor Legislation. The early creation of these institutions was a direct result of the Industrial Revolution (1750-1850) and the labor demands associated with it.

²⁴ Organizations included the International Council of Women and the International Women's Suffrage Alliance.

²⁵ Weindling, *International Health Organisations and Movements, 1918-1939*, 163.

²⁶ National Industrial Conference Board, *The Work of the International Labor Organization*, Studies of International Problems (New York: National Industrial Conference Board, Inc., 1928), 1–2, <http://dds.crl.edu/CRLdelivery.asp?tid=15989>.

²⁷ Susan Pedersen, "Metaphors of the Schoolroom: Women Working the Mandates System of the League of Nations," *History Workshop Journal* 66, no. 1 (September 21, 2008): 190.

²⁸ "The Covenant of the League of Nations," *The American Journal of International Law* 15, no. 1 (January 1, 1921): 12.

Child Brides and Pawning Practices

Marriage was perhaps the most contentious issue separating potential African converts, Christian missionaries, and British authorities. In Nigeria, the issue of ‘companionate’ versus ‘traditional’ marriage was a point of considerable conflict between the missionaries and the westernized Christian elites. In most African communities ‘traditional’ marriage refers to joined kinship groups. Missionaries and British authorities generally argued that marriage was a relationship between a man and a woman—a ‘companionate’ marriage—who had special rights as a couple and mutual obligations to one another. The British began interfering with marriage choices among the Yoruba in Western Nigeria as early as 1863,²⁹ and fifty years later, the *1914 Marriage Act* applied the same standards to Southeastern Nigeria.³⁰

Colonial authorities also intervened in marriage arrangements insofar as they affected pawns, slaves, and other young women and children in Igboland. Without considering the low level of literacy, the government issued a series of ordinances to regulate the age of consent. Girls could marry once they reached 12 years old, but they also had to sign a *Certificate of Betrothal*, and then a *Certificate of Marriage*, giving their written consent. Colonial authorities also wanted the bride and groom and both sets of parents to sign the marriage certificates to ensure that the marriage was legitimate.³¹

²⁹ Kristin Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos* (Cambridge University Press, 1985); See also Harinder Boparai, “The Customary and Statutory Law of Marriage in Nigeria,” *Rabels Zeitschrift Für Ausländisches Und Internationales Privatrecht / The Rabel Journal of Comparative and International Private Law* 46, no. 3 (January 1, 1982): 531.

³⁰ Boparai, “The Customary and Statutory Law of Marriage in Nigeria,” 532-3; For an even earlier history of British imposed marriage ordinances in its colonies, see Shirley Zabel, “The Legislative History of the Gold Coast and Nigerian Marriage Ordinances: I,” *Journal of African Law* 13, no. 2 (July 1, 1969): 64-79.

³¹ *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents.*

Since most of the population was illiterate, few knew what they were signing. And authorities had few if any ways to keep anyone from marrying their daughters to whomever they wished. Frustrated, officials then shifted their efforts to abolishing slavery and pawnship.

In 1932, prompted by the League of Nation's increased concern about slavery and pawnship,³² colonial authorities began to examine the ways in which Igbo, Efik and Ibibio-speaking people in Southeastern Nigeria exchanged children. Governor General Hugh Clifford ordered all district officers to respond to questionnaires detailing native laws and customs, including pawning practices in the Southeast.³³ The government sought information about pawnship especially with regard to their sex, age, consent, and financial arrangements between the parents or guardians. In addition, officials wanted to know what if anything differentiated pawns from slaves.³⁴ The responses varied, creating some confusion about the nature and conditions of child pawning. The responses to the questionnaires on "Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province of Nigeria: Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts"³⁵ listed marriage customs, pawning, child stealing, prostitution and various forms of slavery as ways that Nigerians mobilized child labor.³⁶

These surveys, among the few sources that assess pawnship district by district, revealed how the exchange of boy children differed from that of girl children, and

³² Kevin Shillington, *Encyclopedia of African History* (Routledge, 2013), 785.

³³ Dimitri van den Bersselaar, In Search of Igbo Identity: Language, Culture and Politics in Nigeria, 1900-1966, 178. District officer of Owerri Reginald Hargrove compiled and edited the responses.

³⁴ "Files of the Egba Judicial Council, Tribal Customs and Superstitions of Southern Nigeria (Pawning)," 1920s, CSO 26/1 #06827, Pawning of Children, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

³⁵ *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents.*

³⁶ For a full discussion on 'mobilizing juvenile labor' see Mariet Rodet, "Under the Guise of Guardianship and Marriage": Mobilizing Juvenile and Female Labor in the Aftermath of Slavery in Kayes, French Soudan, 1900-1939," in *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa*, 1st ed., eds. Benjamin N. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts, (Ohio University Press, 2012), 86-100.

documented the numerous ways in which girls were moved from one home to another. Methods of transfer included marriage, pawning, sale, and seizure. Girls left their natal homes primarily for marriage. However, a girl slave could have originally been given as a pawn in payment of brideprice for another bride. The following examples, collected from contemporary informants, show how easily a child could slip from one status to another.

Since marriage was an arrangement between two households comprised of junior and senior men and women, the father of the prospective groom generally approached the woman's family. In Onitsha, the father presented palm wine or gin and kola nuts as initial gifts, but never discussed the potential marriage during the initial meetings. The father continued to bring gifts to the bride's home, and after some time, he mentioned the prospective groom's intentions.³⁷ After extended negotiations, the future husband's family offered formal contract or "bride price" to the bride-to-be's family.³⁸

An informant in Owerri explained that during the 1920s, "In most cases, the bride [had to] consent to marry the groom before the bride's family accept[ed] the bride price."³⁹ Even if a groom acquired a wife through pawning, "brides [were] never [thought] to be for sale. The payments attached to the bride [were] just to fulfill certain traditional obligations as no amount could buy a child."⁴⁰ Even when a girl child was pawned, when she was old enough, she could marry the man of her choice provided that

³⁷ G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (Nonsuch Publishing, 2006), 70–1.

³⁸ G. I. Jones, *Annual Reports of Bende Division, South Eastern Nigeria, 1905-1912: With a Commentary* (African Studies Centre, University of Cambridge, 1986), 91.

³⁹ Anthony Nwadinko, Interview conducted by Ezeji Grace on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 21, 2012.

⁴⁰ Nelson Anyanele Ezeji, Interview conducted by Ezeji Grace on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 21, 2012.

the debt was repaid before the marriage.⁴¹ The British had a limited understanding of ‘how’ a future bride and groom and their respective parents came to a marriage agreement. They also did not fully appreciate how families planned for their daughters’ inevitable departure from their natal homes.

Most societies in Southeastern Nigeria practiced exogamy, and parents of young girls began planning their daughters’ departures when they were quite young. Therefore it may have been easy for an impoverished family to consider pawning one child when economic distress threatened the whole family’s survival. In Enugu, one elder explains that,

The belief of our people is that a girl belongs to somewhere else, that is to say, she will be married outside of the place, [the] compound, [where] she [was] born. But for boys, people want somebody who will take over for them, when they die....[someone] who will remain in the compound.⁴²

The same informant explained why men married more than one woman:

In those old days the men would have several farm lands and they knew [that][a single] woman could not cope with...[all the] farm work. That explains one of the reasons why people marry several wives so that they could be cutting the grass and doing all sort[s] of things that are meant for women.”⁴³

In a culture that positioned women as family members who left the natal village, families planned their future assessing their daughters as assets and liabilities. But personal qualities of the daughters affected the brideprice. For example, Nze Azubuike Azuka of

⁴¹ *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 92–3.

⁴² Chief Daniel E.N. Agbo, J.P., Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s,” August 8, 2012.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Calabar noted that his “mother was very beautiful and it was believed only she could attract a higher loan and thus was given out.”⁴⁴

Customarily, in contrast to the practice in Onitsha, in Owerri, a groom would begin the courtship process by bringing palm wine to the future bride’s home. An Owerri woman explained that:

When a man finds a girl he likes and proposes to her, and the girl agrees, he proceeds to the parents. The man goes for the first visit with a keg of palm wine tagged “*mmanya ajuju*” (meaning inquiry drink) where he makes his intentions known to the parents. On saying the purpose for the visit, the girl child would be called upon and asked if she knew the man. If she says yes, she will be told what the man’s mission [was]. She is then asked if they should drink palm wine, and, if she says yes, it [means] that she has consented to the proposal.⁴⁵

She goes on to describe the next stage of the proposal explaining that,

The man will be asked again to come on a market day... with another keg of palm wine [called], “*mmanya ezi-uka*” (meaning reality drink). [This is when] the groom will ...be given the list of traditional items required for the marriage. And once these items (bride price inclusive) are provided, he is said to have completed the marriage rites. They would be blessed by both families and asked to live peacefully amidst singing and dancing by family and friends.⁴⁶

The process, including extended negotiations with senior members of the girl’s family, always required the future bride’s consent.

The accounts from Aba, Owerri, Onitsha, and Calabar all illustrate the prolonged and complex courtship and betrothal processes required in the Southeast. In the market town of Aba, one senior woman recalled that as the father of the bride continued negotiations, over time the groom would present, “items like a keg of palm-wine, snuff, tubers of yam, hen and cocks,” and she further noted that by the 1920s and 1930s men

⁴⁴ Nze Azubuike Azuka, Interview conducted by Ifeoma Obijiaku on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s,” August 20, 2012.

⁴⁵ Mrs. Anthonia Nkechinyere Ibeawuchi, Interview conducted by Augustine Onyemauchekwuwu O. on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s,” August 25, 2012.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

also paid a sum of around £20.⁴⁷ Another informant from Calabar claimed that prospective grooms frequently worked for the family for an agreed upon period without wages before they let him marry their daughter.⁴⁸ Paying some form of brideprice was mandatory in most areas in the southeast, but the amount varied from place to place.⁴⁹ An Ibibio informant from Calabar claimed that, “people attach little to [the] brideprice. Once they find themselves in love, they get married with or without [observing] tradition[al practices]. They may have up to four children before thinking of going for traditional rights.” It seems that the Ibibio exercised flexibility in courtship practices and bride price agreements. However, if an Ibibio parent needed a loan, they would pawn a girl child with the understanding that the girl would be taken as a bride if they failed to repay the debt.⁵⁰ In other words, some Ibibio would accept the pawned child as a bride when the parents lacked money to repay the loan just as other Igbo, Ijo and Efik parents did during this time, even though they may not have originally required the payment of a bride price for a legitimate marriage arrangement. Nevertheless, for any parents to accept a bride price, the payment signified the symbolic and real value of the woman lost by the family offering her in marriage.

Girls also faced outright pawning when a father, uncle or older brother needed a loan and made the decision to pawn a child. Boys who were pawned assisted with farm

⁴⁷ Callista Okemmadu Ibgocheonwu, Interview conducted by Cynthia E. Uche on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s,” August 22, 2012.

⁴⁸ Kinsley Agu, Interview conducted by Ifeoma Obijiaku on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s,” August 21, 2012.

⁴⁹ Agbo, J.P., Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s.”

⁵⁰ Azuka, Interview conducted by Ifeoma Obijiaku on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s.”

work, worked as apprentices, or assisted with trade activities. Girl pawns worked on farms, performed household laborer, and cared for young children. And if the loans could not be paid, they ended up as the moneylenders' wives.

Nze Azubuike Azuka from Calabar explained that when his maternal grandparents pawned his mother, they sent her to a moneylender in Calabar. Having nine other children to provide for, with great sadness, they pawned his mother who was the most beautiful child in the family and would attract the largest sum.⁵¹ He claims that parents always hoped to retrieve their child, but sometimes pawning arrangements could last for years. In Amorji-Nike, Enugu, a man could pawn his daughter to a rich man and repay the loan when the girl decided to marry.⁵² The female pawn's future groom would then pay the brideprice to the moneylender, not the father. However, Chief Anthony Chibueze Agubaram of Calabar claims that during the 1920s when cash was in particularly short supply, children often became slaves. People in Calabar who suffered the loss of a child called the moneylenders "devil merchants."⁵³ Anthony Nwadinko, an elder born in Owerri in 1914, recalls the shame attached to having to pawn a child of either sex.⁵⁴

Another informant, a chief who lived in Awo Mbieri, Owerri, acquired one of his seven wives by accepting a female pawn. The chief's son, Ahanotu Marcellenus, recalls that the woman's father (not his own mother) "owed my father [a debt] and subsequently

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Elder Abraham Oloko, Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 2, 2012.

⁵³ Chief Anthony Chibueze Agubaram, Interview conducted by Ifeoma Obijiaku on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 22, 2012.

⁵⁴ Nwadinko, Interview conducted by Ezeji Grace on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s."

decided to give out their daughter's hand in marriage to my father. And the debt served as the dowry that my father would normally have had to pay."⁵⁵

The senior resident in Onitsha seemed to believe that people in Southwestern Nigeria were heartless about the need to trade their children in order to pay their taxes and other debts in the 1920s. Resident, H. T. B. Dew, offered his observation, which must be used with caution given its lack of information about Igbo society:

Among a very primitive people like these, among whom females are largely regarded as of such monetary value, where wives are merely bought and sold, where sexual intercourse both among the married and unmarried is to a large extent promiscuous from an early age, where ethical standards in the family affairs of family life do no(t) exist, it can hardly be a matter of surprise that the practice of pawning still remains. They would have no special customs about pawning – the pawn being merely regarded as a chattel of varying value.⁵⁶

His comments reveal erroneous assumptions based on racial hierarchies and sexual ideas about Igbo society. It was difficult for colonial representatives to imagine a community where females existed as both economic assets and valued family members. It is also untrue that there were no special customs assigned to pawning in the Southeastern Provinces. One Enugu resident claims that people practiced pawning in secret during the 1920s and 1930s and that "It is a business system. You don't advertise everything."⁵⁷ For example, it was normal for a father to pretend that he was going to the market or to visit a friend when he transported a child to be pawned. He and the child would visit the moneylender several days in a row and then one day the father returned home without her. Upon his return, he told his family that the child chose to remain with his friend, but

⁵⁵ Ahanotu Marcellenus, Interview conducted by Augustine Onyemauchekwuwu O. on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 23, 2012.

⁵⁶ National Archives, Onitsha, CSO 26/106827, Letter from Sgd. H.T.B. Dew, District Officer, Enugu Province (February 12, 1923), 37-9.

⁵⁷ Okolo, Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s."

he would not reveal the location of the child.⁵⁸ We do not know how such a subterfuge worked or what other members of the family thought had happened to the missing child.

Another Enugu elder from Nike explained a pawning practice that took place outside where both men wore no shoes. As a ritual that represented the father's desire to one day redeem his child, he claimed that the moneylender swore that he would keep his child safe. The debtor believed that "no man will change what he said. He is afraid of the land. If you agree upon something and you disobey it, the land will kill you."⁵⁹ The Igbo believed that if you made a promise to someone while standing barefoot on the land, you would be cursed if you did not honor the agreement.

Most parents did not marry off or pawn their children without thoughtful consideration of customary processes. However, there were instances when another family member rather than the child's parent, sold the child without her parent's consent. For example, when strapped for funds, a father's older brother or uncle might sell a young girl under the guise of collecting a brideprice for her.⁶⁰ Mrs. Anthonia Nkechinyere Ibeawuchi of Ikeduru, Owerri, tells the story of one of her friends who married the son of a moneylender. Even though the practice of giving a girl as a bride in return for a payment from creditor was frowned upon, "parents had no choice [but] to engage in [the practice of pawning] since their deteriorated economic situation could not let them solve their [own financial] problem."⁶¹ One informant from Amorji, Enugu, explains that when a parent offered a female child in return for payment, they would say,

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Oloko, Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s."

⁶⁰ *Annual Report of Owerri 1921*, 42.

⁶¹ Ibeawuchi, Interview conducted by Augustine Onyemauchekwu O. on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s."

“You have helped me, use this female child. Marry her for the good job you’ve done for us.”⁶² This commitment, tantamount to selling the child, revealed that while pawning was an accepted practice, ‘selling’ a child into a marriage was not.

In patrilineal societies, fathers often sold their children in secrecy because if the mother’s father, uncle or brother found out, they would, “go to the man and make him produce the child or the man would be banished. Some people have been forced to go and retrieve the child because of pressure.”⁶³ Another elder from Amorji-Nike, Enugu Abraham Oloko stressed that the people of Nike, the major slave-trading community in Northern Igboland, never sold their own children into slavery. He claims that, “Selling is an abomination,” but pawning was acceptable.⁶⁴ However, the elder admitted that people often bought children from outside of Nike. He explained that child dealers would kidnap children from outside of Nike and bring them to the rich men to sell them. A Nike man would never ask whether or not a child had been stolen, but would accept the child when the child dealer claimed that he was offering his own children. The children were most likely used for agricultural labor.⁶⁵

Outright seizure is the final way a child was removed from her home. This occurred when child dealers stole children. The kidnapper sometimes kept the child himself, forcing the child to work in agriculture, petty trade, domestic services, or

⁶² HRH Igwe Dr. Titus Okolo, Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s,” August 2, 2012.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Elder Oloko, Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s.” It is important to note that while many societies in Southeastern Nigeria pawned sons and daughters, Abraham of Nike claims that the Nike people never pawned boys.

⁶⁵ W. R. G. Horton, “The Ohu System of Slavery in a Northern Ibo Village-Group,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 24, no. 4 (October 1, 1954): 311–336. Horton claims that many of the children came from Agbaja.

prostitution. Some child dealers also acted as middlemen and eventually passed the child along to a willing buyer in a different region. One Chief Ugwuefi Reuben from Enugu attributes child stealing in the 1920s and 1930s to the crisis in the colonial economy - plunging export prices (especially for palm products), increased import products and the implementation of direct taxation.⁶⁶

In 1920, a woman from the Aro town of Bende complained that a child who had been kidnapped had recently appeared in Aba, a major market center. The child testified that a family member took her and gave her to Abraham Hart, a trader at Bonny. Upon questioning, Hart produced a signed marriage certificate. The District Officer of Aba believed this was either a case of child selling or pawning. In any case, the transaction was completed without the mother's consent. Even so, Hart could not be easily prosecuted because someone in the girl's family had agreed to the marriage transaction.⁶⁷ The District Officer of Owerri claimed that, "relatives of children stolen are often employed by agents to entice the children from their homes," thus making the transaction an illegal business exchange rather than a kidnapping."⁶⁸

Reports about female child dealing proliferated as taxes increased and prices for palm kernels and palm oil dropped in the 1920's. In 1921 and 1923 the District Officer of Okigwe reported that,

It is worthy of note that there are signs of Slave Dealing being on the wane. But

⁶⁶ Chief Ugwuefi Reuben, Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 5, 2012.

⁶⁷ E. Falk, "Letter from E. Falk, District Officer at Aba to J. Ashley, Assistant District Officer at Bende 'Cases of Slave Dealing,'" November 7, 1920, 107, OkiDist 4/2/1, Nigeria National Archive Enugu. It is unknown the exact relation that Hart had with a girl. The archival material also does not indicate where Hart was born.

⁶⁸ Major Stevenson, "Letter from District Officer at Owerri, Major Stevenson to the Senior Resident, Owerri Province," June 17, 1933, NAE C136 Child Stealing Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

there is an enormous amount of trade – in truth Slave Dealing – carried on in young girls, but convictions are practically impossible on account of Dowry being legal. These girls are bought – so called married and Dowry paid up country and then taken to the coast and passed on at an enormous profit in so called Dowry.⁶⁹ The main form this takes in Owerri – apart from stealing children in the Onicha country – is the traffic in young children or even young women under the guise of marriage. The New Calabars are fond of that trick. They promise large dowries and pay little or nothing. On getting the woman to Degema they are sold and married off.⁷⁰

The regional variations in child trafficking are revealed in the distinction between Owerri and the stealing of children in ‘Onicha’ (Onitsha) country, the area where Nike is located. What this indicates is that the areas from which the children came and the areas to which the children went had not essentially changed since the nineteenth century.

Evidence of this type of female child dealing existed at various levels in specific towns. In 1923, an Awka chief issued a £20 fine upon a man, and, in return, he pawned his seven-year old daughter.⁷¹ The chief was expected to keep the child until she was old enough to marry, but instead he sold her. Cases such as these continued to be a concern for the colonial officials and their responses were just as varied as were the child dealing accounts.

Colonial Response to Child Dealing

Owerri’s District Officer reported that the majority of child dealing was in young girls, but it was impossible to convict predators due to the nature of the exchange and its relationship to marriage contracts. The ability to seamlessly transform a moneylending

⁶⁹ *Owerri Provincial Annual Report for 1921*, 1921, 42, CSO 26/03928, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Agbala itinerant blacksmiths dealt in slaves and it is likely that the chief intended to sell the girl to a blacksmith.

contract into one of marriage became a point of contention or of frustration for British officials. If the debt remained unpaid, the loan given to the debtor was then considered a bride price payment, and the girl became a wife.⁷² One British official noted, again with considerable misinterpretation and ignorance, that:

The case of pawning female children is somewhat different, as if the debtor does not redeem his daughter within a reasonable time, she would be liable to be married by her master to the man of his choice, but only with the consent of one of the child's parents or guardians, and the marriage dowry received would be taken, or part of it, in settlement of the debt, the parents of the girl very seldom objected to the marriage, as they know that sooner or later his debt would have to be paid, and it was immaterial to him whom his daughter married, as long as he received what he considered a fair dowry fee. It must be remembered that women and female children have no say in these matters, and are only considered a man's chattels, which he can do pretty well what he likes with.⁷³

The Resident officer, Frank Hive, misrepresents the realities of pawning practices and marriage customs. As already noted, girls were sold outright or, as pawns, married without their parents' consent because their parents could not pay warrant chiefs and moneylenders in the 1920s. A pawned girl could decide whom she married provided that her future husband paid a brideprice that covered the debt. Moreover, British officials did not understand the cultural and social implications of being a slave or being married to a slave.⁷⁴ Igbo fathers determined who their daughters married and rejected marriages to certain kinds of slaves called *Osu*. Anthropologist Margaret M. Green noted that an *Osu* was person who was dedicated to a shrine, and who lived in a segregated area, where

⁷² Archival and primary sources, and informants suggest that there were no fixed time limits the time a girl pawn would be held before she was taken as a wife. In each case, the prevailing personal situation of both the moneylender and debtor determined the outcome of the pawning transaction.

⁷³ Frank Hive, *Report on the Pawning of Children in the Southern Provinces, Nigeria, as Called for by His Honour Lieutenant-Governor, Southern Provinces, Vide Secretary Southern Provinces' Confidential Memo No. C.2/23*, January 17, 1923, CSO 26/1 #06827. Vol. I. Pawning 1920s, NNAI.

⁷⁴ Carolyn A. Brown, "Testing the Boundaries of Marginality: Twentieth-Century Slavery and Emancipation Struggles in Nkanu, Northern Igboland, 1920-29," *The Journal of African History* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 53.

he devoted his time to performing rituals for the family. An *Osu* was considered an ‘untouchable’ because of his ritual power. Even today a freeborn-*Osu* marriage is rare and still considered taboo, as it was in Owerri as late as the 1930s.⁷⁵

Colonial officials, missionaries and members of the League of Nations each had different motivations for changing patterns of marriage in the Southeast. The League’s members, all colonial powers, were mostly concerned with what seemed to be the child’s lack of ‘agency’ in choosing when and whom to marry. League representatives in particular wanted to ensure that every woman who was married had given her consent.⁷⁶ Missionaries tried to transform marriage practices because they wanted to increase Christian conversion and reduce the sacri-political power that elder men held over younger men. Of course, missionaries also wanted to totally transform Nigerian society by teaching Africans about the ‘evils’ of polygyny and sanctity of monogamous, companionate relationships. Even so, there was no easy way of transforming indigenous marriage practices as they related to the pawning of very young girls.

Colonial authorities also had a difficult time intervening in many moneylending arrangements because other associations held authority over credit matters. Reverend Thomas John McKenzie, a Primitive Methodist minister, recounted his dealings in Efik Ekpe society between 1919-1921:

We have previously stated that in olden days the Egbo and other societies had great power, and this was exercised at times in relation to debt. The creditor would consult Egbo and the society would fix a day [for] payment, failing fulfillment a fine of one goat and four bottles of gin would be imposed. Raids on the family of the debtor used to take place and anything was taken – cow, goats, sheep, women-folk whether they actually belonged to the man or not. A man might give one of

⁷⁵ M. M Green, *Ibo Village Affairs*, (Praeger, 1964), 158.

⁷⁶ Egon Schwelb, “Marriage and Human Rights,” *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 12, no. 3 (July 1, 1963): 338.

the family to be a slave either in payment or until such time a debt was paid.⁷⁷ An *Ekpe* secret society that served as a mutual fund and enforced debt repayment during the transatlantic slave trade, continued to force debtors to repay moneylenders in the 1920s.⁷⁸

The League of Nations agreed that indigenous marriage customs sometimes camouflaged female child dealing. However, in 1914, the British laws that attempted to codify native marriage customs in Nigeria, in effect, enabled child dealers to traffic children and to avoid prosecution by showing ‘legal’ documents.⁷⁹ Martin Chanock argues that ‘customary law’ was far more dynamic than the British recognized since it involved a negotiation between what we would call ‘stake holders’, and those who had influence over a girl’s life. By codifying the law, colonialists ‘froze’ the law in time, and inhibited the possibility of personal negotiations.⁸⁰ Additionally, the British had little or no means to engage with local people about what practices *were* customary. In other cases, officials also found that child dealers used false marriage certificates as ‘certificates of insurance’ that allowed them to travel with young girls and falsely claim that their parents had given permission for the girls to marry.⁸¹

Some colonial officials did not want to intervene in cases where pawning directly overlapped with marriage arrangements. In fact, the District Officer of Warri advised

⁷⁷ Rev. T. McKenzie, “A Few Words of Interest Relating to Missionary Life in Southern Nigeria, West Africa 1919-1921,” June 1922, 126, MMS 1204, SOAS.

⁷⁸ Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, “The Business of Slaving: Pawnship in Western Africa, C. 1600-1810,” *The Journal of African History* 42, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 67-89.

⁷⁹ Report by Mr. O.W. Firth, District Officer in Charge of Okigwi Division, Pawning of Children, January 31st, 1923 in *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents, 1922, 73, CSO 26/1/074 Vol. I, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan*. Ibid., 87.

⁸⁰ Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 4.

⁸¹ *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*.

that, “It is difficult to say how the betrothal question should be dealt with and I feel inclined to recommend that no further steps be taken to make it illegal.”⁸² In 1923 some Residents even compared the female pawn favorably to the domestic servant in England “who is placed by her mother in service where there is no one to see that the mistress does not overwork the girl and that she is properly and sufficiently fed and decently housed. This domestic is probably in a little more helpless position than the female pawn... .” Given the rise of Britain’s middleclass where domestic servants were young girls entrusted to middle class households, it is not surprising that he used this analogy.⁸³

The Resident also compared pawns to pauper children in Great Britain and assured his superiors that the pawn, unlike the pauper child, is never very far from his or her family. Parents and relatives allegedly visit them, and employers allegedly permitted children to return home for holiday festivals.⁸⁴ Just as officials compared slaves to serfs during the transatlantic slave trade, colonial officials often painted rosy pictures of pawning.⁸⁵ Contrary to the opinions above, an informant from Owerri recalled that local people sometimes went further and showed contempt for the pawns themselves. He argued that, “in most cases, pawned children are treated with contempt and are looked upon as instruments to be used and discarded at will....[P]arental affections emanating from a family do... not extend to pawned children.”⁸⁶

⁸² Mr. Butler, District Officer of Warri, *I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 1923, 93, CSO 26/1/074 Vol. I, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

⁸³ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁸⁴ “Letter from W.A. Ross, Senior Resident, Oyo Province to Secretary of Southern Provinces,” March 14, 1923, 26–7, CSO/26/1 #06827 Vol. I Pawning.

⁸⁵ Frank Wesley Pitman, “The Treatment of the British West Indian Slaves in Law and Custom,” *The Journal of Negro History* 11, no. 4 (October 1, 1926): 616.

⁸⁶ Nwadinko, Interview conducted by Ezeji Grace on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s.”

Southeastern Nigerians continued to find ways to use the institution of marriage to disguise forms of female child dealing, and only in the most obvious cases of abuse roused Colonial officials to intervene. For instance, an Ijaw man named Bob Onana was caught holding a twelve-year-old Igbo girl, Uche Abeaku, in his canoe in Isu. When questioned about the girl, Onana claimed that her father, Maduekwe, agreed to offer her in marriage for a £20 bride price. When questioned, Madueke said that Onana only paid him half the requested amount after which he had had to marry off his daughter to “gain money.”⁸⁷ But without a marriage certificate and because neither party spoke the other’s language, it was impossible to prove that a ‘real’ marriage had been contracted. According to the colonial perspective, the father had sold the child. In this case, authorities prosecuted Onana.

Conclusion

The customary practices of pawning, illicit marriages, and slave dealing were intertwined, and continued to arouse the interest of colonial authorities, missionaries, and international organizations. They were especially interested in the ways in which indigenous people incorporated children into each of these practices. However, as the League of Nations pressed Colonial officials to investigate and stop child pawning practices that permitted young girls and women to be married against their will, they met marked resistance.

As hard as League members and other humanitarian groups worked, little had been done during the 1920s to end child dealing, especially as it related to child

⁸⁷ “Letter from the Chief Inspector to the Commissioner of Police at Port Harcourt,” February 3, 1927, OkiDist 4/9/42 Slave Dealing, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

marriages. The lack of understanding about Igbo-speaking peoples' customs and the introduction of onerous tax payments undermined any attempt to stop child dealing. However, the women of the Southeast were making their concerns heard and the women of the West were still listening.

Chapter Six – Child Trafficking in the Aftermath of the 1929 Women’s War

Although the British carried out many investigations into the causes of the 1929 Women’s War and ended their efforts to tax local women, the prevailing economic conditions lead Nigerians to continue trafficking children in the Southeast.¹ Assistant Commissioner of Police, S.P. George, believed that male taxation continued to be a major cause of child trafficking, but the Great Depression (1929-1939) contributed to the disastrous social conditions that fostered child trafficking.

When the stock market crashed, so did male income, which largely depended on the price of palm products. Not only were young men unable to pay taxes, but many could not pay bride prices.² This caused a deep crisis in village society because marriage was the precondition for a man’s social maturity, ability to participate in village government, and ultimately their ability to survive as farmers. So despised was bachelorhood that the word for an adult unmarried man was *oko okporo* meaning a male woman.³ Economic hardship also contributed to ongoing child dealing practices. For example, a police constable testified about how a man who could not afford a bride price stole his female cousin and sold her in order to earn the funds necessary to marry.⁴ Another man, Okpala Eheakandu from Umuahia testified about why he sold his own daughter.

About two weeks ago I borrowed from one Nwachiku Ocho of Inyishi the sum of 3/- that I used in paying taxation and the brother of my wife by name of Osuji

¹ S.P. George, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing-Final Report up to 15th July, 1935*, Okige, Nigeria, July 17, 1935, 153, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

² George, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing Investigation*, 110.

³ Victor Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, First Edition (Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1965), 86.

⁴ “Rex Vs Mbakwe, Child Stealing, 1929,” November 1929, Okidist 4/11/46 : Rex Vs Mbakwe, Child Stealing, 1929, Nigeria National Archive, Enugu.

Egbubuza [to] whom I owed £2.10/- [a] part of dowry. ...[When] I see all these trouble I said within myself that I will take my daughter by name Ukacho and sell her in order to obtain the money so as to pay the man whom I can borrow money from.⁵

He decided that selling his daughter was the most efficient way to deal with his debts.

Apparently the plot involved both parents because the police arrested Okpala's wife when she attempted to deliver their two-year old daughter to the Aro man who agreed to purchase her. The incident also indicated the legacy of slave-trading sites and customs, as Umuahia was a slaving site under Aro control. Personal accounts such as these speak to the harsh economic realities that Nigerians faced and the decisions parents made to improve their financial circumstances. As Nigerians continued to traffic women and children, international concern about the welfare of women and children continued to attract the attention of the Colonial Office.

The League of Nations and other humanitarian groups continued to seek the cooperation of colonial officials to end the trafficking of children during the Great Depression.⁶ But fear of further reducing Nigeria's economic capacity, must have led Southeastern Nigerians and colonial officials to recognize the personal cost of ending domestic servitude.⁷ As a result, the trade in women and children and the fight against that trade continued throughout the 1930s.⁸ But defining women and children as

⁵ "Statement Given by Okpala Eheakandu of Umuahia Township," March 18, 1934, 141, 127, Okidist 11/1/214 : Child Stealing and Slave Dealing, 1932-1934, Nigeria National Archive Enugu. It should also be noted that men of marriageable age also pawned themselves during the mid-1930s in order to pay the colonial taxes.

⁶ I. *Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 1922, CSO 26/1/074 Vol. I, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

⁷ Moses E Ochon, *Colonial Meltdown Northern Nigeria in the Great Depression* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2009), 2; M Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*. (Harvard: Harvard College, 2000), 322-8.

⁸ S.P. George, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing Investigation* (Bende, Owerri, February 4, 1935), C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

‘protected groups’ suggested that the international community and the Colonial Office did not understand that women and children also participated in human trafficking. Some children fooled other children into being caught and acted as ‘watchmen’ along the trade routes. In addition, women were intricately involved in producing exports for the global economy. They provided the majority of the labor for processing palm oil and had a recognized monopoly in the marketing of palm kernels. Thus, as trade declined and the price of exports plummeted during the 1930s, women sought out other ways to earn income, often assuming the same options as men. Large traders engaged in moneylending with high interest rates, employed pawned labor, and sexually exploited young girls. Some women in Igboland were just as involved in the child dealing trade as men and could often disguise the sale by claiming that the girls were their daughters. Nevertheless, the international effort to protect women and children continued in the 1930s.

In 1930 Eleanor Rathbone, a social reformer and active member of women’s various international organizations,⁹ and her counterparts in the League of Nations’ Advisory Committee on Child Welfare¹⁰ pressed the British government to allow women to join the Colonial Office and the Slavery Commission of the League of Nations.¹¹ Like Rathbone, Mrs. Maria Ogilvie Gordon had long been committed to improving the condition of women and children. In 1916 Gordon served as the President of the National Council of Women, and then she became the first vice-president of the International

⁹ Organizations included the International Council of Women and the International Women’s Suffrage Alliance; Eleanor Rathbone was a feminist social reformer, an independent member of the British Parliament, and an active member of the women’s international organizations.

¹⁰ Weindling, *International Health Organisations and Movements, 1918-1939*, 163.

¹¹ Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 246–9.

Council of Women in 1920.¹² She also formed the Council for the Representation of Women of the League of Nations in 1919 and became the chair of the Mothercraft and Child Welfare Exhibition Committee between 1919 and 1921 and in 1930.¹³ In 1930 Gordon submitted a memorandum to the League of Nations asserting that she intended to bring a deputation of women to the next League meeting to consider the issue of slavery in the colonies.¹⁴

The group she led consisted of some of Britain's most prominent women activists. There was Lady Mary Gertrude Emmott, the convenor of the Parliamentary and Legislation Committee of the National Council of Women¹⁵ and a member of the African Society.¹⁶ She also included Miss Chrystal Macmillan, a suffragist and the first female barrister-at-law to plead a case in front of the House of Lords. Macmillan was also known for championing women's marital rights.¹⁷ Miss Majorie Chave Collisson, a co-

¹² "Dame Maria Ogilvie Gordon: Geologist and Prominent Worker for Women's Causes," *The Glasgow Herald*, June 26, 1939. As a specialist in geology and paleontology, Gordon was the first woman to receive a PhD from the University of Munich.

¹³ Nina Boyle, "Council for the Representation of Women in the League of Nations Invitation to the Conference on Women and Slavery," 1930, CO 323/1071/8 Slavery: Slavery of Women, Public Records Office, London. Affiliated Societies included National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland, National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, National Union of Teachers, National Women's Citizen's Association, Association of Assistant Mistresses, Association of Head Mistresses, Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, Association of Teachers of Domestic Subjects, Association of Post Office Women Clerks, Social and Political Alliance, Conservative Women's Reform Association, Women Civil Servants, Society for Women's Service, Mother's Union, Nursing Association, Open Door Council, Freedom League, and other groups; "Dame Maria Ogilvie Gordon: Geologist and Prominent Worker for Women's Causes."

¹⁴ Nina Boyle, "Council for the Representation of Women in the League of Nations. Annual Report, 1929-30 (League of Nations, 1930)," CO 323/1071/8 Slavery: Slavery of Women, Public Records Office, London.

¹⁵ Stefan Slater, "Lady Astor and the Ladies of the Night: The Home Office, the Metropolitan Police and the Politics of the Street Offences Committee, 1927-28," *Law and History Review* 30, no. 2 (May 1, 2012): 541.

¹⁶ The Africa society was founded in 1901 to commemorate the work of Mary Kingsley, a writer who traveled throughout Africa in the 1890s and encouraged the study of Africa in the U.K. "Dinner of the Society," *Journal of the Royal African Society* 25, no. 100 (July 1, 1926): 359.

¹⁷ Chrystal Macmillan, "Nationality of Married Women: Present Tendencies," *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law* 7, no. 4 (January 1, 1925): 142-154.

founder of British Commonwealth League,¹⁸ who sought to promote “citizenship throughout the Empire,” also joined her.¹⁹ Mrs. Margery Corbett Ashby, a long time British suffragist and liberal politician, found ways to contribute to their campaigns.²⁰ All of these women worked to improve women’s welfare, uphold the rights of women and children, and advance reforms for women and children all over the Empire. The delegation was especially eager to have the League form a Slavery Commission and appoint a female representative to the Colonial Office to oversee the wellbeing of British and indigenous women throughout the colonies.²¹ In 1929, the women had attempted to persuade the League to reconstitute the Slavery Commission in order to investigate all forms of slavery. Their goal was to amend the 1926 Slavery Convention’s definition of slavery, which read:

Slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised. The slave trade includes all acts involved in the capture, acquisition or disposal of a person with intent to reduce him to slavery; all acts involved in the acquisition of a slave with a view to selling or exchanging him; all acts of disposal by sale or exchange of a slave acquired with a view to being sold or exchanged; and, in

¹⁸ Fiona Paisley, “Citizens of Their World: Australian Feminism and Indigenous Rights in the International Context, 1920s and 1930s,” *Feminist Review* no. 58 (April 1, 1998): 78.

¹⁹ Jill Roe, “Collison, Marjorie Chave (1887–1982),” in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University), accessed February 12, 2014, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/collison-marjorie-chave-12338>. Collison was born to English parents in 1887 in Indiana, United States of America. She moved with her parents to Tanzania and then to South Australia on account of her father being a clergyman. In 1916 She attended the University of Sydney and won multiple honors for her historical research and by 1916 she had become known as a “pestilential feminist.” During the mid-1920s she worked on behalf of indigenous populations in India and Australia and would later become a member of the International Alliance of Women and the chair for its Equal Moral Standard Committee.

²⁰ “Margery Corbett Ashby,” *Spartacus Educational*, 2003-1997, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Washby.htm>. At the age of 18, Ashby and her sister formed the group Younger Suffragists in 1900. It was in 1901 when she attended Newnham College in Cambridge that she joined the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies and a year later she became the Constitutional Suffrage Movement’s secretary. She also served as the secretary for the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies in 1907 and then united with the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in 1909. In the meantime she had formed the Liberal Suffrage group with her sister and mother. In 1919, she attended the Versailles Peace Conference as a member of the International Alliance of Women and was elected president of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in 1923.

²¹ *Council for the Representation of Women in the League of Nations. Annual Report, 1929-30.*

general, every act of trade or transport in slaves.²²

The new definition would highlight pawning practices as they related to bride price payments and would make illegal the selling or pawning of girls and women because it included the “status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership” were “exercised.”²³ For the women of the League, a female pawn’s status was no better than that of a slave.

It is also clear that these women did not recognize the political institutions of Nigerian women and the choices that they could make in marital arrangements. Rathbone claimed that Nigerian fathers and husbands considered women to be their property, and that, “while no doubt ‘bride price’ often operates as an inducement to the husband to treat his wife properly, it in fact leads to abuses of the most revolting character.”²⁴ She suggested that providing educational services would counteract what she deemed to be the unfair treatment of women and children.²⁵ While outwardly sympathetic, the Secretary of State, Sydney Webb, (Lord Passfield) a Fabian socialist, explained that any forceful attempt to change indigenous marriage practices would be costly and that it would be “impossible” for any British officer to “regulate the daily lives and customs of the people in detail.” Webb claimed that native law rather than colonial law regulated marriage practices and argued that changes would occur over time.²⁶

²² “Slavery Convention: Signed at Geneva on 25 September 1926. Entry into Force: 9 March 1927, in Accordance with Article 12” (United Nations: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, September 25, 1926),

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/SlaveryConvention.aspx>.

²³ *Council for the Representation of Women in the League of Nations. Annual Report, 1929-30.*

²⁴ *Notes of a Meeting Held in the Secretary of State’s Room at 11.a.m. on Tuesday, the 8th of April, 1930* (League of Nations, April 8, 1930), 3, CO 323/1071/8 Slavery: Slavery of Women, Public Records Office, London.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5. Lord Passfield’s proper name was Sydney Webb.

However, in March 1930, his office received numerous letters from the various women's associations belonging to the Council requesting an audience to discuss the condition of native women throughout the Colony.²⁷

Women's groups also registered their concerns about the welfare of children. In June 1931 Save the Children International convened a conference in Geneva to discuss the fate of 'the African child'. Missionaries, government representatives, educators, welfare workers and business operators who had worked in various capacities with African children were invited to suggest methods to improve their livelihoods. The conference conveners discussed options for ending child labor and pawning practices in Africa.²⁸ The continued pressure from this and other international groups spawned an investigation into the continuing trade in children and slaves. It is remarkable that the treatment of African children would attract the support of such a prominent group of women reformers.

In 1933, a result from pressure from the League, the Secretary for the Southern Provinces of Nigeria began a 27-month-long campaign against child stealing and slave dealing in the provinces of Owerri, Onitsha, Ogoja and Calabar that he administered.²⁹ British officials were aware that Igbo continued to engage in child trafficking,³⁰ but the goal of this investigation was to develop a comprehensive understanding of child dealing networks, primary actors, and the reason why children were sold, pawned, and stolen.³¹

²⁷ "Slavery: Slavery of Women," 1930, PRO CO 323/1071/8, Public Records Office, London.

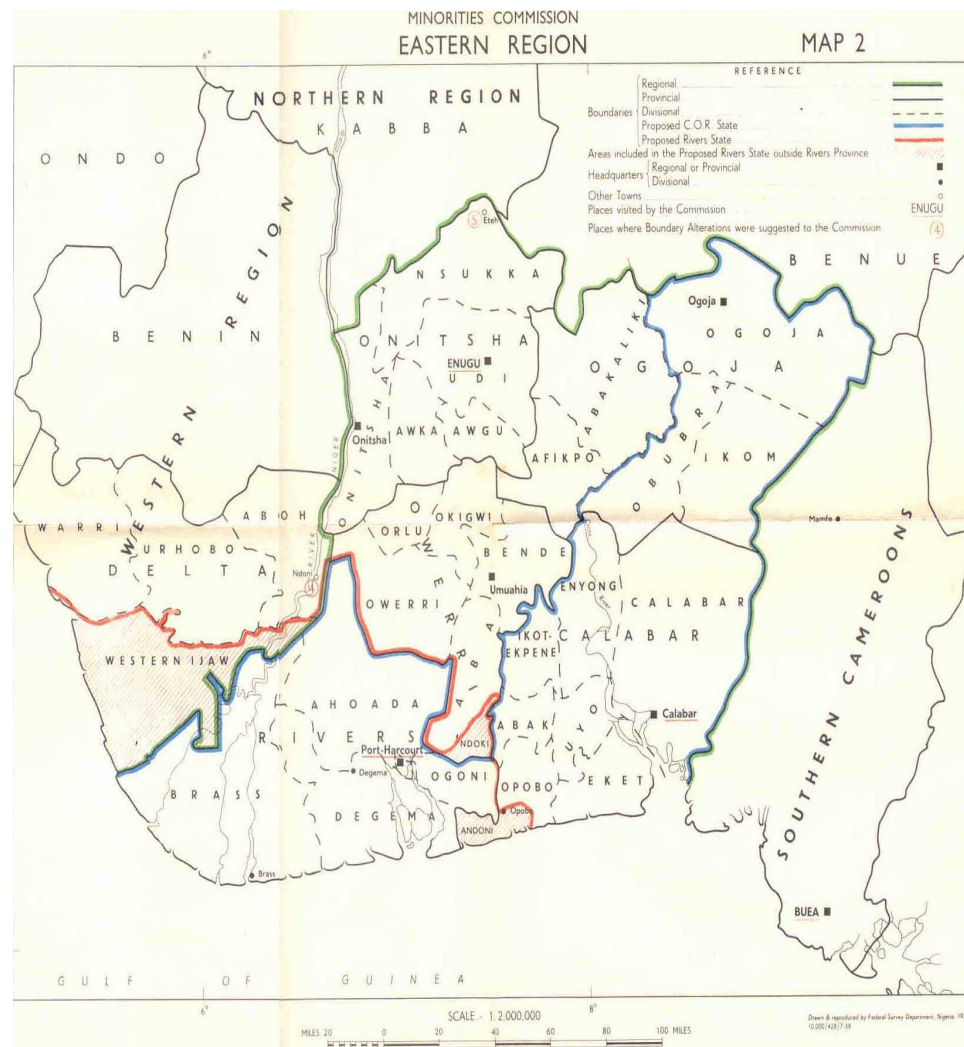
²⁸ Evelyn Sharp, *The African Child; An Account of the International Conference on African Children*, Geneva (Negro Universities Press, 1970), 76.

²⁹ George, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing Investigation*.

³⁰ C.R. Bell, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing. Monthly Report, September, 1934* (Port Harcourt, Owerri Province, October 1, 1934), 67-88, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

³¹ J. W. Garden, *Slave Dealing. Report for December, 1933: The Assistant Inspector General of Police, Southern Provinces, through the Commissioner of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt* (Port

Map 1.9 Southeastern Provinces



Source: <http://www.zum.de/whkmla/region/westafrica/xnigeria.html>

By the fall of 1933, the Assistant Inspector-General of Police of the Southern Provinces, G.N. Faux-Powell, appointed Major J.W. Garden to oversee the investigation into slave dealing in the Southeast³² in the aforementioned Provinces.³³ District Officers

Harcourt, Owerri Province, January 5, 1934), 41, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

³² "Letter from the Assistant Inspector-General of Police, Southern Provinces, Enugu to the Commissioner of Police, M.F. Powell, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt," October 16, 1933, 13, NAE C136, Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

and Residents investigated how traffickers acquired children, identified the routes travelled, and discovered the ways in which they disposed of children.³⁴ The resulting reports illuminate many aspects of child dealing during the 1930s. Officials learned how traffickers captured children from interviews with such children.

I came to market “ORIE UGURE” a man called Ukuebula [told] me that I should come and look [at] nice beads and earrings that he would present me. I was then tied in a sack and carried away on [a] cycle to Oguta and from there to Okugba in a house of one Ogidebo, a middle man of slave dealer.³⁵

I was on top of a tree in the station, [and] one Jack of Umunze of Awka Division came and told me that the Police man said that I should go with him... to bring tobacco. I agreed and followed him to Umunze town [where] he kept me in the house[.] When night come ...Jack put me into the basket and carried me to a certain woman called Mbeko at Uga town in Awka Division.³⁶

About 5 years ago one Ume Ogarakwe of Lokpa and one Kabuku of Aro Chuku residing in Agwa that time came to our place when all the people had gone to farm. Ume told me [Oduomyenma of Okigwe] to come and join them to go and visit a woman of my father’s relative at Ngodo. I followed them passed Ngodo to a place called Uburu. We slept two nights on the way to Uburu. We entered the house of a certain chief... and the chief paid them some money dowry on my head. After 5 months Ume ...came one night and met me where I was playing with other girls and took me away... He took me to New Calabar to the house of one chief...[H]e received £10 from him and left me there for 7 months.³⁷

Even though parents continually warned their children to be wary of child stealers, these stories illustrate how easily traffickers could manipulate children into following them.³⁸

Oduomyenma’s account includes references to several familiar elements: the role of the

³³ “Letter from the Assistant Inspector-General of Police, Southern Provinces, Enugu to the Commissioner of Police, M.F. Powell, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt.”

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ “Lolo Alias Obuta Statement,” March 1932, 6, Okidist 11/1/214 : Child Stealing and Slave Dealing, 1932-1934, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

³⁶ “The Statement of a Girl Named Mgboli Okofo,” June 24, 1932, 28, Okidist 11/1/214 : Child Stealing and Slave Dealing, 1932-1934, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

³⁷ “Statement given by Oduomyenma of Okigwe,” March 31, 1934, 129, Okidist 11/1/214 : Child Stealing and Slave Dealing, 1932-1934, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

³⁸ *Igbo Worlds: An Anthology of Oral Histories and Historical Descriptions* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978).

Aro, the use of bicycles, the involvement of a policeman, and the sale to a chief. It also shows how sometimes child dealers stole a child from someone to whom they had previously sold the child. The child dealing business was especially ruthless as Southeastern Nigerians felt the deep effects of the Depression.

Between 1930 and 1936 investigations into child dealing revealed that in addition to pawning, many children were stolen and sold.³⁹ And yet some officials continued to try to disguise the practice. J.E.W. Flood, the Colonial Office administrator in charge of Nigerian affairs,⁴⁰ claimed that the Colonial Office had always discouraged pawning practices and that by 1930 “no children [were] taken as pawns,” and that “native custom never permitted the pawning of a girl.” Flood insisted that girls and women never suffered any abuse as a result of pawning. Moreover, he maintained that the penalty of imprisonment for up to seven years deterred people from pawning children.⁴¹ His letter, meant for the Council for the Representation of Women in the League of Nations, completely dismissed the idea that girls were bought and sold under the guise of marriage.

Just as in the 1920s, officials acknowledged that child pawnship existed, but insisted that the practice remained relatively harmless. The District Officer at Bende, a core area for slave trading, claimed that even though a girl might be pawned while she was quite young, she could always marry if her future husband repaid the debt. In the case of boy children, he argued that although the practice was considered a “criminal offence,” it was “not always detrimental to the child’s happiness.” The officer alleged

³⁹ George, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing Investigation*, 110.

⁴⁰ Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Duke University Press, 2011), 134.

⁴¹ *Notes of a Meeting Held in the Secretary of State’s Room at 11.a.m. on Tuesday, the 8th of April, 1930.*

that he observed “several instances in which this has been done and [I] have usually found that the boy is better treated than he would have been had he lived with his impecunious parents.”⁴² Those concerned primarily with the colonial economy frequently held such sentiments. Since the District Officer of Bende was responsible for generating revenue, he understood that some parents could only pay taxes if they pawned their children. To criticize and prosecute the practice would thwart his goal of tax collection. However, other officials openly admitted the horrors caused by child pawnship.

In 1933, the District Officer of Owerri Province, Mr. E. Dickinson claimed that most child-dealing occurred in Isu (Orlu Division) and Ekwereazu, in the Owerri Division, located east of Bende and south of Onitsha. People who kidnapped children found markets in the northeast area of the Owerri Province as well. Traffickers took the children north to Amachara, which served as a clearing station for the Okigwi Division. One Obowo man testified that,

I am the father of the girl-child stolen by the accused. Ihenwenwa is about three years old. About two weeks ago when rain had finished falling, we all went to bed. I was alone in my room. In the middle of the night I was awakened by the sound of a dog barking. I came out and saw two men carrying [a] child. I recognized [the child]as my own and raised the alarm.⁴³

Fortunately, with the help of others the father retrieved his daughter. In other instances, once traffickers kidnapped a child, they took the child from Obowo and traveled several miles to their destination. They crossed the Imo River, either by bridge or canoe, and then traveled by foot to Umuahia and onto Amachara.⁴⁴ An Igbo man, named Ubendu

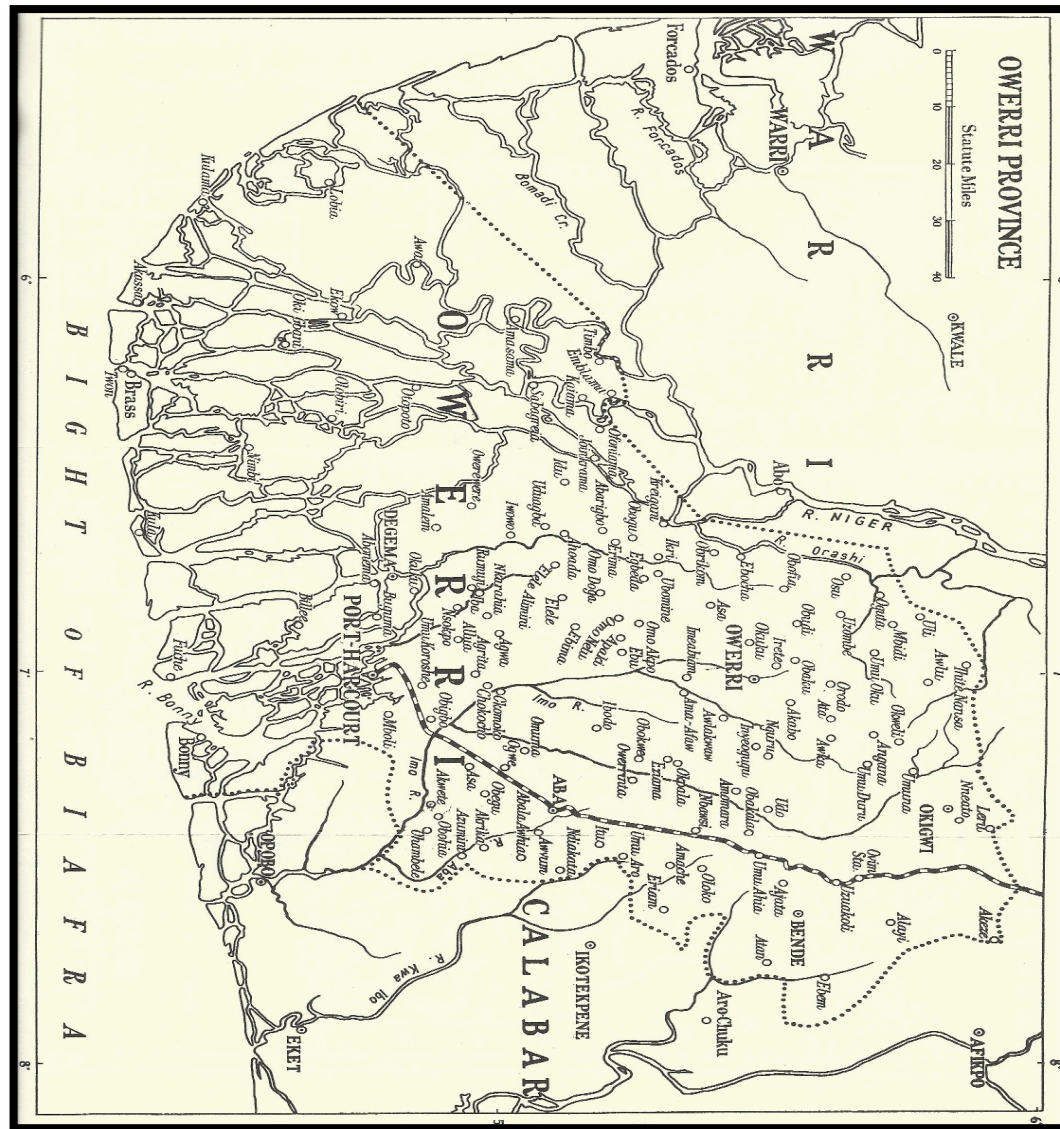
⁴² George, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing Investigation*, 127.

⁴³ “Rex versus Wilson Edom of Umuariam Obowo,” April 13, 1925, 3, Okidist 11/1/267 : Rex Vs Wilson Edom, Child Stealing, 1935, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

⁴⁴ Bell, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing. Monthly Report, September, 1934*, 67.

operated as the main intermediary in the area during the early 1930s and employed messengers to inform buyers, mainly Aro agents, when he had a child up for sale.⁴⁵

Map 1.10 Owerri Province



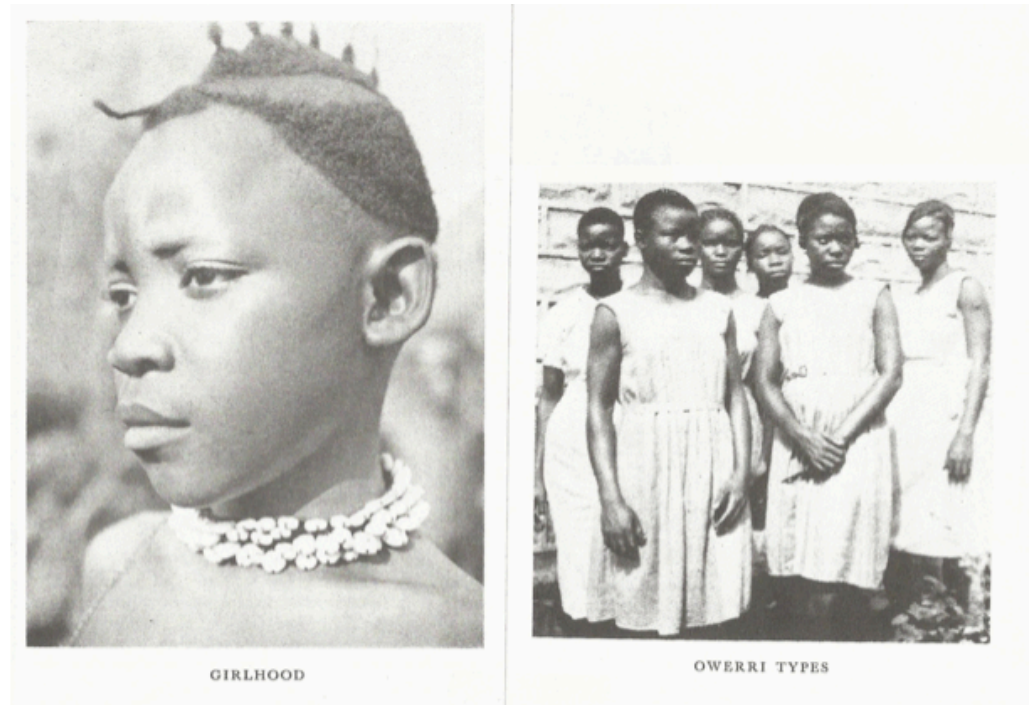
Source: Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women* (1978)

The District Officer of Degema urged Major Garden to begin his investigation in the Degema Division in Owerri Province because it was a key location for trafficking

⁴⁵ Ibid., 71.

girls. Parents and Aro agents usually collected the girls from Agbiam, Umuahia, Kwale and Owerri for the purpose of selling them in Degema.⁴⁶ During their patrol of the market, officers discovered and retrieved a number of women and children who had been captured and brought to Degema.⁴⁷

Photo 2.3 Owerri Girls⁴⁸



Photos taken during the mid 1930s
 Source: Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women* (1939)

Okigwe, particularly the villages located in of Egado, Isu and Obowo, was one of the main places where slaves could be found.⁴⁹ Dealers primarily sold Okigwe children

⁴⁶ Garden, *Slave Dealing. Report for December, 1933: The Assistant Inspector General of Police, Southern Provinces, through the Commissioner of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt*, 42; Benedict B. B. Naanen, "Itinerant Gold Mines': Prostitution in the Cross River Basin of Nigeria, 1930-1950," *African Studies Review* 34, no. 2 (September 1, 1991): 71.

⁴⁷ Garden, *Slave Dealing. Report for December, 1933: The Assistant Inspector General of Police, Southern Provinces, through the Commissioner of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt*, 43.

⁴⁸ Leith-Ross, *African Women*.

⁴⁹ Garden, *Slave Dealing. Report for December, 1933: The Assistant Inspector General of Police, Southern Provinces, through the Commissioner of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt*, 41.

in the Isu and Obowo areas.⁵⁰ Officials also cited Obowo as a frequent place to find stolen children and those who had been sold by their parents.⁵¹ Child dealers transported them by railroad and then sailed south down the Imo River to the creek region. The District Officer of Ahoada confirmed that along with the Aro, Okigiwe traders dominated the kidnapping rings in the area and could easily identify their conspicuously large homes. In some cases traffickers transported the children southeast to buyers in Umuahia.⁵²

Child dealers also took captives from the northeastern part of Owerri Province to Obowo and transferred them through Umuokpara, east to Umuahia and then through Achara and north to Uzuakoli (located slightly northwest of Bende).⁵³ Again, with the help of local informants, colonial investigators identified the homes of slave dealers located in Umuahia and Uzuakoli.⁵⁴ According to the investigators, child dealers also travelled south from Oguta to Ahoada and sold children along the creeks as far as the North Brass area.⁵⁵

On the coast, the Brass area had historically incorporated large numbers of slaves into their Canoe Houses during the Atlantic trade and used these slaves to trade with the

⁵⁰ "Letter from the District Officer in Okigwi to Major J.W. Garden, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt," 34. Known aggressors in Obowo were Inyama of Alike, Ihemebere, Jeremiah Okafor (an Aro living in Amuzari), and Okpara Nwokeke.

⁵¹ Benedict B. B. Naanen, "'Itinerant Gold Mines': Prostitution in the Cross River Basin of Nigeria, 1930-1950," *African Studies Review* 34, no. 2 (September 1, 1991): 71.

⁵² *Council for the Representation of Women in the League of Nations. Annual Report, 1929-30* (League of Nations, 1930), CO 323/1071/8 Slavery: Slavery of Women, Public Records Office, London.

⁵³ "Letter from the District Officer in Okigwi to Major J.W. Garden, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt," 35.

⁵⁴ "Letter from the District Officer in Okigwi to Major J.W. Garden, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt," December 4, 1933, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

⁵⁵ E. Dickinson, "Letter from E. Dickinson, Acting District Officer of Owerri to Major J. W. Garden, D.S.O.," November 28, 1933, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

Palm Belt and to enhance the size and power of their trade corporation.⁵⁶ Some were taken through Mbidi, travelled through Oguta and across the Niger River where they eventually sold their captives to the Ijaws or southwards to the Abonnema people.⁵⁷ The Ijaws, neighbors of the Ibo in the Eastern Delta, ventured into an even more heinous form of trafficking. They bought Igbo children to breed them and sold the resulting offspring to dealers in the north who operated in Oguta in Owerri Division.⁵⁸ The Ijaws also transported children east to the Obowo area of the Okigwe District.⁵⁹

The investigation uncovered the persistent operation of the trading systems that the Aro had first developed during the Atlantic slave trade. Parents in Owerri Province claimed that they preferred “to deal” with the Aro because they paid “a higher price than that offered by the local people.”⁶⁰ The Aro paid £9 to £12 for girls who ranged in age from five to ten years old. When parents decided to sell a child, they accompanied the child and the Aro dealer to the child’s final destination. In one instance, when police approached parents and a child travelling with an Aro man, the parents claimed that the child was going to work as a caregiver for the Aro man’s younger children.⁶¹ When challenged by authorities, the parents took their child home. Even though officials did not

⁵⁶ Toyin Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria* (Indiana University Press, 2009), 40.

⁵⁷ “Letter from the District Officer in Okigwi to Major J.W. Garden, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt,” 36.

⁵⁸ George, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing Investigation*, 110.

⁵⁹ Dickinson, “Letter from E. Dickinson, Acting District Officer of Owerri to Major J. W. Garden, D.S.O.,” 26.

⁶⁰ Garden, *Slave Dealing. Report for December, 1933: The Assistant Inspector General of Police, Southern Provinces, through the Commissioner of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt*, 41.

⁶¹ J.W. Garden, *Slave Dealing Report-Report for March 1934* (Owerri Province, April 5, 1934), 60, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

arrest the parents or the Aro man, they described the incident as an obvious slave dealing case.⁶²

In other incidents Major Garden claimed that parents admitted to District Officers and police that they established a written marriage agreement in order to avoid prosecution. Contrary to Major Garden's report, it is unlikely that parents explained how they avoided prosecution. However, Garden may have assumed this to be the case when parents argued that they had received payment for the child only in the context of an arranged marriage.

When dealers transported children south to the Delta creek areas, an adult usually travelled with the child by train from Uzuakoli to Umukoroshe (now called Rumukoroshe), near Port Harcourt. According to some reports, women often fulfilled this role of transporting children on foot to Okikra and other towns located along the creeks. If at any point authorities questioned a woman about the child in her care, she claimed to be the mother. If a man accompanied a "more fully grown girl," he claimed to be her husband.⁶³ In other instances, the District Officer of Okigwe claimed that child dealers took the children to the Aro capital at Arochukwu and sold them to plantation owners at Akpabuyo or Creek Town. Dealers also sold girls to brothels located along the coast.⁶⁴

⁶² Garden, *Slave Dealing. Report for December, 1933: The Assistant Inspector General of Police, Southern Provinces, through the Commissioner of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt*, 41.

⁶³ "Letter from the District Officer in Okigwi to Major J.W. Garden, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt," 35.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

General Garden produced a report listing all of the child stealing and slave dealing cases in January 1934. In all of the cases, the Court reviewed the cases of sixteen boys and eighteen girls.⁶⁵ It spanned the previous 22 months and showed the following:

Table 3.6 Slave Dealing Cases, March 1934

Division	# of cases tried	Guilty	Not Guilty
Owerri	14	6	8
Okigwi	11	5	6
Bende	8	5	3
Ahoda	2	1	1
Degema	0	0	0
Aba	0	0	0
Totals	35	17	18

Source: Slave Dealing Report-Report for March 1934

Understanding that the numbers of child-stealing and slave-dealing cases might seem minimal, Major Garden warned that the “figures merely show the cases which have been before the Courts and cannot be taken to indicate that slave dealing is not being extensively carried on.”⁶⁶ He explained that a large number of acquittals resulted from parents’ and relatives’ participation. Colonial officers handled child-stealing cases differently than cases wherein the parents participated in the exchange of a child because prosecution proved too difficult.

⁶⁵ Garden, *Slave Dealing. Report for December, 1933: The Assistant Inspector General of Police, Southern Provinces, through the Commissioner of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

The Ogoja Province had its own demand for women and children for agricultural purposes.⁶⁷ Ogoja had a population that was lower than many of the other towns in Southeastern Nigeria, but like other areas in the Palm Belt, had a need for laborers.⁶⁸ Many slaves came from throughout Igboland and from Bamenda, Cameroon. British officials did not believe that the children originated from Afikpo Division on the Cross River, but that Afikpo, an Aro enclave, operated as a main location where dealers bought and sold children.⁶⁹ Middlemen from the Cross River traveled to Afikpo to assess the need for children by speaking with agents from the Bende and Okigwe Divisions.⁷⁰ Evidence suggests that some children traded in Afikpo came from the historic slave source areas of Udi district near Enugu and Awka near Onitsha.⁷¹ Dealers chose to negotiate the terms of exchange at the Uburu market, which was held every 24 days allowing time for the middlemen to communicate with parents and others who sold children. Often, they agreed to deliver children to the Obubra and Ikom Divisions for ‘pickup’. Once a dealer located a “suitable” child, they claimed the child at night.⁷²

Children served a variety of purposes in the Obubra and Ikom Divisions in Ogoja Province. Secret societies and social clubs continued to create a large demand for child slaves.⁷³ Dealers also forced girls into prostitution, which created a specific demand for girls. As Ben Naanen noted, “by the 1920s prostitution had become a substantially

⁶⁷ Naanen, “Itinerant Gold Mines,” 63.

⁶⁸ John Manton, “‘The Lost Province’: Neglect and Governance in Colonial Ogoja,” *History in Africa* 35 (January 1, 2008): 327, 332.

⁶⁹ J.W. Garden, “Letter from J.W. Garden, Assistant Commissioner of Police to the Assistant Inspector General of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt,” February 10, 1934, 54, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

⁷⁰ J.W. Garden, “Letter from J.W. Garden, Assistant Commissioner of Police to the Assistant Inspector General of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt,” February 10, 1934, 49, 52, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 51.

developed trade in the area,” and by the “mid-1930s the level of prostitution in Obubra Division became a major concern to both the colonial administration and the local elders.”⁷⁴ When owned by another man or woman, remittances from prostitution ensured a continuous influx of income even when the prostitute worked outside of the Ogoja Province.

Child dealers transported children in caravans to the Cross River region of Calabar Province as well. Working with others, they avoided police detection. Colonial authorities believed that women claimed to be the children’s mother or sister when they traveled with the dealer and the children.⁷⁵ In addition, scouts on bicycles and armed men traveled ahead of the group and warned them if they saw authorities on the path.⁷⁶ The Cross River people received just as many boys as girls, paying up to £35 for both. The children were usually bought to work on palm farms in Ediba and Ugbun. In order to avoid detection as a ‘foreign’ child, owners renamed the children, sequestered them, and made them learn the local language before allowing them to socialize with other children.⁷⁷

In addition to the process by which children became acculturated to their ‘destination’ environments, child dealers disguised child trafficking while they worked as short and long distance traders who often carried their wares from one town to another. By operating child-dealing schemes in conjunction with legitimate business, the traders made it extremely difficult for authorities to identify them as traffickers.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Naanen, “Itinerant Gold Mines,” 60.

⁷⁵ Bell, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing. Monthly Report, September, 1934*, 68.

⁷⁶ Garden, “Letter from J.W. Garden, Assistant Commissioner of Police to the Assistant Inspector General of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt,” 50.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ A. E. Afigbo, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885-1950* (University of Rochester Press, 2006), 124.

The total number of child stealing and slave dealing cases noted below⁷⁹ are not representative of the actual number of children transported from one region to another in Southeastern Nigeria and probably severely underestimate the numbers. In fact, during his investigation, Major Garden received seventy-six complaints about child stealing that occurred between 1932-1934.⁸⁰ In November 1934, Assistant Commissioner of Police C.R. Bell reported that he received complaints that sixty-eight children had been kidnapped from Okigwe, Owerri, Aba and Bende (all main locations of the Women's War) over the past fifteen years.⁸¹ But for any case to be brought forth and successfully prosecuted, authorities needed willing parties to testify. In most cases, not even the child would testify against his or her captor.⁸² And as previously noted, when parents and family members participated in the child dealing, authorities had a difficult time prosecuting them.

⁷⁹ Garden, "Letter from J.W. Garden, Assistant Commissioner of Police to the Assistant Inspector General of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt," 54.

⁸⁰ Garden, *Slave Dealing Report-Report for March 1934*, 59.

⁸¹ C.R. Bell, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing. Monthly Report, November 1934* (Bende, Owerri, December 4, 1934), 100, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

⁸² Garden, "Letter from J.W. Garden, Assistant Commissioner of Police to the Assistant Inspector General of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt," 51.

Table 3.7 Slave Dealing Report, March 1934

Town	Cases	# Charged	#	
			Convicted	Acquitted
Afikpo	5	15	5	10
Obubra	8	25	15	10
Ogoja	1	3	2	1
Abakiliki	1	0	0	0
Ikom	0	0	0	0
Total	15	46	25	21

Source: Slave Dealing Report-Report for March 1934

After 1929, child stealing had become a lucrative and increasingly violent business. During the 1930s, child traffickers frequently committed murder in order to obtain a child. For example, in February 1935, a young man named Dick Wogu stole his five-year old stepsister from her hometown of Owerrinta, Owerri. With the assistance of two associates he took the girl to Okigwe where they hid at home during the day. Joined by another man, they traveled again by night to Obowo where a known slave dealer, Akwukwaebu, met them. After agreeing on a price, Akwukwaebu took the girl to Uzuakoli where she was passed off two more times. At some point during the transaction Wogu's accomplices killed him, presumably to gain a larger portion of the profits from selling the girl. Fortunately for her, the police raided the home of her final kidnapper. After a thorough investigation, the authorities were able to convict twelve of the fourteen people who participated in her abduction and sale.⁸³

⁸³ J. W. Garden, *Slave Dealing-Monthly Report. February 1934* (Enugu Nigeria, March 10, 1934), 55-7, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

In another instance, authorities apprehended a known Aro child dealer, Lemadim of Ibom, and noticed a bullet wound in his neck.⁸⁴ It is likely that another child trafficker shot him during a transaction. And in a case similar to Wogu's story, child dealers killed one mother in order to obtain her two children, who were found twelve miles from Umuahia with two men and two women. Police were able to arrest the kidnappers because the officers wore plain clothes and did not scare them off upon approaching them. The dealers in this case accused someone else of the murder and pleaded with authorities to continue their investigation to prove their innocence. Colonial records did not provide the accused dealers' explanation of how they had acquired the children.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, it is clear that child dealers resorted to violence when in search of children.

Women & Children: Victims or Perpetrators?

Women and children may have benefited from the increased concern about their abuse in Southeastern Nigeria. However, in an attempt to survive Nigeria's economic decline, both also participated in human trafficking that mainly victimized other women and children.⁸⁶ They traveled the same trade routes as men, and informed agents when children were available for purchase.⁸⁷ Women claimed that the accompanying child was a son or daughter or some other family member when they confronted authorities on a footpath, train or canoe.

⁸⁴ C.R. Bell, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing. Monthly Report, October, 1934* (Port Harcourt, Owerri Province, November 1, 1934), 93, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

⁸⁵ Bell, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing. Monthly Report, September, 1934*, 68.

⁸⁶ Afigbo, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885-1950*, 125.

⁸⁷ Bell, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing. Monthly Report, September, 1934*, 76.

The League of Nations was concerned with the wellbeing of Nigerian women and children, but they not take into account that women and children also participated in child stealing and slave dealing. This reality presented a particular kind of problem to humanitarians when they classified women and children as ‘protected groups’. Of course, the women and children were but a minority of those involved in the trade and should not be overstated. Some children, mostly sons, assisted their father’s by transporting younger children to the destination location.⁸⁸ By overwhelming margins, men dominated the trade and created the complex networks and practices that made it function so well. However, future investigations into the role of women will provide new insights into the gendered dimensions of this violent trade. There are a number of references to women who participated in the sale, buying and transporting children. Some acted as regular dealers while others only participated if the opportunity presented itself as when a child dealer persuaded a woman to participate by paying her to “pass this children off as her own if questioned” during transport.⁸⁹ The investigative reports of the 1930s are a rich source of information about how some women contributed to traffic in children through the institutions of slavery, pawnship and prostitution in Southeastern Nigeria. Women’s involvement in certain types of child dealing schemes was not new to the 1930s. But by the mid-1930s, they had become just like men, with some women referred to as “habitual dealers.”⁹⁰ Women who had become prominent traders or moneylenders also participated in child dealing to some degree and often offered their

⁸⁸ Bell, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing. Monthly Report, October, 1934*, 95.

⁸⁹ Bell, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing. Monthly Report, September, 1934*, 70.

⁹⁰ George, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing-Final Report up to 15th July, 1935*, 146.

homes as a meeting place for child dealers, no doubt for a fee.⁹¹ In addition, it appears that many of them were connected to prostitution and this was a significant reason why senior women bought and sold young girls.

Extensive discussions of child dealing have omitted its frequent connection to prostitution. Impoverished families might sell daughters into prostitution as easily as they might pawn them.⁹² Prostitution itself was a product of colonial urban policies that discouraged family life and made factory centers, sites of railroad construction, and coal and tin labor camps into prostitution havens for underpaid, single men.⁹³ In her study of female prostitutes in Nairobi, Kenya, Luise White notes that prostitution resulted from the development of capitalist society in Africa as women attempted to make rational economic choices.⁹⁴ Unlike the women who chose sex work in Nairobi, children in Igboland were generally forced into prostitution by older women. Mfom Umoren Ekpo-Otu argues that the rise of prostitution in colonial Nigeria resulted from the “socio-economic dislocations” of imperialism.⁹⁵

One of the most prominent areas associated with colonial prostitution was the Akunakuna region of the Cross River. The women controlled the trade of young girls between Akunakuna (south) and Ediba (north). Assistant Commissioner C.R. Bell alleged that women “who have been harlots and have no children of their own” were the

⁹¹ “Letter from the District Officer of Bende to the District Officer at Okigwe,” April 29, 1927, 11, OkiDist 4/9/72 Rex vs Idi, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

⁹² Mfom Umoren Ekpo-Otu, “Contestations of Identity: Colonial Policing of Female Sexuality in the Cross River Region of Southern Nigeria,” *Journal of Human and Social Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2013): 75.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁹⁴ Luise White, *The Comforts of Home Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁹⁵ Ekpo-Otu, “Contestations of Identity: Colonial Policing of Female Sexuality in the Cross River Region of Southern Nigeria,” 74.

main purchasers of young girls and that girls from Okigwe often ended up in the Cross River region.

...a case occurred where a woman named Obia Ogum Anum living at Umon on the Cross River was found in possession of four girls from Umunga, Okigwi Division. The four girls were repatriated to Okigwi by the District Officer, Okigwi Division, who has the matter in hand.⁹⁶

It is clear that retired prostitutes acquired girls for the purpose of prostitution, but, in a twisted application of gender inheritance, they also bought or ‘adopted’ boys so that they could become their heirs.⁹⁷

Madams also recruited girls from Degema, and 1933 Court records reveal how a madam, who had in her possession two young girls, attempted to sell them to a French commercial agent for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Having two marriage certificates in her possession claiming that the girls were betrothed to an Okrika man provided sufficient evidence to convict her for illegally selling the children. Luckily the marriage certificates noted their natal villages, which allowed authorities to reunite them with relatives in the Owerri and Okigwe Divisions.⁹⁸

Authorities also discovered differences that the majority of the girls taken from Owerri to the Brass area were sixteen to twenty years old, “old enough to look after themselves,” and they alleged that they had left their homes of their own volition. Officials believed that the girls willing went with their dealers.⁹⁹ It is likely that some women who wanted to escape from home or to unwilling to avoid marrying the man their

⁹⁶ Bell, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing. Monthly Report, October, 1934*, 90.

⁹⁷ George, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing Investigation*, 110.

⁹⁸ J.W. Garden, *Slave Dealing: Report for January, 1934. From the Acting Commissioner of Police, J.W. Garden to the Assistant Inspector General of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt*. (Owerri Province, February 10, 1934), 49, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

⁹⁹ H. Haydock-Wilson, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing Campaign. Final Report-up to 9th May, 1936* (Owerri Province, May 11, 1936), 212, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

parents selected, willingly left with older prostitutes who promised them lucrative employment of some kind. However, colonial reports do not state whether or not the girls actually knew that they would become prostitutes. In addition to prostitution, ‘big’ women ‘adopted’ and ‘fostered’ children for other economic reasons.

Omu Okwei: A Case Study of a ‘Big Woman’

One account of the life of a successful trader is the biography of Omu Okwei (1872-1943). Her story provides an example of how women operated as traders and moneylenders. Okwei was known as “the merchant queen of Ossomari,” a coastal town, located on the eastern side of the Niger River. The town had been a major center of the slave trade and seemed to have continued to be a rather lawless place. Okwei had developed her trade business¹⁰⁰ in Onitsha by working for the Royal Niger Company, which was a charter company that controlled commerce on the Niger River.¹⁰¹ She traded palm products for imported wares and was part of a larger population of wealthy women who earned large profits transporting goods inland. In addition, she functioned as a moneylender, lending funds with very high interest rates, from sixty to ninety percent, to farm owners and young traders.

Felicia Ekejiuba has noted that Okwei presided over a workforce comprised of “beautiful girls—mostly ‘adopted’ presumably women who as children were pawned to her by debtors.”¹⁰² Okwei raised the children and offered them as mistresses or wives to

¹⁰⁰ Felicia Ifeoma Ekejiuba, “Omu Okwei : The Merchant Queen of Ossomari,” *Nigeria Magazine*. no. 90 (1966): 213.

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth Isichei, *History of Nigeria* (Prentice Hall Press, 1983), 100. The Royal Niger Company (originally The National African Company) had dominated trade activities along the Niger River nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

¹⁰² Obiageli Nwakaego Ugwu, Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in

influential business men and others.”¹⁰³ Okwei’s use of marriage to cement alliances and develop clients was a time-honored pattern of commerce in Igboland and throughout Africa. Once the foreign traders left Nigeria, the women were expected to return to Okwei with any “children or property” they acquired while living with a foreigner.¹⁰⁴ Okwei’s business had become so successful that in 1935 she was given the title *Omu*, meaning queen.¹⁰⁵ Female traders like Okwei acquired capital through their use of ‘adopted’ mistresses and through trading ventures with the help of child pawns and slaves. The Depression Years only encouraged female traders to continue their trade and use of children to increase their own economy solvency.

Conclusion

As child dealers developed a sense of where they could find markets, they became part of a larger network of individuals who transported children from one part of Southeastern Nigeria to another. Moneylenders, chiefs, family members, long distance traders and the ‘occasional helper’ created a large network through which children were trafficked. If a child was stolen, parents found it difficult to find him or her due to the child dealers’ swift and efficient actions. By visiting marketing centers in advance and

Nigeria, 1920s-1940s,” August 8, 2012. Adoption during the 1920s and 1930s referred to a type of fosterage. According to oral testimony, poor parents generally gave the child away and the child would not know that he/she was adopted until old age; Chief Ugwuefi Reuben, Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, “A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s,” August 5, 2012. According to Chief Rueben, formal adoption was not conducted until after WII.

¹⁰³ Ekejiuba, “Omu Okwei,” 215.

¹⁰⁴ This practice is strikingly similar to the practice of the 18th century signares on the Senegal River, who married Portuguese and French men to gain special trade items and when the men returned to Europe, they contracted yet another ‘marriage’.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid; See also Buchi Emecheta, *The Slave Girl: A Novel* (George Braziller Inc., 1980). Similar to Okwei’s biography, Buchi Emecheta’s novel, *The Slave Girl* offers the narrative of a successful female trader. It shows how women traders were common, especially in major market towns like Onitsha. The story features a young girl named Ogbanjie Ojebeta, who was sold by her brother, to a prominent female textile trader for whom she worked as a seamstress, after her parents’ death.

by discussing the need for children with other agents, they made sure that they would be able to hand off the child quickly.¹⁰⁶ Children were hidden in houses and were often transported at night making the transaction virtually impossible to detect. In the end, children often ended up in locations far from their home making it difficult for them to return.¹⁰⁷

By 1936, at the end of the campaign to end the trade in slaves and children, little had been accomplished. By April 1936, the Resident at Owerri wrote to the Secretary of the Southern Provinces requesting the termination of the anti-Slave Dealing and Child Stealing campaigns. He stated that,

I agree with the Inspector General of Police that the results of the campaign have not recently been such as to justify the retention of a Police Officer on this special duty. The number of cases investigated and the convictions obtained in the first half of the year 1935 had a salutatory effect and made people realise [sic] that they could not sell children with impunity, it may be that this check to the activities of those engaged in the traffic is the cause of the meager results which have since been obtained.¹⁰⁸

The Resident of Ogoja Province agreed that the appointment of a special investigator to inquire about child dealing cases should end. In part, this decision was based on the assumption that child dealers often worked independently and therefore were difficult to detect. Authorities doubted that large organized gangs dominated the trade in children, as they had done previously.¹⁰⁹ However, as A.E. Afigbo aptly explains:

The fact of the matter was that the government soon found out that in mounting

¹⁰⁶ Stevenson, "Letter from District Officer at Owerri, Major Stevenson to the Senior Resident, Owerri Province."

¹⁰⁷ Cornelius Echeruo Ezinna, Follow-up Interview conducted by Augustine Uche Onye on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project titled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," September 2012.

¹⁰⁸ "Letter from the Resident of Owerri Province to the Secretary, Southern Provinces at Enugu," April 15, 1936, 202, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

¹⁰⁹ E.J.G. Kelly, "Letter from E.J.G. Kelly, Secretary of the Southern Provinces to the Chief Secretary to the Government at Lagos," April 20, 1936, 202, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

a special campaign it had bitten off more than it could chew and so had to beat a dignified retreat. This, in our view, was perhaps the single most important reason for the ending of the campaign... There were gangs involved with in trade but not gangs with the kinds of institutional structures which the government could easily identify and deal with using police methods or any other known formal methods for that matter.¹¹⁰

The investigators lacked an understanding of the complexity of the economic and transport dimensions of the intricate child-dealing network. This could have been caused by the lack of resources. However, the administration's failure to end the trafficking of women and children seemed to have had more to do with their desire to avoid challenging indigenous labor customs, which ultimately supported the colonial economy. Afigbo notes that, "in spite of the knowledge that the evil traffic was embedded in the economic and social life of the people, no attempt was made to understand in detail the organization that supported it."¹¹¹ Consequently, the investigation into child stealing and other forms of human trafficking so eagerly championed by members of the League of Nations and other humanitarian groups resulted in negligible results.

By April of 1935, the Assistant Commissioner of Police admitted that he agreed with the Residents O.W. Firth and Major H.C. Stevenson that it was "impractical to prosecute all the cases of pawning, quasi-slave dealing, and quasi-marriages which come to light. Only those cases of these types which involve definite ill-treatment of the children should be proceeded with." He acknowledged that individuals against whom complaints were lodged should be investigated, but argued that returning the children to their natal homes had to be the priority.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Afigbo, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885-1950*, 108.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹¹² S.P. George, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing-Monthly Report, March 1935* (Port Harcourt, Owerri Province, April 1, 1935), 131, C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

The decision to end the campaign opened officials to criticism from international humanitarian organizations. In the end, the Secretary of the Southern Provinces, E.J.G. Kelly acknowledged the League of Nations Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery would be appalled at their decision to end the campaign to end child trafficking. He admitted that there would be “opinion in England which will hardly be convinced of the justification for discontinuing this special campaign.” However, even at the risk of criticism and potential disagreement, he did not believe that the results up to that point justified the continued cost and effort.¹¹³ By the fall of 1936 the League of Nations Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery turned their attention to the “economic and social situation of emancipated slaves in Nigeria.”¹¹⁴ However, this did little to stop the pawning of children, child stealing, and slave dealing in Southeastern Nigeria.

As the special committees of the League of Nations, Save the Children Fund, and the International Labor Organization (among others) campaigned against the exploitation of children and women throughout the British Empire, the conditions on the ground blocked their goals. Women and children were not fighting for their own protection so much as they were finding ways to survive in an economic environment that challenged their ability to survive. By engaging in dangerous activities, they may, in fact, have followed strategies that permitted them to survive.

¹¹³ Kelly, “Letter from E.J.G. Kelly, Secretary of the Southern Provinces to the Chief Secretary to the Government at Lagos,” 204.

¹¹⁴ “Letter from A.R.A. Dickins for Secretary, Southern Provinces to The Resident at Calabar Province,” October 24, 1936, 26, *Itudist* 2/1/28 : Slave Dealing, 1933-1938, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

Conclusion

A History of Child Trafficking in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900s-1930s is a study that explores the exchange of children in the Bight of Biafra during the pre-colonial and colonial eras. My research maps out the continuities between the transatlantic slave trade and the ways in which colonial authorities and Igbo, Ibibio, Efik and Ijaw (Ijo) populations mobilized juvenile productive and reproductive labor. Child dealing supported domestic labor needs at a time when the legality of colonial 'slavery' was in flux. This dissertation has documented how the porosity between institutions of pawnship, slavery, panyarring, serf, client, servant, subject, and child marriages allowed for slippages from one status to another. In particular, the focus on child pawning has led to an investigation of pre-colonial and colonial credit systems. My work shows how pawnship changed over time as Nigeria became more integrated into the global economy. Additionally, the examination of child pawnship illustrates how the breakdown of kinship relationships contributed to child trafficking during the colonial era. Colonial authorities began regulate moneylending agreements, but tentatively pursued an end to child pawnship. Some officials understood that many Nigerians had to pawn dependents in order to pay taxes, and chose to turn the 'colonial blind eye'.¹

The history of Aro trade networks provided an analysis of the infrastructure used by traffickers in order to maintain trade ties through the expansion of settler colonies in Southeastern Nigeria. From the height of the transatlantic slave trade until the 1930s, it is clear that the Aro acted as the main agents of slaving, and continued to dominate the

¹ Benjamin N. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts, "Introduction," in *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa*, eds. Benjamin N. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts, 1st ed. (Ohio University Press, 2012), 1-28.

trade in children during the colonial era.² By hiring others to act as middlemen, middlewomen, and even children, the Aro successfully continued the trade of children well into the twentieth century.

Imperial policies that altered Nigerian forms of governance and Nigeria's increased involvement in the global economy had real consequences for the indigenous populations.³ Primarily, the move from supplying countless slaves during the transatlantic slave trade era to the development of the prominent palm oil industry created a need for labor. The increased need for domestic labor occurred at the time when Anti-Slavery lobbies and other international groups sought to end all forms of servile labor in the Empire. Lugardian reforms, such as the Indirect Rule system and the implementation of warrant chiefs show how Bight of Biafra inhabitants suffered a decline in social and economic security, which led to an increase in debt and debt litigation, which often involved child pawns.

Nigeria's steep economic decline of the 1920s and 1930s caused a dramatic increased in child pawning, stealing and dealing. Many parents pawned children in order to pay colonial taxes. Men pawned girls to raise the bride price for their own marriages and child dealers stole and sold children to add to their personal wealth. By participating in the 1929 women's revolt, women expressed their dissatisfaction with warrant chief abuses, their husbands' tax burden and the assumption threat they too would be taxed. Nigerian women also reacted because they lost numerous children in pawn.⁴ This new

² For a full analysis see G. Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³ For a full discussion of Indirect Rule, see A. E. Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929* (Humanity Press/prometheus Bk, 1972).

⁴ Examples can be found in Nigeria. Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbance in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929., *Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of*

interpretation of Nigerian women's motivations to participate in the Women's War builds upon longstanding scholarship. For over 40 years scholars have produced interesting and meaningful interpretations of the Igbo women's protest movement. Judith van Allen's article, "'Sitting on a Man': Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women" prompted vigorous debates about the women's motivations to join the 1929 revolt.⁵ My analysis would not be complete without van Allen's contribution and the others that came after her, including the work of Nina Mba, Susan Martin, A. E. Afigbo, Ekwere Otu Akpan, Violetta L. Ekpo and most recently, *The Women's War of 1929* by Susan Kingsley Kent, Marc Matera, and Misty L. Bastian.⁶

The mission to 'civilize' Nigeria had many consequences that resulted in the continued trade in children as well. Public works projects required local rulers to provide laborers to clear roads and creeks, railroad construction, and for other tasks. Local rulers sent slaves, pawns and other dependents to serve the need for colonial labor. Consequently, rulers sought additional ways to obtain servile dependents, which often meant acquiring children.

International efforts, which aimed to highlight and end the traffic in women in children enjoyed limited success. The investigations into child pawning, stealing and dealing produced a wealth of colonial documents. Archival records outline the trade in

Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbance in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929/[microform] Aba Commission of Inquiry. (London: Waterlow & Sons, 1930).

⁵ Judith van Allen, "'Sitting on a Man': Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 6, no. 2 (January 1, 1972): 165–181.

⁶ Kent, Matera, and Bastian, *The Women's War of 1929*; Nina Emma Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965* (University of California / Institute of International Studies, 1982); Susan M. Martin, *Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History of the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800-1980*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule In Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*; and Ekwere Otu Akpan, *The Women's War of 1929: Preliminary Study* (Calabar, Nigeria: Government Printer, 1988).

children and women in intricate detail as colonial officials understood it. We also see how British concerns about the colonial economy often subordinated international concerns about child dealing, especially during the Great Depression when palm oil product revenue declined dramatically.⁷ This ambivalent approach is identified in the views offered by colonial officials as they compared English pauper children to Nigerian child pawns, suggesting that the welfare of the indigenous child was always better maintained. Reading the colonial documents with a critical eye has allowed for an analysis that recognizes that some colonial officials were much more focused on buttressing the Nigeria's economic output than they were in unpacking the complexities and conditions of child pawnship. Moreover, oral testimonies highlight how child pawns suffered from abuse in the environments in which they lived, refuting any claim by authorities that it was an innocuous social status.

This work also disrupts assumptions about categorizing certain groups as primary trafficking 'victims'. Members of the League of Nations and similar groups concerned with the rights of women and children often focused on women and children as specific groups needing protection in colonial Nigeria. However, my work shows that women and children participated in human trafficking for the same reasons men did—they wanted to enhance their own financial and social security. The long history of women's involvement in the slave trade, as moneylenders, commercial traders and as madams suggests that attempts to end child trafficking should have been realized around how to

⁷ I. *Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents*, 1922, CSO 26/1/074 Vol. I, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan; see also S.P. George, *Slave Dealing and Child Stealing Investigation* (Bende, Owerri, February 4, 1935), C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24, Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

protect ‘poor’ and socially insecure (people who lack strong kinship ties) individuals, rather than focus on groups only identified by gender or age.

This study is a significant contribution to African history, which incorporates the history of child labor in Nigeria and a new analysis of the well-known African women’s social movement, the 1929 Women’s War.⁸ My research also contributes to the contemporary concern about child trafficking in West Africa and modern slavery. Human rights groups and policy makers are seeking ways to understand the legacies of human trafficking in order to develop policies that would limit, and if possible, end child trafficking. Understanding the long history of human trafficking in Nigeria will assist that effort.

The limitation of this study mainly is represented in the types of the available archival material. Court and colonial records often mitigate Nigerian accounts, and lack a significant number of firsthand testimonies from children. I have attempted to rectify this absence through the use of oral testimonies, but even then I have found that while many informants were willing to discuss child dealing, and pawning in particular, few admitted that they themselves or relatives had been taken as a pawn or slave. Even taking the limitations into account, the oral histories from current day residents in Enugu, Aba, Calabar and Owerri offer rich details that described the cultural practices that allowed a child to move from under one form of guardianship to another.

Further historical study that would extend the history of child trafficking in Southeastern Nigeria and the international efforts to end it, can best be done by analyzing the development of the British Welfare Service in Calabar during the late 1940s and

⁸ Susan Kingsley Kent, Marc Matera, and Misty L. Bastian, *The Women’s War of 1929* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

1950s. The work of Welfare Service members, such as Miss Margaret Laurie Belcher, offers unique insight into how Nigerians continued to utilize child labor in trade activities.⁹ The continuation of child stealing is also evidenced by the number of articles published in local Nigerian newspapers that warn children to be wary of kidnappers. For example, in 1956 one editorial noted,

You must have been startled by the recent cases of kidnapping. Perhaps that reminds you of the days of the slave trade when life was unsafe. But as if this dirty business had not been finally uprooted, we find in our midst today living memories of those evil days. They roam about in the garb of decent folks see[k]ing for whom to enslave. I do not have to mention the names of the children whom Providence has delivered from the dreadful clutches of the modern slavers. Cases of kidnapping are still pending in court. All these events double stress the importance of a note of warning. And pray God you heed the warning.¹⁰

This article highlights the fact child traffickers continued to steal children from their natal villages. The author also alludes to the fact that traffickers continued to be members of unsuspecting local communities, making their identification difficult.

Nigerian child dealing continues to be a social blight on the country today. In 2005, activists began an awareness campaign by educating secondary school children about the prevalence of sex trafficking.¹¹ In May 2013, authorities rescued seventeen teenage girls and 11 babies from a home located in Imo state, Southeastern Nigeria. One man had impregnated all of the girls, and the girls' owner, a woman, had intended to sell the babies on the black market for up to \$6400.¹² I offer these examples in order to show that child trafficking remains a profitable business in Nigeria's shadow economy.

International groups and humanitarians, whose purpose it is to end human trafficking,

⁹ "Supplement," *London Gazette*, January 1, 1955, 26.

¹⁰ Uncle Mike, "Beware of Human Wolves," *The Daily Times*, August 11, 1956, 4, Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

¹¹ Francisca Isi Omorodion, "Vulnerability of Nigerian Secondary School to Human Sex Trafficking in Nigeria," *African Journal of Reproductive Health / La Revue Africaine de La Santé Reproductive* 13, no. 2 (June 1, 2009): 33–48.

¹² "Nigeria 'Baby Factory' Raided in Imo State," May 10, 2013.

must look to the Bight of Biafra's long history of slave trading in order to understand the economic imperatives and long standing networks of exchange before they can end it.

Bibliography

Interviews

Agbo, J.P., Chief Daniel E.N. Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 8, 2012.

Agu, Kinsley. Interview conducted by Ifeoma Obijiaku on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 21, 2012.

Agubaram, Chief Anthony Chibueze. Interview conducted by Ifeoma Obijiaku on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 22, 2012.

Asawalam, Thomas U. Interview conducted by Cynthia E. Uche on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 29, 2012.

Azuka, Nze Azubuike. Interview conducted by Ifeoma Obijiaku on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 20, 2012.

Ebubedike, Chief Ohaegbulam. Interview conducted by Cynthia E. Uche on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 31, 2012.

Echewa, T. Obinkaram interview by Robin Chapdelaine, Philadelphia, PA, 16 May 2009

Ekpeyong, Mr. Archibong. Interview conducted by Ifeoma Obijiaku on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 20, 2012.

Ezeji, Nelson Anyanele. Interview conducted by Ezeji Grace on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 21, 2012.

Ezinna, Cornelius Echeruo. Follow-up Interview conducted by Augustine Uche Onye on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," September 2012.

———. Interview conducted by Cynthia E. Uche on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 29, 2012.

- Ibeawuchi, Mrs. Anthonia Nkechinyere. Interview conducted by Augustine Onyemauchekwuwu O. on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 25, 2012.
- Ibgocheonwu, Callista Okemmadu. Interview conducted by Cynthia E. Uche on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 22, 2012.
- Marcellenus, Ahanotu. Interview conducted by Augustine Onyemauchekwuwu O. on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 23, 2012.
- Nwadinko, Anthony. Interview conducted by Ezeji Grace on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 21, 2012.
- Okolo, HRH Igwe Dr. Titus. Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 2, 2012.
- Oloko, Elder Abraham. Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 2, 2012.
- Reuben, Chief Ugwuefi. Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 5, 2012.
- Ugwu, Elder Chief Ugwu Nwangwu. Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 5, 2012.
- Ugwu, Obiageli Nwakaego. Interview conducted by Anayo Enechukwu on behalf of Robin P. Chapdelaine for the project entitled, "A History of the Social Economy of Children: Child Pawnship in Nigeria, 1920s-1940s," August 8, 2012.

Archives

Great Britain

British Library
Public Records Office, London (PRO)
Colonial Records Project, Rhodes House, Oxford University
School of Oriental and African Studies, London (SOAS)

Nigeria

Nigeria National Archives, Enugu (NNAE)
Nigeria National Archives Ibadan, Ibadan University (NNAI)

Newspapers

London Gazette
New York Times
Nigeria Magazine
Nigerian Chronicle
The Daily Times
The Glasgow Herald

Unpublished Sources

Annual Report of Owerri 1921, 1921. CSO 26 No. 03928. Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

Annual Report of Owerri Province 1922, CSO 26 No. 03928. Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

Annual Report on the Police Department of the Southern Provinces of Nigeria for the Year 1915. Sessional Papers, December 7, 1916. PRO 657/3. Public Records Office, London.

“Appendix to Calabar Report,” in The General Missionary Conference of South Africa. Church Missionary Society Archive. Section VII: General Secretary’s Papers: Part 1: Papers Relating to Africa, 1847-1950. University of California, Los Angeles, BV 2500C488 Reel 1. UCLA, Southern Regional Library Faculty.

Bell, C.R. Slave Dealing and Child Stealing. Monthly Report, November 1934. Bende, Owerri, December 4, 1934. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

- . Slave Dealing and Child Stealing. Monthly Report, October, 1934. Port Harcourt, Owerri Province, November 1, 1934. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- . Slave Dealing and Child Stealing. Monthly Report, September, 1934. Port Harcourt, Owerri Province, October 1, 1934. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- Boyle, Nina. "Council for the Representation of Women in the League of Nations Invitation to the Conference on Women and Slavery," 1930. CO 323/1071/8 Slavery: Slavery of Women. Public Records Office, London.
- Butler, District Officer of Warri, Mr. I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents, 1923. CSO 26/1/074 Vol. I. Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.
- "Chief Ezeonyodu vs. Okanu," January 21, 1925. CSO 26/1/16100. Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.
- Cooper, J. Treasury Papers, Southern Nigeria: Proposal to establish a government currency note issue. "Letter from J. Cooper, Bank of British West Africa Limited, to the Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office." Treasury Papers, Southern Nigeria: Proposal to establish a government currency note issue, April 18, 1908. PRO TI/11226/695. Public Records Office, London.
- Council for the Representation of Women in the League of Nations. Annual Report, 1929-30. League of Nations, 1930. CO 323/1071/8 Slavery: Slavery of Women. Public Records Office, London.
- Dickinson, E. "Letter from E. Dickinson, Acting District Officer of Owerri to Major J. W. Garden, D.S.O.," November 28, 1933. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- Doro. "Letter from Doro, Head Chief and Political Agent, Warri, Nigeria to Unknown Colonial Representative," April 27, 1914. CSE 8/7/39 : Slave Dealing : Extension of Jurisdiction of D.C.'s to hear and determine cases sitting with Native Court or with selected Assessors-Requests, 1912-1914. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- Egerton, Walter. Treasury Papers, Southern Nigeria: Proposal to establish a government currency note issue. "Letter from Governor Sir Walter Egerton of Southern Nigeria to the Earl of Elgin, Secretary to the Colonies." Treasury Papers, Southern Nigeria: Proposal to establish a government currency note issue November 30, 1907. PRO TI/11226/695. Public Records Office, London.
- Falk, E. "Letter from E. Falk, District Officer at Aba to J. Ashley, Assistant District Officer at Bende 'Cases of Slave Dealing,'" November 7, 1920. OkiDist 4/2/1. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

“Files of the Egba Judicial Council, Tribal Customs and Superstitions of Southern Nigeria (Pawning),” 1920s. CSO 26/1 #06827, Pawning of Children. Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

Garden, J. W. Slave Dealing-Monthly Report. February 1934. Enugu Nigeria, March 10, 1934. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

———. Slave Dealing. Report for December, 1933: The Assistant Inspector General of Police, Southern Provinces, through the Commissioner of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt. Port Harcourt, Owerri Province, January 5, 1934. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

———. Letter from J.W. Garden, Assistant Commissioner of Police to the Assistant Inspector General of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt,” February 10, 1934. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

———. Slave Dealing Report-Report for March 1934. Owerri Province, April 5, 1934. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

———. Slave Dealing: Report for January, 1934. From the Acting Commissioner of Police, J.W. Garden to the Assistant Inspector General of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt. Owerri Province, February 10, 1934. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

George, S.P. Slave Dealing and Child Stealing Investigation. Bende, Owerri, February 4, 1935. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

———. Slave Dealing and Child Stealing-Final Report up to 15th July, 1935. Okige, Nigeria, July 17, 1935. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

———. Slave Dealing and Child Stealing-Monthly Report, March 1935. Port Harcourt, Owerri Province, April 1, 1935. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

“Glover to Administrator in-Chief, Sierra Leone,” February 11, 1870. Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

“Glover to Newcastle,” October 9, 1863. CSO 1/1/1, #87. Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

Haydock-Wilson, H. Slave Dealing and Child Stealing Campaign. Final Report-up to 9th May, 1936. Owerri Province, May 11, 1936. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

Heathcote, G.N. “Memorandum from Assistant District Officer G.N. Heathcote of Bende to the District Officer of Okigwi,” July 29, 1920. NAE 1/1920 Cases of Slave Dealing. OkiDist 4/2/1. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

Hives, Frank. Report on the Pawning of Children in the Southern Provinces, Nigeria, as Called for by His Honour Lieutenant-Governor, Southern Provinces, Vide Secretary Southern Provinces’ Confidential Memo No. C.2/23, January 17, 1923. CSO 26/1 #06827. Vol. I. Pawning 1920s. Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

- I. Enactment of Slavery Ordinance, 1916; II. The Slavery (amendment) Ordinance, 1916. CSO 26/1/03063. Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.
- I. Tribal Customs and Superstitions of the Southern Province II. Practice of Pawning Children as Security for Debts of Parents, 1922. CSO 26/1/074 Vol. I. Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.
- J. Beringer, Sr. Sanitation Officer. The Influenza Epidemic of 1918 in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria, September 5, 1919. PRO, CO 583/77. Public Records Office, London.
- Kelly, E.J.G. "Letter from E.J.G. Kelly, Secretary of the Southern Provinces to the Chief Secretary to the Government at Lagos," April 20, 1936. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- "Letter from A.R.A. Dickins for Secretary, Southern Provinces to The Resident at Calabar Province," October 24, 1936. Itudist 2/1/28 : Slave Dealing, 1933-1938. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- "Letter from District Commissioner F.E.G. Johnson to the High Provincial Commissioner," November 13, 1911. CSE 8/7/39 : Slave Dealing : Extension of Jurisdiction of D.C.'s to hear and determine cases sitting with Native Court or with selected Assessors-Requests, 1912-1914. National Archive of Nigeria Enugu.
- "Letter from the Assistant Inspector-General of Police, Southern Provinces, Enugu to the Commissioner of Police, M.F. Powell, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt," October 16, 1933. NAE C136, Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- "Letter from the Chief Inspector to the Commissioner of Police at Port Harcourt," February 3, 1927. OkiDist 4/9/42 Slave Dealing. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- "Letter from the District Commissioner R. C. Bayton at Aba to the Provincial Commissioner at Calabar," September 11, 1911. CSE 8/7/39 : Slave Dealing : Extension of Jurisdiction of D.C.'s to hear and determine cases sitting with Native Court or with selected Assessors-Requests, 1912-1914. National Archive of Nigeria Enugu.
- "Letter from the District Officer at Ahoada to the Assistant Commissioner of Police, J.W. Garden, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt," November 25, 1933. NAE C136 Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- "Letter from the District Officer at Bende to the District Officer at Okigwe: Alleged Slave Dealing at Obowo," February 28, 1929. OkiDist 4/11/31, 1929. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

- “Letter from the District Officer in Okigwi to Major J.W. Garden, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Owerri Province, Port Harcourt,” December 4, 1933. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- “Letter from the District Officer of Bende to the District Officer at Okigwe,” April 29, 1927. Okidist 4/9/72 Rex vs Idi. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- “Letter from the District Officer of Degema to Major J. W. Garden and Resident of Owerri Province,” December 1, 1933. NAE C136 Child Stealing Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- “Letter from the District Officer of Okigwi to the District Officer of Awka,” June 1, 1929. Okidist 4/11/31 : Alleged Slave-Dealing, 1929, 10 pages. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- Ojo, Olatunji. “Yoruba Credit and Debt Mechanisms Adjusted, c.1850-1900,” November 23, 2006.
- “The Statement of a Girl Named Mgboli Okofo,” June 24, 1932. Okidist 11/1/214 : Child Stealing and Slave Dealing, 1932-1934. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- Treasury Papers, Southern Nigeria: Proposal to establish a government currency note issue. “Letter from the Earl of Elgin, Colonial Secretary to Sir Walter Egerton.” Treasury Papers, Southern Nigeria: Proposal to establish a government currency note issue, March 26, 1908. PRO TI/11226/695. Public Records Office, London.
- “Letter from the Provincial Commissioner at Calabar to the Colonial Secretary at Lagos,” October 22, 1915. Calprof 13/6/103. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- “Letter from the Resident of Owerri Province to the Secretary, Southern Provinces at Enugu,” April 15, 1936. C136 Child Stealing, Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- “Letter from W.A. Ross, Senior Resident, Oyo Province to Secretary of Southern Provinces,” March 14, 1923. CSO/26/1 #06827 Vol. I Pawning.
- “Lolo Alias Obuta Statement,” March 1932. Okidist 11/1/214 : Child Stealing and Slave Dealing, 1932-1934. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.
- Lovejoy, Paul E. “Pawnship, Debt and ‘Freedom’ in Atlantic Africa during the Era of the Slave Trade: A Re-Assessment,” 2014.
- Lucas, C. P. Treasury Papers. “Letter from C.P. Lucas, The Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office (London) to the Secretary to the Treasury.” Treasury Papers, December 31, 1909. PRO TI/11226/26021. Public Records Office, London.

McKenzie, Rev. T. "A Few Words of Interest Relating to Missionary Life in Southern Nigeria, West Africa 1919-1921," June 1922. MMS 1204. SOAS.

"Memorandum from the District Officer of Okigwi to the District Officer of Bende, 'Alleged Slave Dealing at Obowo,'" February 28, 1929. Okidist 4/11/31 : Alleged Slave-Dealing, 1929, 10 pages. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

Mr. Devonshire. "Letter from Mr. Devonshire to Sir Hugh Clifford, Governor," December 12, 1922. CSO 26/1 #06827. Vol. I. Pawning 1920s. Nigeria National Archives.

Nigeria. *Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbance in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929. Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbance in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929* / [microform] Aba Commission of Inquiry. London: Waterlow & Sons, 1930.

Notes of a Meeting Held in the Secretary of State's Room at 11.a.m. on Tuesday, the 8th of April, 1930. League of Nations, April 8, 1930. CO 323/1071/8 Slavery: Slavery of Women. Public Records Office, London.

Numa, Chief Dore. Slave Dealing: Extension of Jurisdiction of District Commissioners to Hear and Determine Cases Sitting with the Native Court, April 27, 1914. CSO 8/7/39. National Archive of Nigeria Enugu.

Okanu of Ochida. "Letter from Okanu of Ochida to the Resident of the Southern Province, Lagos," July 2, 1925. CSO 26/1/16100. Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

Owerri Provincial Annual Report for 1921, 1921. CSO 26/03928. Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.

"Rex versus Wilson Edom of Umuariam Obowo," April 13, 1925. Okidist 11/1/267 : Rex Vs Wilson Edom, Child Stealing, 1935. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

"Rex Vs Mbakwe, Child Stealing, 1929," November 1929. Okidist 4/11/46 : Rex Vs Mbakwe, Child Stealing, 1929. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

Sessional Papers, 1914, 1914. PRO 657/3. Public Records Office, London.

Slave Dealing: Extension of Jurisdiction of District Commissioners to Hear and Determine Cases Sitting with the Native Court, 1914 1912. CSE 8/7/39. National Archive of Nigeria Enugu.

Slave Dealing: Extension of Jurisdiction of District Commissioners to Hear and Determine Cases Sitting with the Native Court-Precis of Views by Officers in Regard to Difficulties experienced Containing Conviction before the Supreme

Court., 1912. CSE 8/7/39 : Slave Dealing : Extension of Jurisdiction of D.C.'s to hear and determine cases sitting with Native Court or with selected Assessors-Requests, 1912-1914. National Archive of Nigeria Enugu.

Slave Dealing: Precis of Views by Officers in Regard to Difficulties Experienced in Containing Conviction before the Supreme Court and Suggestions Submitted for Remedying Detection and Conviction More Effective., May 13, 1912. CSE 8/7/39 : Slave Dealing : Extension of Jurisdiction of D.C.'s to hear and determine cases sitting with Native Court or with selected Assessors-Requests, 1912-1914. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

"Slavery: Slavery of Women," 1930. PRO CO 323/1071/8. Public Records Office, London.

"Statement given by Oduomyenma of Okigwe," March 31, 1934. Okidist 11/1/214 : Child Stealing and Slave Dealing, 1932-1934. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

"Statement Given by Okpala Eheakandu of Umuahia Township," March 18, 1934. Okidist 11/1/214 : Child Stealing and Slave Dealing, 1932-1934. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

Stevenson, Major. "Letter from District Officer at Owerri, Major Stevenson to the Senior Resident, Owerri Province," June 17, 1933. NAE C136 Child Stealing Rivprof 2/1/24. Nigeria National Archive Enugu.

Townsend, Rev. H. "Letter from Reverend H. Townsend to Captain Trotter, R.N., on the African Coast Blockade," January 31, 1849. MF-653 CMS Nyanza and Yoruba. Center for Research Libraries.

Treasury Papers, Southern Nigeria: Proposal to establish a government currency note issue. "Insert from a Letter from Lord Crewe to Sir Walter Egerton." Treasury Papers, Southern Nigeria: Proposal to establish a government currency note issue, August 7, 1908. PRO TI/11226/695. Public Records Office, London.

Books, Articles and Other Published Materials

A. Chief. "Concerning the House Rule Ordinance: A Cry from the Central Province of Old Southern Nigeria." *The Nigerian Chronicle*. September 25, 1914.

Afigbo, Adiele Eberechukwu. *Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*. London: Longman, 1972.

_____. *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885-1950*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006.

_____. *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*. Lagos: University of Nigeria Press, 1981.

- _____. "Revolution and Reaction in Eastern Nigeria: 1900-1929: The Background to the Women's Riot of 1929," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, III, no. 3 (December 1966): 529–57.
- Africa and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History; a Multidisciplinary Encyclopedia*. ABC-CLIO, 2008.
- Ajayi, J. F. Ade, and Michael Crowder, eds. *History of West Africa*, Vol. 1. 1st ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.
- Akpan, Ekwere Out and Violette Ekpo. *The Women's War of 1929: Preliminary Study*. Calabar, Nigeria: Government Printer, 1988.
- Alagoa, E. J. "Long-Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta." *The Journal of African History* 11, no. 3 (January 1, 1970): 319–29. doi:10.2307/180341.
- Allen, Judith van. "'Sitting on a Man': Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women." *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Etudes Africaines* 6, no. 2 (January 1, 1972): 165–81. doi:10.2307/484197.
- Amadiume, Ifi. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. London: Zed Books, 1987.
- Ampofo, Akosua Adomako, Josephine Beoku-Betts, Wairimu Ngaruiya Njambi, and Mary Osirim. "Women's and Gender Studies in English-Speaking Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review of Research in the Social Sciences." *Gender and Society* 18, no. 6 (December 1, 2004): 685–714.
- Anyika, Francis. "The Genesis of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) Medical Mission in Igboland 1893-1911: A Historical Analysis." *Nsukka Journal of the Humanities* 14 (2004): 49–66.
- Aries, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. New York: Vintage, 1965.
- Basden, G. T. *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*. Nonsuch Publishing, 2006.
- _____. "Notes on the Ibo Country, Southern Nigeria." *The Geographical Journal* 65, no. 1 (January 1, 1925): 32–41. doi:10.2307/1782346.
- Behrendt, Stephen D., A. J. H. Latham, and David Northrup. *The Diary of Antera Duke, an Eighteenth-Century African Slave Trader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Bersselaar, Dmitri van den. "Missionary Knowledge and the State in Colonial Nigeria: On How G. T. Basden Became an Expert." *History in Africa* 33 (January 1, 2006): 433–50.

- Boparai, Harinder. "The Customary and Statutory Law of Marriage in Nigeria." *Rabels Zeitschrift Für Ausländisches Und Internationales Privatrecht / The Rabel Journal of Comparative and International Private Law* 46, no. 3 (January 1, 1982): 530–57.
- Brown, Carolyn A. "Testing the Boundaries of Marginality: Twentieth-Century Slavery and Emancipation Struggles in Nkanu, Northern Igboland, 1920-29." *The Journal of African History* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 51–80.
- . *We Were All Slaves: African Miners, Culture, and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery, Nigeria*. Oxford: James Currey, 2003.
- Byfield, Judith A. (Judith Ann-Marie). *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940*. Social History of Africa series, ISSN1099-8098; Social History of Africa. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann ; Oxford : James Currey, 2002.
- Cadbury, Tabitha. "A Trader in Central Africa: The Dennett Collection at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter." *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 20 (March 1, 2008): 109–19.
- Campbell, Gwyn. *Women and Slavery: Africa, the Indian Ocean World, and the Medieval North Atlantic*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 2007.
- Campbell, Gwyn, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph Calder Miller. *Child Slaves in the Modern World*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011.
- . *Children in Slavery through the Ages*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009.
- . *Women and Slavery*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007.
- Campbell, Gwyn, and Alessandro Stanziani. *Debt and Slavery in the Mediterranean and Atlantic Worlds*. London: Pickering and Chatto Publishing, 2013.
- Carland, John M. *The Colonial Office and Nigeria, 1898-1914*. 1st Edition. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1985.
- Chanock, Martin. "A Peculiar Sharpness: An Essay on Property in the History of Customary Law in Colonial Africa." *The Journal of African History* 32, no. 1 (January 1, 1991): 65–88.
- . *Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Chuku, Gloria. *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900-1960*. Cambridge: Routledge, 2004.
- Coe, Cati. "How Debt Became Care: Child Pawning and Its Transformation in Akuapem, The Gold Coast, 1874-1929." *Africa* 82, no. 2 (2012): 287–311.

- Compilations, Nigeria, Northern. Orders in Council and Proclamations.* Stevens, 1905.
- Cooper, Frederick. "Africa and the World Economy." *African Studies Review* 24, no. 2/3 (June 1, 1981): 1–86. doi:10.2307/523902.
- Cunningham, Hugh. "Histories of Childhood." *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 4 (October 1, 1998): 1195–1208. doi:10.2307/2651207.
- Curtin, Philip D. *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- "Dame Maria Ogilvie Gordon: Geologist and Prominent Worker for Women's Causes." *The Glasgow Herald*, June 26, 1939.
- Davidoff, Leonore, and Catherine Hall. *Family Fortunes*. London; New York: Routledge, 2002.
- deMause, Lloyd. *The History of Childhood*. New York: Harper and Row, 1995.
- Dennett, R.E. "Development of Native Governments in Southern Nigeria." *The Nigerian Chronicle*. September 29, 1911.
- Dennett, Richard Edward. *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*. London: Cass, 1968.
- Dessy, Sylvain E., and Stéphane Pallage. "A Theory of the Worst Forms of Child Labour." *The Economic Journal* 115, no. 500 (January 1, 2005): 68–87.
- Dike, K. Onwuka. Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885. *An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962.
- Dike, Kenneth O., and Felicia Ekejiuba. *Aro of South-Eastern Nigeria, 1650-1980: Study of Socio-Economic Formation and Transformation in Nigeria*. Oxford: African Books Collective, 1995.
- "Dinner of the Society." *Journal of the Royal African Society* 25, no. 100 (July 1, 1926): 359–62.
- Ejizu, Christopher I. "Chi Symbolism as a Potent Mirror of Igbo Indigenous Worldview." *Anthropos* 87, no. 4/6 (January 1, 1992): 379–89.
- Ekechi, Felix K. "Pawnship in Igbo Society," in *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003.

- Ekejiuba, Felicia Ifeoma. "Omu Okwei : The Merchant Queen of Ossomari." *Nigeria Magazine*, no. 90 (1966): 213–20.
- Ekpo-Otu, Mfom Umoren. "Contestations of Identity: Colonial Policing of Female Sexuality in the Cross River Region of Southern Nigeria." *Journal of Human and Social Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2013): 72–80.
- Ekundare, R. Olufemi. *An Economic History of Nigeria, 1860-1960*. London: Methuen, 1973.
- Equiano, Olaudah. *Interesting Narrative and Other Writings by Equiano*, Olaudah New York: Penguin Classics Paperback. Penguin Classics, 1995.
- Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*. Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society; 2nd Ser., No. 79; Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society ; 2nd Ser., No. 79. London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1937.
- Falola, Toyin. *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria*. Indiana University Press, 2009.
- . "‘My Friend the Shylock’: Money-Lenders and Their Clients in South-Western Nigeria." *The Journal of African History* 34, no. 3 (January 1, 1993): 403–23.
- . *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective*. Westview Press, 1994.
- Falola, Toyin, and Matthew M. Heaton. *A History of Nigeria*. 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Falola, Toyin, and Paul E. Lovejoy. "Pawnship in Historical Perspective." In *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*, 1–26. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2003.
- Falola, Toyin, and Adam Paddock. *The Women’s War of 1929: A History of Anti-Colonial Resistance in Eastern Nigeria*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2011.
- Fass, Paula, and Mary Mason. *Childhood in America*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Forde, Cyril Daryll, and Gwilym Iwan Jones. *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria*. London: International African Institute, 1950.
- Forde, Daryll, ed. *Efik Traders of Old Calabar*. Facsimile edition. Dawsons Pall Mall, 1968.
- Galbi, Douglas A. "Child Labor and the Division of Labor in the Early English Cotton Mills." *Journal of Population Economics* 10, no. 4 (October 1, 1997): 357–75.

- Graff, Harvey J. "Review: The History of Childhood and Youth: Beyond Infancy?" *History of Education Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (April 1, 1986): 95–109. doi:10.2307/368879.
- Grant, Kevin. *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slaveries in Africa, 1884-1926*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Green, Margaret M. *Ibo Village Affairs*. New York: Praeger, 1964.
- Grier, Beverly. "Child Labor and Africanist Scholarship: A Critical Overview." *African Studies Review* 47, no. 2 (2004): 1–25.
- Guyer, Jane I. *Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa*. 1st ed. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Hardt, M, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Harvard: Harvard College, 2000.
- Harneit-Sievers, Axel. "Igbo 'Traditional Rulers': Chieftaincy and the State in Southeastern Nigeria." *Africa Spectrum* 33, no. 1 (January 1, 1998): 57–79.
- Harris, J. S. "Some Aspects of Slavery in Southeastern Nigeria." *The Journal of Negro History* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 1942): 37–54. doi:10.2307/2715088.
- Harris, J.H. "The Native House Rule Ordinance." *The Nigerian Chronicle*. August 11, 1911.
- Henderson, Richard N. *The King-in-Every Man; Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha-Ibo Society and Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972.
- Hendrick, Harry. *Children, Childhood and English Society, 1880-1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Hendrick, Harry, and Economic History Society. *Children, Childhood, and English Society, 1880-1990*. Cambridge [England]; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Heywood, Colin. *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times*. 1st ed. Oxford: Polity, 2002.
- Hochschild, Adam. *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999.
- Hodder, B. W. And U. I. Ukwu. *Markets in West Africa Studies of Markets and Trade Among the Yoruba and Ibo*. 1st Edition. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1969.
- Hodgson, Dorothy L. "Wicked" *Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*: Edited by Sheryl McCurdy. Westport, CT: Heinemann, 2001.

- Horton, W. R. G. "The Ohu System of Slavery in a Northern Ibo Village-Group." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 24, no. 4 (October 1, 1954): 311–36. doi:10.2307/1156711.
- Huberman, Michael, and Christopher M. Meissner. "Riding the Wave of Trade: The Rise of Labor Regulation in the Golden Age of Globalization." *The Journal of Economic History* 70, no. 3 (September 2010): 657–85.
- Isichei, Elizabeth Allo. *History of Nigeria*. New York: Longman, 1983.
- . *Igbo Worlds: An Anthology of Oral Histories and Historical Descriptions*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978.
- . *The Ibo People and the Europeans: The Genesis of a Relationship--to 1906*. London: Faber and Faber, 1973.
- Jacob, Wilson Chacko. *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.
- Johnson, Christopher Kumolu. "Editor's Response to 'A Cry from the Central Province of Old Southern Nigeria.'" *The Nigerian Chronicle*. September 25, 1914.
- Johnston, H. H. "A Journey up the Cross River, West Africa." *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography* 10, no. 7 (July 1, 1888): 435–38. doi:10.2307/1801452.
- Jones, G. I. *Annual Reports of Bende Division, South Eastern Nigeria, 1905-1912: With a Commentary*. African Studies Centre, University of Cambridge, 1986.
- . "Ibo Age Organization, with Special Reference to the Cross River and North-Eastern Ibo." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 92, no. 2 (July 1, 1962): 191–211. doi:10.2307/2844258.
- Kent, Susan Kingsley, Marc Matera, and Misty L. Bastian. *The Women's War of 1929*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- King, Margaret. "Concepts of Childhood: What We Know and Where We Might Go." *Renaissance Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 371–407.
- Latham, A. J. H. "Currency, Credit and Capitalism on the Cross River in the Pre-Colonial Era." *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 4 (January 1, 1971): 599–605.
- . *Old Calabar, 1600-1891: The Impact of the International Economy upon a Traditional Society*. Clarendon Press, 1973.
- Lauren, Paul Gordon. *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen*. Third Edition. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

- Law, Robin. *From Slave Trade to "Legitimate" Commerce: The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Lawrance, Benjamin N., and Richard L. Roberts, eds. *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa*. 1st ed. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012.
- Leith-Ross, Sylvia. *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965.
- Lindsay, Lisa. *Working with Gender: Wage Labor and Social Change in Southwestern Nigeria*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003.
- Livingstone, David. "Treatment of Native Races. The Heritage and Duty of the British People. Address Delivered by Mr. E.D. Morel at Birkhead." *The Nigerian Chronicle*. June 13, 1913. MF 749 CAMP.
- Lovejoy, Paul E. "Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa - What's in a Name?" *Atlantic Studies: Literary, Cultural and Historical Perspectives* 9, no. 2 (June 2012): 165–84.
- . *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*. 2nd Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Lovejoy, Paul E., and Toyin Falola, eds. *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003.
- Lovejoy, Paul E., and David Richardson. "The Business of Slaving: Pawnship in Western Africa, C. 1600-1810." *The Journal of African History* 42, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 67–89.
- . "'This Horrid Hole': Royal Authority, Commerce and Credit at Bonny, 1690-1840." *The Journal of African History* 45, no. 3 (January 1, 2004): 363–92.
- . "Trust, Pawnship, and Atlantic History: The Institutional Foundations of the Old Calabar Slave Trade." *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (April 1, 1999): 333–55. doi:10.2307/2650369.
- Lugard, F. D. *Lugard and the Amalgamation of Nigeria: A Documentary Record, Being a Reprint of the Report by Sir F. D. Lugard on the Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria and Administration, 1912-1919*. Frank Cass & Co., 1968.
- Lynn, Martin. *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- MacGregor, Laird, and Oldfield, R. A. K. *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa, by the River Niger*. London: Richard Bentley, 1837.

- Macmillan, Chrystal. "Nationality of Married Women: Present Tendencies." *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law* 7, no. 4 (January 1, 1925): 142–54.
- Mann, Kristin. *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Manton, John. "'The Lost Province': Neglect and Governance in Colonial Ogoja." *History in Africa* 35 (January 1, 2008): 327–45.
- Martin, Susan. "Gender and Innovation: Farming, Cooking and Palm Processing in the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1900-1930." *The Journal of African History* 25, no. 4 (January 1, 1984): 411–27. doi:10.2307/181224.
- Martin, Susan M. *Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History of the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800-1980*. 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- McDaniel, Lorna. "An Igbo Second Burial." *The Black Perspective in Music* 6, no. 1 (1978): 49. doi:10.2307/1214302.
- Miers, Suzanne. *Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade*. New York: Africana Pub. Corp., 1975.
- . "Contemporary Forms of Slavery." *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 34, no. 3 (January 1, 2000): 714–47. doi:10.2307/486218.
- Miers, Suzanne, and Richard Roberts. *The End of Slavery in Africa*. 1st ed. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988.
- Mwalimu, Charles. *The Nigerian Legal System*. Vol. 2. 2 vols. Peter Lang, 2005.
- Naanen, Benedict B. "Economy within an Economy: The Manilla Currency, Exchange Rate Instability and Social Conditions in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1900-48." *The Journal of African History* 34, no. 3 (January 1, 1993): 425–46.
- . "'Itinerant Gold Mines': Prostitution in the Cross River Basin of Nigeria, 1930-1950." *African Studies Review* 34, no. 2 (September 1, 1991): 57–79. doi:10.2307/524228.
- Nardinelli, Clark. "Child Labor and the Factory Acts." *The Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 4 (December 1, 1980): 739–55.
- . *Child Labor and the Industrial Revolution*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Nearing, Scott. *The Solution of the Child Labor Problem*. New York, Moffat, Yard and company, 1911.

“News of the Week.” *The Nigerian Chronicle*. June 28, 1912.

Nigeria. *Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbance in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929. Notes of Evidence Taken by the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Disturbance in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces, December, 1929* / [microform] *Aba Commission of Inquiry*. London: Waterlow & Sons, 1930.

Njoku, Raphael Chijioke. *African Cultural Values: Igbo Political Leadership in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1996*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Northrup, David. “The Growth of Trade among the Igbo before 1800.” *The Journal of African History* 13, no. 2 (January 1, 1972): 217–36.

———. *Trade Without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1978.

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

Nworah, Kenneth D. “The Aborigines’ Protection Society, 1889-1909: A Pressure-Group in Colonial Policy.” *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 1971): 79–91. doi:10.2307/484052.

Ochonu, Moses E. *Colonial Meltdown Northern Nigeria in the Great Depression*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2009.

Ofonagoro, Walter I. “From Traditional to British Currency in Southern Nigeria: Analysis of a Currency Revolution, 1880-1948.” *The Journal of Economic History* 39, no. 3 (1979): 623–54.

Okeke, Okechukwu Edward. *A Political and Administrative History of Onitsha, 1917-1970*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2009.

Okonkwo, Rina. “The Lagos Auxiliary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Rights Protection Society: A Re-Examination.” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 15, no. 3 (January 1, 1982): 423–33. doi:10.2307/218145.

Omorodion, Francisca Isi. “Vulnerability of Nigerian Secondary School to Human Sex Trafficking in Nigeria.” *African Journal of Reproductive Health / La Revue Africaine de La Santé Reproductive* 13, no. 2 (June 1, 2009): 33–48.

“On The Pawnbroker’s Bill.” *The Nigerian Chronicle*. June 7, 1912.

Oriji, John N. "Sacred Authority in Igbo Society." *Archives de Sciences Sociales Des Religions* 34, no. 68.1 (July 1, 1989): 113–23. doi:10.2307/30128572.

Paisley, Fiona. "Citizens of Their World: Australian Feminism and Indigenous Rights in the International Context, 1920s and 1930s." *Feminist Review*, no. 58 (April 1, 1998): 66–84.

"Pawnbrokers Order in Council." *The Nigerian Chronicle*. February 21, 1912.

Pedersen, Susan. *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

———. "Metaphors of the Schoolroom: Women Working the Mandates System of the League of Nations." *History Workshop Journal* 66, no. 1 (September 21, 2008): 188–207. doi:10.1093/hwj/dbn025.

———. "The Maternalist Moment in British Colonial Policy: The Controversy over 'Child Slavery' in Hong Kong 1917-1941." *Past & Present*, no. 171 (May 1, 2001): 161–202.

Perham, Margery Freda. *The Diaries of Lord Lugard: Vol. 4: Nigeria, 1894-5 and 1898*. London: Faber 1963.

———. *Native Administration in Nigeria*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Pinchbeck, Ivy, and Margaret Hewitt. *Children in English Society: From the Eighteenth Century to the Children Act 1948*. Vol. 2. Routledge and K. Paul, 1973.

Pitman, Frank Wesley. "The Treatment of the British West Indian Slaves in Law and Custom." *The Journal of Negro History* 11, no. 4 (October 1, 1926): 610–28. doi:10.2307/2713884.

Rainger, Ronald. "Philanthropy and Science in the 1830's: The British and Foreign Aborigines' Protection Society." *Man* 15, no. 4 (December 1, 1980): 702–17. doi:10.2307/2801541.

Ryan, Patrick J. "How New Is the 'New' Social Study of Childhood? The Myth of a Paradigm Shift." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38, no. 4 (April 1, 2008): 553–76.

Samson, K. T. "ILO [International Labor Organization]." *Human Rights* 9, no. 2 (October 1, 1980): 32–35.

Sandoval, Alonso De. *Treatise on Slavery: Selections from De Instauranda Aethiopum Salute*. Edited by Nicole Von Germeten. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub Co, 2008.

Schwelb, Egon. "Marriage and Human Rights." *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 12, no. 3 (July 1, 1963): 337–83. doi:10.2307/838893.

- Sharp, Evelyn. *The African Child: An Account of the International Conference on African Children, Geneva*. Negro Universities Press, 1970.
- Shaw, Thurstan. *Unearthing Igbo-Ukwu: Archaeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria*. Ibadan, Nigeria ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Shillington, Kevin. *Encyclopedia of African History*. Routledge, 2013.
- Slater, Stefan. "Lady Astor and the Ladies of the Night: The Home Office, the Metropolitan Police and the Politics of the Street Offences Committee, 1927-28." *Law and History Review* 30, no. 2 (May 1, 2012): 533–73.
- Snow, William F. "The Program of the League of Nations Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People." *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York* 12, no. 1 (July 1, 1926): 411–17. doi:10.2307/1180410.
- Southern Provinces (Nigeria). *Annual Report on the Prison Department of the Southern Provinces of Nigeria for the Year 1915-1938*. Lagos: Govt. Printer, 1916. <http://dds.crl.edu/CRLdelivery.asp?tid=20048>.
- Sparks, Randy J. *The Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Stearns, Peter N. *Growing up: The History of Childhood in a Global Context*. Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures ; 28; Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures ; 28th. Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2005.
- "Supplement." *London Gazette*. January 1, 1955.
- "The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society Formation of the Lagos Auxiliary." *The Nigerian Times*. September 6, 1910.
- "The Covenant of the League of Nations." *The American Journal of International Law* 15, no. 1 (January 1, 1921): 4–13. doi:10.2307/2212919.
- "The MoneyLender's Bill." *The Nigerian Chronicle*. June 21, 1912.
- "The Native House Rule Amendment Ordinance Discussed." *The Nigerian Chronicle*. February 16, 1912.
- "The Native House Rule Ordinance in Southern Nigeria." *The Nigerian Chronicle*. October 13, 1911.
- "The Pawnbrokers Bill." *The Nigerian Chronicle*. June 7, 1912.

- Uche, Chibuike Ugochukwu. "Foreign Banks, Africans, and Credit in Colonial Nigeria, C. 1890-1912." *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 52, no. 4 (November 1, 1999): 669–91.
- Uchendu, Victor. *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*. First Edition. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1965.
- Uncle Mike. "Beware of Human Wolves." *The Daily Times*. August 11, 1956. Nigeria National Archive Ibadan.
- Usoro, Eno J. *The Nigerian Oil Palm Industry: Government Policy and Export Production, 1906-1965*. Ibadan University Press, 1974.
- Vaughan, Olufemi. *Nigerian Chiefs: Traditional Power in Modern Politics, 1890s-1990s*. Softcover Ed. Pochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006.
- Weindling, Paul. *International Health Organisations and Movements, 1918-1939*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- White, Luise. *The Comforts of Home Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Wilson, Adrian. "The Infancy of the History of Childhood: An Appraisal of Philippe Ariès." *History and Theory* 19, no. 2 (February 1, 1980): 132–53. doi:10.2307/2504795.

Website Sources

- "Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child." League of Nations, September 26, 1924. <http://www.un-documents.net/gdrc1924.htm>.
- "Health and Social Questions Section," 1946 1919. <http://biblio-archive.unog.ch/detail.aspx?ID=405>.
- Lord Lugard. "Memorandum from Lord Lugard High Commissioner: Memo No. 6-Slavery Questions," September 1906. <http://www.tubmaninstitute.ca/sites/default/files/file/memo6.pdf>.
- "Margery Corbett Ashby." *Spartacus Educational*, 2003 1997. <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Washby.htm>.
- "Nigeria 'Baby Factory' Raided in Imo State," May 10, 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22484318>.

- National Industrial Conference Board. *The Work of the International Labor Organization. Studies of International Problems*. New York: National Industrial Conference Board, Inc, 1928. <http://dds.crl.edu/CRLdelivery.asp?tid=15989>.
- Roe, Jill. "Collison, Marjorie Chave (1887–1982)." *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University. Accessed February 12, 2014. <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/collison-marjorie-chave-12338>.
- "Slavery Convention: Signed at Geneva on 25 September 1926. Entry into Force: 9 March 1927, in Accordance with Article 12." *United Nations: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*, September 25, 1926. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/SlaveryConvention.aspx>.
- Southern Provinces (Nigeria). *Annual Report on the Prison Department of the Southern Provinces of Nigeria for the Year 1915-1938*. Lagos: Govt. Printer, 1916. <http://dds.crl.edu/CRLdelivery.asp?tid=20048>.
- "The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database: Voyages," 1999. <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces>.
- "Trafficking in Children." *The New York Times*, May 4, 2001, sec. Opinion. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/04/opinion/trafficking-in-children.html>.