The Slave Emancipation Problematic: Igbo Society and the Colonial Equation

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The slave emancipation problem in colonial contexts, such as the Igbo case in Igboland, south-eastern Nigeria, deserves attention because there are too few relevant studies (Brown 1996; Nwaka 1985; Ohadike 1988). These studies spotlight wage labor above other aspects of the emancipation question. This approach is justified because the colonial anti-slavery policy there centred on the promotion and control of wage labour. The wage labour focus is useful in explaining what the colonial state did, although it does say little about what the state avoided, and why. There was much more to the emancipation question than labour formation and control. The control of land, a critical element of class formation and reproduction in a post-emancipation agrarian situation, was the fundamental arena of conflict in post-abolition colonial Africa (see Cooper 1980; Klein 1993c). In other words, while the most effective means to achieve emancipation was land tenure reform, the colonial state chose to pursue the proletarianization strategy. This essay will examine why this was so.

Besides the insufficient scholarly attention given to the land matter, there are virtually no comparative studies on any aspect of the Igbo slave question. The comparative approach can thus continue to be useful, if it transcends the narrow focus on uniformities (Bloch 1967:58) or on differences (Cooper 1979:105). Recent efforts in this direction involving emancipation in Africa and Asia (Klein 1993a) have helped to sharpen the focus of the questions we have about Africa. Following Marc Bloch (1967:83), I will "make full use as occasion demands of any light that can be thrown . . . by comparison with other countries." This strategy does not correspond to any of the two archetypes that Terence Byres (1995:571–5) recently delineated.[1] European and African

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[1] These are the variable-oriented and case study-oriented approaches. The first involves rigor-

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non-abolitionist, non-colonial situations will serve to shed light on manumission processes in pre-colonial Igboland. Understanding the pre-colonial processes makes for a greater appreciation of the colonial situation. A comparison of the settler colonies of the British West Indies and the non-settler cases, mainly in East and West Africa, illuminates the problem of emancipation in colonial contexts. State measures, slave/slave-owner responses, the land tenure question, and the changing character of slave dealing are the basic areas of concern.

The African slave emancipation literature is meagre and has only just begun to show signs of growth (Moitt 1993).[2] Slave studies in Africa generally lag behind those of the Americas, despite slavery's long-standing significance in African society (Lovejoy 1983, 1986).[3] Consequently, some thorny issues relating to slavery in Africa have not yet been debated. Of continuing interest is the persistence of forms of servitude after abolition in different periods and widely distributed areas of the world (Afolayan 1993; Bloch 1975; Brown 1989; Cohen and Greene 1972; Cooper 1977; Craton 1988; Engerman 1995: 225–62; Grace 1975; Hogendorn and Lovejoy 1988; Klein 1993a; Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993; Miers and Roberts 1988; Moitt 1993; Ofonagoro 1982; Roberts and Klein 1980; Ross 1983:118–9). Carryovers of pre-abolition social relations subsist in Africa (Horton 1954; Klein 1993b; Nwachukwu-Ogedengbe 1977; Nwaka 1985; Okeke 1985; Oriji 1990:6–7; Robertson 1983; Sawyer 1986; Uchendu 1965, 1977). Besides cognate forms of servitude, slavery proper persists despite the existence of over 300 international anti-slavery treaties (Sawyer 1986). In the post-colonial period, abolitionists (O'Callaghan 1961; Sawyer 1986) still write in terms similar to their predecessors' in the 1920s (Buxton 1921; Harris 1926; Simon 1929), who called attention to the pervasiveness of slavery in the colonial world.[4] The administrator of the Igbo state of Abia complained as late as 1994 that certain persons were selling Igbos "for enslavement in Gabon and other central African countries."[5] All this suggests that slavery is not merely a hitherto-existing phenomenon but also a current af-

ous quantification and compares cross-national data sets. The case-oriented approach considers a limited number of case studies and relies exclusively on secondary sources. This article utilizes a significant amount of primary material.

[2] The African English language emancipation literature includes Cooper (1977, 1980), Grace (1975, 1977), Hogendorn and Lovejoy (1989), Klein (1988a, 1988b, 1993a), Lovejoy and Hogendorn (1983), Miers and Roberts (1988), Roberts and Klein (1980).

[3] Searing (1993:44) explains that the focus on the volume of slave exports is responsible for this anomaly. But it is also true that this historiography sheds light on trends in indigenous slavery. A look at Inikori (1994) easily bears this point out. I am grateful to Professor Inikori for making this material available to me.

[4] The International Labour Organization (ILO) continues to deliberate on what it terms "contemporary forms of slavery." Working and position papers emanate regularly from the necessary committees and workshops. The United Nations inherited the slave question from the League of Nations. For discussions in the 1960s, see Awad (1966). The American newsmagazine, *Newsweek*, once published a special issue on the subject (see Masland *et al* 1992).

[5] *West Africa* (1994:649).

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fair. The examination of the persistence of slavery in the study of emancipation is thus not a diversion but a necessity.

Two basic reasons account for the colonial focus of scholarly emancipation literature on Africa. One is, to be sure, the availability of written data. The other, perhaps more relevant to this study, is that it was during the colonial period that the problem became clear-cut. Although opportunities for manumission were probably greater in pre-colonial Africa than elsewhere (Watson 1980), general abolitionism as a discourse was of European origin (Klein 1993b:3; Roberts and Miers 1988:8–9). In rare and unsustained instances related specifically to the mid-Atlantic slave trade, pre-colonial African ruling classes made moves against enslavement (Klein 1993b:24–25; McGowan 1990). Even these maneuvers appear to have occurred only when particular ruling classes calculated more effective opportunities for political or surplus accumulation. "At their most superficial, African and Asian rulers simply wanted to fend off international pressure and to create alliances" (Klein 1993a:24–25). The prospect of capturing "white slaves" in an impending 1905 British invasion excited an Igbo elder still ignorant of the potency of British firepower (Okafor-Omali 1965:70). Evidence is lacking about any internal general anti-slavery programme before colonialism.[6]

On the other hand, the insinuation that European colonialism accomplished its alleged humanitarian mission in Africa by decisively tackling slavery is too unfounded to warrant any attention here. Critical scholarship has established that colonial anti-slavery performance faltered. There are actually doubts about the colonial governments' commitment to emancipation. European powers did not, after all, conquer the colonies to effect a social revolution (Cooper 1980:24; Manning 1990:16). Clearly, something in the colonial equation calls for explanation. Fred Cooper (1980:6, 32–33) seeks answers in the nature of a European abolitionist discourse. He argues that the failure of the British to tackle emancipation decisively in coastal East Africa derived from a narrow conception of free labour, springing principally from the racist and "conservative basis and direction of anti-slavery ideology itself." Unlike Cooper, Jan Hogendorn and Paul Lovejoy (1988) recognize that administrative expediency hindered abolitionism in Northern Nigeria. But, unlike Cooper, they explain the problem in

[6] Notwithstanding, it is difficult to accept Genovese's argument (1979:xiv) that the lateness of emancipation resulted from a general disposition of "pre-capitalist" societies to conceive of social relations as "normally" hierarchical. This idea coheres with Orlando Patterson's (1982, 1984) that freedom as a concept is new to the world and unnatural in, and unknown to, the non-Western world. This view echoes the dominant classes' version of reality and does little justice to the efforts of the slaves who, historically, have vigorously resisted slavery. Admittedly, rebellious slaves did not necessarily envisage equalitarian social orders, but this tendency is not unique to the pre-capitalist era and non-capitalist societies. The capitalist and post-capitalist revolutions only succeeded in entrenching other forms of class rule. Further, it has been shown that slavery was not incompatible with capitalism. In given contexts, it actually enlivened capitalism (Beguelman 1978; Engerman 1995: 237). Even Genovese later subscribed to the argument that capitalism not only absorbed servile labour systems but also "created new ones, including chattel slavery, on an unprecedented scale and at an unprecedented level of violence" (Fox-Genovese and Genovese 1983:vii).

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terms of the philosophies of the colonial administrators. They argue that the British governor, Frederick Lugard, favoured the reform of slavery over abolishing it. Indeed, my evidence supports the idea that British colonial officers held social hierarchy as both necessary and desirable. But the reform of slavery resulted from an inability to stop it—not the other way round. The arguments that colonial officers tempered "the ideals by expediency," as Cooper (1980:40) has maintained, or that they preferred to preserve an unfree labour force, as Hogendorn and Lovejoy (1988) have argued, differ from the facts of the Igbo case. True, administrative officers had their schemes and limitations, but these were only a part of the emancipation problem.

For over a generation, the historiography of the African colonial political economy has emphasized that the weakness of the state was the main obstacle to colonial projects, especially during the early stages of rule (Ajayi 1968; Bayart 1993; Berry 1992; Cliffe 1978; Cooper 1981; Hyam 1980; Kitching 1985; Klein 1971; Lonsdale 1981; Phillips 1989). The evidence regarding slave emancipation in Igboland accords with this principle. There was no colonial masterstroke in the miscarriage of the emancipationist programme. European administrators pursued their pro-master policies neither necessarily by free choice nor because of the shortcomings of their ideology. The officers acted within the constraints of the indigenous political economy in these formative stages of the colonial state rather than out of a warped understanding of, or aversion to, free labour. The complex web of traditional elites' relationships with colonial administrators defined the course of emancipation. Accordingly, African-oriented scholars of comparative slavery observe that the attempt to impose the European abolitionist discourse on non-Europeans placed Africa and Europe "on a collision course" (see Klein 1993b:3; Lovejoy 1983:246). The study of colonial emancipation is thus a study in power relationships involving two sets of social forces: colonial officers and the indigenous elites.[7]

Historically, colonial states deferred to special slave interests in matters of emancipation. Local slave-owning allies resisted whenever the metropolis pushed the abolitionist agenda. Often connected to the state, their resistance to emancipation derived from the extant political structure and relations. For the pre-emancipation British West Indies, Adam Smith and some later scholars have regretted that, in their position as members of the colony assemblies and electorate, planters obstructed measures to ameliorate the lot of the slaves (see Burns 1965:633–4; Craton 1976, 1988; Levy 1980). However, discernible differences obtained in both the patterns of this resistance and rates of abolitionist success between settler and non-settler colonies. Abolition came easier in the settler territories, such as the West Indies, because the metropole had a firmer control on the political economies. Resistance to emancipation took a different form in the non-settler colonies of Africa and Asia, where internal

[7] Slave resistance is an important variable reckoned with here. A fuller detail of this aspect of emancipation in Igboland is duly the subject of another study.

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slave-holding allies had traditional power bases. Abolition came relatively harder to these places.

Slavery persisted in Igbo society, not because but in spite of the colonial policy to end it. Colonial administrators were too preoccupied with maintaining their alliance with indigenous ruling classes to enforce the abolitionist policy effectively. The administrators' ignorance of local conditions further limited the measures they could undertake to undermine slavery without offending their allies. In arguing this case, one must discriminate between imperial policy and the exigency-dictated responses of colonial administrations. Such an exercise will show why it was the "men on the spot," not metropolitan officials, who rationalized slavery and why Europeans did not hold a unitary anti-slavery ideology.

I identify the following periods in this analysis: pre-colonial (up to 1900) and colonial (1900–54).[8] I also analyze the influence of slavery and land tenure on class formation, referring mostly to the post-colonial situation. The centrality of land in twentieth-century Igboland derives not only from the need for food production but also from "the maintenance of the social order" (Bentor 1994:161). This point underlines the close relationship of land and slavery. African slave studies have paid insufficient attention to this relationship. Even worse is the failure to examine the extent to which slavery informed the emergence of socio-economic groups in a rapidly urbanizing context (see Dumett and Johnson 1988). This shortcoming makes comparison rather difficult. The influence of the traditional elites over emancipation runs through the different periods of the history of Igbo slavery. This influence was subject to "the options and constraints which particular historical situations presented" (see Cooper 1979:116). Slave resistance, the Christian influence, abolitionist pressure, demographic shifts relating to urbanization, and the evolution of capitalist relations of production were the relevant historical processes. They have received as much attention as the state-centric focus of this article allows.

Although no major work has appeared, slavery in Igbo society has received a certain amount of attention (see Basden 1966:243–58; Brown 1996; Forde and Jones 1950:23–24; Horton 1954; Igwegbe 1962; Isichei 1976:43–48, 94–102; G. I. Jones 1989; Meek 1937:203–4; 1957:170; Northrup 1981; Nwachukwu-Ogedengbe 1977; Nwaka 1985; Nzimiro 1972:25–29; Offiong 1985; Ohadike 1988; Okeke 1986; Okoro 1985; Uchendu 1965, 1977). This essay draws heavily from these works, as well as the colonial records in the Nigerian National Archives, Enugu (NAE), and Rhodes House, Oxford. These sources, however, present three problems that merit noting. First, most tend to conflate slavery and other forms of servitude and discrimination, such as con-

[8] Nigeria attained independence in 1960. But the Eastern Region was one of the two regions that gained regional self-government in 1954. West-Niger Igbo, as part of the Western Region, had a similar constitutional history.

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cubinage, pawnship, and the *osu* phenomenon.[9] This approach often confuses the slave emancipation scholar who must make sense of the analyses, prescriptions, and conclusions so derived. Based on such an indiscretion, Tuden and Plotnicov (1970:13) conclude, for example, that manumission was absent in Igbo slavery because of its uncommon rigidity. In actuality, this characterization applies only to the *osu.* For purposes of clarity, "slave" is conceptualized here as a person who was at once economically exploited and described as property. No one of these two criteria suffices in itself. It is precisely their conjuncture that distinguishes slaves from other marginalized social categories.[10] Second, most of the sources have male bias. They sometimes explicitly recognize sexual differences in manumission, but as Claire Robertson and Martin Klein (1983b:3) found from evidence on a cross-section of African societies, these works base many of their generalizations on evidence from the male experience. As much as possible, I will highlight the gender differences in manumission. The third problem, though not specific to emancipation, is how to date the pre-colonial period. Many existing sources, including colonial reports, are synchronic in form. They are incorporated here, albeit critically, for two reasons. First, some of their authors self-consciously looked for history (see, for example, Basden 1966). Second, the colonial experience did not radically alter indigenous social structures and relations. The colonial state was neither willing nor able to do so.

One does not seek to suggest that colonialism failed to engender change in Igbo society. Ohadike (1988; 1994) has ably charted the contours of change with regard to various forms of dependency. Nwaka (1985) has marshalled the important struggles for equality of the hitherto marginalized groups. And recently, Brown (1996) brilliantly described the impact of proletarianization on an important slave-holding clan. While recognizing change, this essay focuses only on slavery and seeks to emphasize continuity. Colonial sources tend to exaggerate change, though one cannot talk of a colonial revolution as such (see Afigbo 1971; Ajayi 1968). The objective of this approach is two-fold. The first is to explain why slavery persisted in Igboland as long as it did. The second is to show that the apparent absence of slavery in contemporary times does not preclude the persistence of pre-abolition social relations.

[9] Osu refers to individuals who were said to be dedicated to a deity. They were untouchable. Discrimination against them was purely social. The osu status was static: The osu and their offspring remained osu for ever. These marginal categories must be problematised on their own account as has recently been done for pawnship (see Klein and Roberts 1987; Falola and Lovejoy 1994). A version of Igbo historiography has begun to indicate the difference between pawnship and slavery (see Ekechi 1994:86–89; Okeke 1986:96; Uchendu 1977:88, 126).

[10] Violence and kinlessness are also important characteristics of slavery. But they are controversial. They are less tangible and more amenable to ideological distortions. Kopytoff and Miers (1977) and Noah (1980:24–27, 76–77, 142) claim that they are unable to identify these characteristics in African systems and, thus, virtually deny the existence of slavery. Cooper's (1979) excellent critique of this agnosticism is limited by its author's careful avoidance of an explicit alternative. What he adumbrates applies clearly only to first-generation slaves.

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PRE-COLONIAL PROCESSES OF MANUMISSION

Opportunities for manumission existed in pre-colonial Igboland. As in most other African situations, this "open system" system of slavery differed from the rigid "closed system" that obtained in Asia (see Watson 1980). But these opportunities were selective in the Igbo setting, as in most pre-colonial African societies and pre-abolition manumissions elsewhere. While in classical and early feudal Europe, manumission opportunities occurred within legal frameworks, in Igboland they took the form of the jural rights of slaves and obligations of masters. The fulfilment of certain social expectations and demands is the sine qua non for citizenship status in jural contexts (see Fortes 1969:89–91). Within the achievement norms of Igbo society, all men, including slaves, automatically gained status when they eliminated a recognized enemy of the community in the form of either a human being or ferocious animal (G. I. Jones 1963:18; Nwachukwu-Ogedengbe 1977:150; Uchendu 1977:124). This recognition for public service seems to have been peculiar to Igbo slavery.

With the probable exception of areas with centralized kingships such as Nri, Oguta, Onitsha, and Osomari (see Nwala 1985:193; Nzimiro 1972:26–27), wealth acquired through trade and farming was extremely relevant. According to the practices in the coastal communities of the Niger delta (see Dike 1956; Hopkins 1973:252),[11] forceful and enterprising male slaves benefitted most in this regard. In agrarian communities, enterprising slaves effectively attained manumission once they owned land.[12] Their marginal status lessened significantly at the level of production. Depending on the local practice, they still worked for masters one or two days in the four-day market week and for themselves during the rest. Their marginal status was more pronounced in political responsibilities, ritual practices, inheritance, and marriage. There is no evidence, either in the Igbo or other African cases, that women slaves owned land.[13] They were, thus, not beneficiaries of this liberating factor.

Unlike in early medieval Europe (Bloch 1975:24) or plantation Americas, where the designation of slave was primarily an ethnic category, the chances that Igbo (ex-)slaves would be (re-)sold into slavery at that stage were the same as those of the freeborn. In exceptional instances, people of servile origins founded what G. I. Jones (1989:9) refers to as "minor lineages . . . whose ge-

[11] Calabar was a notable exception. Slaves could trade for free merchants on commission basis but were expressly forbidden to trade independently (Law 1995b:13).

[12] Under the land tenure system, a slave did not own land but could exercise only use rights on communal land (Meek 1957:170). In Ndoki, in the south, slaves could only gain access to communal land on the guarantee of a freeborn. See NAE OW 301/1922-RIVPROF 8/10/214: District Officer (D. O.), Aba, to Resident, Owerri Province, 19 April 1922, par. 4. But recent field work among the Aro, by far the largest slave-holding Igbo group (besides slavedealing), shows that, once they acquired land, (ex-) slaves exercised land rights in similar ways with the freeborn.

[13] Evidence from Aro-nde-Izuogu shows that the land tenure system allowed a freeborn woman to inherit land only if her parents wished her to be unmarried. In this case, she more or less played man in the patriarchal society.

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nealogical connections with the founder were obscure." Aro-nde-Izuogu is a case in point. Straddling the upper Imo River in the Igbo heartland, it was the largest slave pool in the Aro complex and, possibly, the entire Igbo country. Out of the eighteen lineage-groups that comprise the federation, only two have lineages which descended directly from the late eighteenth-century slave-dealing founder. The founder's brothers and prominent dependents founded the sixteen others. Their direct male descendants, along with the founder's direct descendants, constituted the respective ruling classes of Aro-nde-Izuogu towns.[14] The majority of these lineage-groups' populations, in turn, comprised of people of servile origins excluded from the rulership of the lineage groups. They form auxiliary lineages within each lineage group. The charter patrilineages of the lineage groups, more or less, intermarried among one another. They only married from the adjunct lineages if such a union involved them as husbands. The slave-born females they married automatically became free. Their children became full-fledged members of the patrilineage.

This patrilineal incorporation applied to most Igbo societies (see Ohadike 1988:451; Nwachukwu-Ogedengbe 1977; Uchendu 1977:129–30). In some places, such as the northern Igbo communities (Horton 1954:317) and the centralized kingdoms of the lower Niger—Osomari, Oguta and Onitsha (Nzimiro 1972:27)—marriage of any kind did not occur between slave and free people. Viewed superficially, this trend seems to confirm Meillassoux's generalization (1983:50) that marriage between a slave and a free person was impossible in African societies where slavery was institutionalized. Since the societies that allowed such marriages equally institutionalized slavery, one should perhaps distinguish system types by the scope and degree of regimen, rather than the presence or absence of institutionalization. Among the southern Igbo groups, such as the Ngwa and Ndoki, the barrier between slaves and free people seems to have been relatively permeable. A male slave could marry a freeborn woman. The issue of such a marriage had an ambiguous status. In much of southern Igboland, such a marriage could also occur if the slave was bought (as opposed to having been captured). In this case, the children had a status equivalent to that of the children of their father's master, by whom the slave man's children were adopted. This kind of union did not, however, emancipate the slave man in these societies.[15] By contrast, there is no evidence, since the nineteenth century at the latest, that a woman remained a slave while in marriage to a freeborn male.

Also, a woman did not become a slave by marrying a male slave in areas where such marriages obtained. Moreover, freeborn husbands were vehicles for emancipation in Igbo patriarchies. Freeborn wives were not. Another important

[14] The history and dynamics of the Aro-ndi-Izuogu lineage hierarchy is more complex. Seven of the lineage-groups were founded by the sons and descendants of the founder's wife's slave.

[15] NAE OW 301/1922-RIVPROF 8/10/214: D. O., Aba, to Resident, Owerri, 19 April 1922, pars. 4–6; D. O., Owerri, to Resident, Owerri, 21 April 1922, par. 2.

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characteristic feature of the Igbo system is that female slaves were mostly born into slavery, not sold into it. Given the above caveats, plus a high incidence of polygyny (see Martin 1995), the observation that women formed the bulk of the African slave population (see Meillassoux 1983; Robertson and Klein 1983b) calls for closer scrutiny in the case of the pre-colonial Igbo. Of immediate relevance is the experience of slave women deemed to be liberated when married to the freeborn. Both in Igboland and elsewhere in Africa, the ideology of women's inferiority further served to justify an exploitative sexual division of labour. Freedom from slavery did not, therefore, necessarily result in free status for women. Extending her field experience with the Ga of Ghana, Robertson (1983:225, 226–7; Robertson and Klein 1983b:7) argues forcefully that the offspring of female slaves and ex-slaves "often bore a stigma from their origins and had inferior status" in African systems.

Redemption was possible in Igbo society by the eighteenth century. Recent field work among the Aro group points to manumission dating as far back as the mid-eighteenth century; other work elucidates the nineteenth-century situation (Nwachukwu-Ogedengbe's 1977:148; Uchendu 1964, 1977). Within the Aro–Igbo trading concerns, such slaves started their journey to accumulation and freedom by gaining the liberty to retain some commission on the wares they sold. This strategy was an incentive for the slave which also translated to more business for the master and strengthened that master against competitors and enemies (Ekejiuba 1972:13). Self-ransom presupposes the slave's prior involvement in some independent economic activity. Other African cases show this phenomenon (Dunbar 1977:166; Harms 1983; MacCormack 1977:196; Mann 1995). It may also have informed the involvement of slaves in trade in Nupe and Lagos (in the middle belt and south-western regions of Nigeria, respectively). In these places, the slaves accumulated substantial wealth in the nineteenth century (Law 1995c:200). In ancient Greece, a slave could secure a ransom loan by obtaining membership in a loan association (*eranoi*) (see Westerman 1960:23–24). The foregoing shows that the freedom to earn income, an important liberating element, was seldom altruistic. In this context, Basden has suggested (1938:243) that manumission by ransom was necessarily bogus in Igboland. It is probably more accurate to state that disincentives encumbered the process of manumission in many Igbo communities.[16] In nineteenth-century Owerri, where slaves were worked relatively hard (three days in six), redemption involved the repayment of the purchase price, plus 100 percent interest. The master also got a refund for bridewealth if the slave was married. The slave was then expected to return to his original lineage. This experience could be a difficult transition.[17] If leaving the ex-master's lineage was not a requirement, the mere payment of a fee did not bring complete acceptance in the

[16] NAE OW 301/1922-RIVPROF 8/10/214: Memo by Moorhouse, 25 Nov. 1921, par. 6.

[17] See NAE OW 301/1922 RIVPROF 8/10/244: D. O. Owerri, to Resident, Owerri, 21 April 1922, par. 2.

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ranks of the freeborn. However, Basden's claim that manumission served only psychological purposes exaggerates the situation for a considerable part of Igboland, especially the Aro, the largest slave-holding complex in Igboland. The Aro slave system was based on "accelerated emancipation" (Nwokeji 1997:717). In the largest Aro community, Aro-nde-Izuogu, the imperative of acquiring agricultural land from neighbouring communities promoted the acceleration of manumission, especially in the late nineteenth century.[18]

Historically, slave masters hardly encouraged self-redemption, except when they saw benefits (Dockès 1979:2). The *murgu* institution in the nineteenth-century Sokoto Caliphate is an example. This institution involved slaves, masters, rent, and work in a manner that closely resembled serfdom (Lovejoy 1993). Under murgu (see Lovejoy 1993:173), as in the late Roman Empire, masters released themselves from supporting the slaves. In the Roman system, masters also avoided running "the risk of too-extensive enterprises" (Barrow 1928:174–5, 178–9; Bloch 1975:4–7). They increasingly resorted to setting slaves up as craftsmen or tenant-farmers in *latifundia* for more effective exploitation through rent and obligatory labour. Manumission was often tied to the life expectancy of the master in Greece and Rome (Westerman 1960:28; Barrow 1928:186–7). Even when a slave was manumitted in Rome, it took two generations to attain full citizenship status in the tenth century. The slave was also effectively kept dependent on ex-master and his offspring "nearly indefinitely." Manumission "with obedience" was common in medieval European slavery (see Bloch 1975:4–8, 16–17).

Towards the realization of their self-interest, slave-holding ruling classes ensured the absence of clear-cut mechanisms for ensuring the rights of slaves. This design often limited emancipation in the Igbo country. In nineteenth-century Aboh, a slave was supposed to work for his master only every fourth day and spend three days working for himself. As generous as this term sounds, many slaves served as crew members of trading and war canoes, often on tours for upward of one week at a time (Nwachukwu-Ogedengbe 1977:143). In places where the process of manumission seems to have been relatively rigorous, such as Oguta and Aboh (Nwachukwu-Ogedengbe 1977:137; Nzimiro 1972:26–27),[19] certain titles were the preserve of the those born into slavery. In Aboh, custom restricted such conferments on slave-class sons born of free mothers. Most of these titles were inferior to those of the freeborn (Nwachukwu-Ogedengbe 1977:137). In the same Aboh, a slave alleged to have been incorporated into the master's kin received no due legal process, as would a freeborn. The master acted as both plaintiff and judge in a system that granted an accused no resort to appeal (Nwachukwu-Ogedengbe 1977:144). As in Senegambia and the Western Sudan (see Klein forthcoming; Klein and Lovejoy 1979:184), manumission in Igbo society was often drawn out over a long

[18] Recent field observations from settlement and residential patterns, and oral interviews.

[19] NAE OW 301/1922-RIVPROF 8/10/244: D. O., Owerri Division, to Resident, Owerri Province, 21 April 1922, par. 2.

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period of time (G. I. Jones 1963:57, 1989:9; Basden 1966:257; Uchendu 1977:129). Indigenous ruling classes generally disfavoured emancipation. Individual and corporate self-interest as stimuli for manumission were more pronounced in Aro societies, sometimes pre-empting rebellion in the nineteenth century.

It is clear from the foregoing that, despite obstacles, manumission obtained in pre-colonial Igboland. Sometimes, ex-slaves even formed lineage-groups or autonomous settlements. The ownership of land, the masters' self-interests, wealth, hard work and, specifically in the Igbo case, public service, brought the freedom status to (ex-)slaves. The assimilation of ex-slaves differed according to sex. Although women slaves had wider opportunities for manumission when married to the freeborn, among the handicaps they faced was the inability to own land. Land was the central index for manumission in agrarian Igboland.

Crises crystallized from the mid-nineteenth century, when the Igbo systems expanded (Ohadike 1988:44). More slaves became involved in domestic production consequent to the shift from slave to palm produce export (see Afigbo 1981:241–2; Hopkins 1973:155; Isichei 1976:96–97 and 100, 1978:81; Lovejoy 1983:9–15 and 1989; Northrup 1978), and the colonization of the Cross River valley and Aro-nde-Izuogu (G. I. Jones 1989:44). The emergence of a slave mode of production[20] in the nineteenth century had contradictory consequences for emancipation in the region. "Wealth and economic leadership" hastened the manumission process (Jones 1989:57). This structural transformation was uneven, more profound in the coastal communities than in Igboland (see Dike 1956; Hopkins 1973:125–35; G. I. Jones 1963, 1989:9 and 43; Lovejoy 1983:156–83, 1983; Northrup 1978:227–8).

The structural transformation in Igbo society was, nevertheless, sufficient to deepen stratification (Isichei 1976:103; Ohadike 1988, 1994; Oriji 1982, 1983, 1991:66–75). This trend stretched extant kin-based slavery ideologies to their limits. Tighter control of slave labour was more a feature of centralized polities (see Cooper 1979:108, 112; Klein 1978, forthcoming).[21] Most Igbo societies were not. Slave alienation deepened. Rebelliousness, in turn, elicited a harsh response from insecure masters (Ohadike 1988:442–3). This reaction differs from Harms' findings (1983:93) on contemporaneous acephalous societies along the Zaire River. Rather than attempt to suppress the slaves, the ruling classes in these societies deliberately and successfully created these positive in-

[20] Klein (1993b:10) defines a slave mode of production as a socioeconomic system in which the surpluses that support the ruling classes derive from slave labour. For a detailed discussion of this process on a variety of African regions, see Klein and Lovejoy (1979), Lovejoy (1983:269–82), and Terray (1975).

[21] The incorporation of slaves into lineage and quasi-lineage statuses appears to have been a rational system of absorption geared towards forestalling resistance. Though poorly documented, resistance did occur in the pre-colonial period (Basden [1938] 1966:256; Jones 1967:85–87; Isichei 1976:101–2, 1983:247). Glassman's (1991) work on resistance in the Swahili coast of East Africa offers theoretical insights.

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centives for socio-economic mobility. The aim was, similar to that in Igboland, to defuse resistance. The Zaire River slave-owning classes seem to have coped better than their Igbo counterparts. What is clear is that in both cases slaves themselves contributed to shaping the institution of slavery. When European missionaries, and, soon after, administrators, began to close in on Igboland in late nineteenth century, slaves seized the opportunity of the presence of these new social forces to further an ongoing struggle. Exoduses at Abarra-Uno and Osomari on the Niger produced new settlements which were only part of the process. While Abarra-Uno slave exiles founded Abarra-Ogada, the Osomari migration was so extensive that it left the town "a shadow of its former self" (Isichei 1976:102, 1983:247). This was, possibly, the largest single migration in modern Igbo history. Fringe groups, including slaves, became the first missionary converts (Ekechi 1972:11–15; Isichei 1973: 152; Ohadike 1988:444–5; Uchendu 1965). Parallel developments are well documented in the Yoruba case (see Mann 1995; Oroge 1975). The Europeans were to confront a fiercely defensive ruling class in Igboland (see Ohadike 1991, 1994:10–11).

THE COLONIAL PERIOD, 1900 TO 1954

British concerns with slavery in the Bight of Biafra go back to the 1840s after Britain's abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. For over fifty years, however, they confined their interference to the coastal communities (see Dike 1956; Eltis 1987:172; Isichei 1976; G. I. Jones 1963:83, 1989:72–73). Direct interference with the internal affairs of the Igbo country began in 1884, when the Niger Coast Protectorate was established. Still, no attempt was made to stop slavery before 1900 (Nwanunobi 1981:37; Ohadike 1988:445). After that, general abolition became part of colonial political discourse.

The Aro expedition of 1901–02 achieved its military objective but fell short of the political aims of subjugating the Igbo and stopping the slave trade (Ohadike 1988:448). As in other parts of Africa (see Klein 1977:353; Lovejoy 1981:19; Manning 1990:16; Miers and Roberts 1988; Phillips 1988:5; Shenton 1986:26–29), colonial officers in Igboland had to rely on slave dealers and masters in order to subdue and govern. The result of that relationship was a compromise of the abolition policy that incorporated the interests of indigenous allies. Even where such a compromise was not explicit, the indigenous ruling classes often exceeded their traditional mandates and used their powerful position to advantage. Onuoha Duru of Nguru told Elizabeth Isichei: "We helped the white men in the fight against Ahiara and captured many people whom we sold immediately" (Isichei 1976:125). The two heartland communities were at war just prior to the British Ahiara expedition of 1905. Men of this sort generally continued their slavery enterprises. Others became Christians and abandoned old ways. The Aro ex-slave trader, Nwafor Ogwuma, became a native court member in the early 1900s but soon resigned his post. He devoted himself to the church and got ordained as a ruling elder in 1912 and missionary

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assistant in 1918. He became "the first Igbo to administer the sacrament in the Church of Scotland Mission and one of the Africans who assisted . . . in the translation of the Bible into Igbo language" (Kalu 1979:4–5).

Britain's fixation with stopping the unabated slave business primarily aimed to break Aro influence,[22] and was, ostensibly, a prelude to ending slavery. Lugard's Political Memoranda for Nigeria states that "enslaving is a more serious crime than slave-dealing and deserves a severer penalty" (Lugard 1919:par. 27). Yet, the widespread obsession with stopping the slave trade, rather than dealing directly with slavery, prevailed under him, his successors, and other European administrators in Africa. One District Officer in Igboland observed in 1927 that slaveholders "never get punished and so the traffic goes on obeying the economical law of supply and demand, there being nothing done by the Government to lessen the latter" (Cook 1927).

The state's efforts to arrest those involved in slave dealing (not slavery) seems to have started much earlier in Northern Nigeria (see Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993:27–30; Ubah 1991) than in Igboland, where serious attempts began in the mid-1930s. Contrary to the explicit instructions from the British Governor regarding the Hausa (of Northern Nigeria) and Aro intermediaries (see Egerton 1909), the government officers in eastern Nigeria relied on the Aro to promote trade. Government measures were restricted to slave dealing in the North. Even then, only inter-provincial transactions were illegal up to 1904, "a concession to local opinion" (Ubah 1991:450, 454). The rationale for relying on the Aro to propagate trade derived from the belief that the Aro possessed the intelligence and experience both to promote the consumption of European manufactures and stimulate export crop production in the Igbo country (see Brooks 1920:24). This policy seems to have enabled the Aro to camouflage their slave-trading activities (Afigbo 1981:269). The Aro still sold slaves "every market day at Uzuakoli" in 1910, Uzuakoli being relatively out of "the government's eye" (Dodds 1930:13; Ekejiuba 1972a:22, 1972b:14). However, the "centres of the slave trade [were] perfectly well known" to colonial officers by 1913 (NAE Conf. E. 115/13-CALPROF 13/6/103, File 2). The Aro slave traders were operating from a base at Isiagu right on the railway route (Afigbo 1981:266). Years after the Aro expedition of 1901–02, the protectorate government only managed to drive slave dealing underground (see Afigbo 1981:264–5; Brown 1989; G. I. Jones 1989:44; Kalu 1979:4).[23] It is unclear whether the British or any other colonial outfits similarly relied on slave dealing, itinerant merchant groups as they did on the Aro-Igbo.

The Native House Rule Ordinance of 1901 illustrates clearly an inverse re-

[22] The colonial government orchestrated and, perhaps, exaggerated the Aro opposition to the protectorate government (Afigbo 1981:187; Anene 1966:18; Isichei 1973:131; Kalu 1979:2; Northrup 1978:116, 118; Ohadike 1988:447–48).

[23] Frank Hives, District Officer of Bende, and, later, Resident of Owerri, has chronicled his personal experience on the persistence of slavery (See Hives 1930).

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lationship in the state's dependence on the indigenous ruling classes to promote abolitionism. This document was a triumph for the slave-owning classes. It merely abolished the legal status of slavery, not the institution of slavery. It invested the native courts, which were controlled by the indigenous ruling classes, with the bulk of the responsibility for emancipation. It also provided for a fine of £50 for an insubordinate slave (Lugard 1919:par. 41). Since the new law stipulated punishments for resistance to slavery, the master now had, in addition to traditional resources, the backing of the apparatuses of the colonial state. The ordinance also targeted European groups, like the missionaries and abolitionist activists, who might encourage slaves to abandon their masters. Anyone who employed a slave without the consent of the house head would incur a fine of up to £50 and a one-year imprisonment (Harris 1911:5; Lugard 1919).

As a result of this decree, slaves fled across what Harris calls (1911:7–8) the "slave border" into West and Northern Nigeria, where they were "comparatively safe." Sometimes slaves fled to whatever parts of Igboland that promised refuge. This flight reached crisis proportions in the west Niger Igbo area. From 1912, although thousands of slaves left, thousands others did remain but ceased to work for former owners (Ohadike 1994:12). In 1912, the slaves of the Egbuna family in Isele-Uku, also in west Niger, began to leave in large numbers to an unidentified settlement that a former sub-chief of Isele founded. Apparently to undercut his political rivals, he offered the slaves "plenty of farm land and the status of freedom." Isele-Uku chiefs trusted that the Provincial Commissioner, Moorhouse, would intervene in their favour. Moorhouse hesitated on the ground that he "was unable to do that and that the people were free to go and take their personal property with them." In spite of himself, he soon attempted to begin negotiations, claiming that he found that the people were leaving because they were drawn by the allure of the offer rather than by retaliating as the result of any grudges against their masters who had treated them "well." "After somewhat protracted negotiations, it was mutually agreed that the departing 'slaves' should pay a lump sum of £100 down which was divided amongst the 'owners' . . . and an annual contribution of 700 yams to be similarly divided." What more could the chiefs of Isele–Uku gain and the slaves lose? Political expediency rather than a deformed ideology had played its part. But the slaves knew what was better for them. They did not take Moorhouse's advice at face value; many continued their departure. Seven years later, Moorhouse, now in charge of the entire Southern Provinces, reported that the people were now returning to their Isele masters. He recommended to his subordinates the bizarre solution of having the slaves pay lump sums and annual rents to masters.[24] Once more, the wish of the indigenous ruling classes prevailed.

In 1916 the impressively titled "Emancipation Decree" recognized a slave's

[24] NAE OW 301/1922-RIVPROF 8/10/244: Memo by Moorhouse, 25 Nov. 1921, par. 7.

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right to freedom. The ordinance provided that no court could enforce slavery. Governor-General Lugard instructed Residents to publicize this particular provision (Lugard 1919:pars. 4, 7). This law was a definite advance on the 1901 one that had been promulgated before colonial rule was consolidated. The 1916 decree indicates that the colonial state asserted itself progressively with time. Given that slavery depended on the state, the implementation of this law would have eliminated the legal underpinnings of slavery. But then, Lugard's obligation to the indigenous ruling classes compelled him to give safeguards. The ordinance still recognized the slave status in native courts and individuals as property in equity cases (Lugard 1919:pars. 5, 33). Section 2 of the document explicitly stated that "the institution of domestic slavery is not hereby abolished as would be done in a general decree of emancipation" (Lugard 1919:par. 4). Lugard claimed that the condition of slaves improved because, knowing that they could no longer sell recalcitrant slaves nor reclaim runaway ones by force, masters began to treat them well (1919:par. 14). He even tried to strengthen the houses by constituting them into "Native Trading Corporations." The secretary of state overruled him (see Lugard 1919), an indication that this colonial policy departed from the methods of those administrators who were eager to please their indigenous allies, if only to maintain stability and be recognized as successful administrators. Not surprisingly, Lugard's indefinite "transition period" survived his tenure, which terminated in 1919.

Colonial officers believed that time alone could end slavery. Lugard's *Political Memoranda* decried the masters' insistence that their slaves' children continued in servitude to liquidate the cost of their upkeep. The children would, after all, already have defrayed such cost by participating in household work. Yet, the government decided that such an "obligation, if it exists, is of the same nature as that of son to his parents, and its discharge must be left to pressure of native opinion." Until an alternative system of employment was found, administrative officers must discourage large-scale slave desertions (Lugard 1919:par. 7). Many of these subjected persons were not necessarily seeking wage labour. They wanted land—a question the government never seriously addressed. Lugard (1919:par. 12) calculated that, by lacking land, (ex-)slaves would sell their labour power to landowners at a low price. This strategy seems more like an attempt to create a proletariat affordable to (ex-)masters than the reform of slavery.

The contradictory considerations for slave masters' property rights and the free labour requirement preoccupied the administrative officers. The colonial government was vague in Igboland for the most part. Following the exodus that followed immediately upon the 1916 "Emancipation Decree" in parts of the west Niger (Ohadike 1994:13) and the south in Degema Division, the slaves asked the government to clarify its position. Up to 1922, the government "invariably" informed anxious Degema slaves that "no such status exists and

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that if they wish to return to their homes there is nothing to prevent them from going there."[25] Many had already gone.

As Klein finds (1988b, forthcoming) in his studies on Guinea and Senegal, the slaves were the ones who forced the issue in Igboland. The Nkanu slave resistance of the early 1920s complicated the situation for government and compelled it to face the emancipation problem. From 1920, most servile people stopped working for their masters. They rejected the landowners's quit order, arguing that they had served their term. Their grievances against the freeborn included the routine kidnaping and sale of their children, as well as the ritual sacrifice of their women. Following a complaint in July 1921 to the lieutenant-governor by Chukwuani, a prominent warrant chief in the area described as master of "several hundred" slaves (Brown 1989), the district officer of Enugu, H. T. B. Dew, was asked to investigate the matter. Dew established that the emancipation problem affected "not only the whole of Nkanu . . . but probably [also] the whole of the Ibo tribe."[26] The Secretary of the Southern Provinces, Moorhouse, admitted past vacillations and called for active state involvement in negotiating emancipation. "As [the question of emancipation] has now been definitely raised, a solution will have to be found." It is important to note that Moorhouse resolved initially to deal with the problem, even if such an action might jeopardize "the economic situation connected with the labour supply and cultivation of land." Yet, following the recommendations of an inferior officer the masters' property interests prevailed on Moorhouse's fear that such a course would excite criticism.[27] The government decided that Nkanu slaves had to begin paying ransom to masters. Unlike the rest of Nigeria's Southern Provinces, ransom did not yet obtain in Igboland.[28] Significantly, this decision came before district officers throughout Igboland received instructions to evaluate the problem and advance solutions.

Each officer generally gave the impression that the problem of slavery was slight in his division. Like Lugard (1919) and Mockler Ferryman (1902:251), they maintained that decrees and demonstrative military expeditions could not solve the entire slave question.[29] This argument holds true on social discrimination, but not on every aspect of slavery. None of the officers came up with

[25] See NAE OW 301/1922-RIVPROF 8/10/244: D. O., Degema, to Resident, Owerri, 10 April 1922, par. 2.

[26] OW 301/1922 RIVPROF 8/10/244: Memo by D. O., Enugu, 11 Oct., 1921, par. 2.

[27] NAE OWPROF 301/1922 RIVPROF 8/10/244: Memo by Moorhouse, 25 Nov. 1921, pars. 5, 8, 11, 12.

[28] See NAE OW 301/1922-RIVPROF 8/10/244: Resident, Onitsha, to Secretary, Southern Provinces, 18 Oct. 1921, pars. 2–6; memo by D. O., Enugu, 11 Oct. 1921, par. 5. See also Memo by D. O., Enugu, 11 Oct. 1921, par. 6.

[29] During the Nkanu slave agitations of the early 1920s, Moorhouse figured that "what they [the slave-born] want is what no Ordinance can give them." NAE OW 301/1922-RIVPROF 8/10/244: Memo by Moohouse, 25 Nov. 1921.

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any concrete proposals on land tenure reform.[30] The only officer who deliberated on this question in detail was Falk, the anachronistic district officer of Degema, southern Igboland. Claiming that (ex-)slaves faced the tremendous problem of adaptation, Falk suggested that any political solution or general law was "undesirable." It would not be "equitable" to ask the former slave masters to share their land with former slaves. "Landless classes have to make the best terms they can with landowners."[31]

The most innovative recommendation for solving the emancipation crisis came from the District Officer of Okigwi, Ingles. Though he avoided the land tenure question, Ingles proposed that government "assist by starting [ex-slaves] as traders or farmers in some country where their previous status would be unknown." Ingles thought that, this way, the (ex-)slaves could realize both economic and social emancipation. Significantly, the Resident of Owerri was hostile to Ingles' proposal, claiming that Ingles' proposition would be repugnant both to the traditional elites and slaves. He also disagreed with another District Officer who suggested encouraging former slaves to return to their place of origin.[32]

Government officers, including those who assessed the Nkanu revolt, knew the danger of recognizing slavery. Yet, they imposed a 12-shilling redemption fee on the Nkanu slaves. Some paid. The slave masters interpreted this fee as annual rent in lieu of labour. Not surprisingly, these measures did not stop the revolt. Instead, it escalated early in 1923 and was more complicated than the government realized.[33] Nkanu people, slave and free, did not recognize British authority. The warring parties ignored government's instructions.[34] The slave-born of Akegbe town claimed an inherent right to residential and agricultural

[30] Their views, however, differed in some important aspects. From Owerri, Ferguson ruled out redemption on the technical ground that the slave status had ceased to exist. He was almost certain that ex-slaves would get some land if they were encouraged to go back to wherever they came from. NAE OW 301/1922-RIVPROF/8/10/244: D. O., Owerri, to Resident, Owerri, 21 April 1922. Tabor in the Aba Division seemed satisfied that the occasional complaint was that slaves no longer worked for their masters. NAE OW 301/1922-RIVPROF 8/10/244: D. O., Aba, to Resident, Owerri Division, 19 April 1922.

[31] NAE OW 301/1922 RIVPROF 8/10/244: D. O., Degema, to Resident, Owerri, 10 April 1922.

[32] NAE 301/1922-OW RIVPROF 8/10/244: D. O., Okigwi, to Resident, Owerri, 5 April 1922, par. 6. The Resident reasoned, rather dishonestly, that such a scheme would fail because the kinsmen of the returning person would still see him as a slave and not give him land. See Resident, Owerri, to Secretary, Southern Provinces, 1 May 1922. In the previous year, one Obatu returned to Amagunzi in Enugu Division "to the house of Ndemba, whose forefathers sold him to Onitsha." See Memo by D. O., Enugu, 11 Oct. 1921, par. 5.

[33] At Oborka (Ugboka), the British also found themselves entangled in local politics over warrant chieftaincy. One warrant chief, Agu-Welemba of Amaozum Division, seized the opportunity of the fracas to usurp effective power over neighbouring Obilagu Division (a.k.a. Ishiekwe) in late November 1923. For demonstrative effect, he and his kinsman, Mba-Agu-Welemba, raided Ishiekwe "capturing the land juju . . . killed 3 Ishiekwes [and] sold 17 into slavery." The British did not punish Agu-Welemba either for murder or slave dealing. Only Mba-Agu-Welemba, got arrested, but it was for failing to render "homage" to the British-preferred warrant chief, Nwobodo Mba, during a peace meeting arranged by the District Officer on 22 or 23 November. He even "attempted to create a disturbance [before he] was arrested." See NAE OP 208/1921-ONPROF 7/8/200: D. O., Enugu, to Resident, Onitsha, 28 November 1923, pars. 1–9.

[34] In April 1923, the slave-born of Amaozom drove away many freeborn of the community and

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land and rejected the government's order that they pay rent.[35] More violence in 1928, 1936, and throughout the Second World War wasted "hundreds of lives" as a result of government failure to clarify its position (Nwaka 1985:480).[36]

To advance their interests, the slave-owning classes exploited the government's machinery. This strategy came out clearly in one incident that occurred in Ihiala in the Igbo heartland. For the "breach of native custom," the freeborn controllers of the Native Court, in November 1927, sentenced a young freeborn man to two terms of eighteen months' imprisonment with hard labour. He had attempted to marry a slave-born maiden. The girl's father incurred a £5 fine. Only after the resulting furor had continued for two months did the District Officer intervene to prevent further escalation. He first suspended the sentences and "finally quashed [them] in view of the Government's well-known attitude on the question."[37] Even then, he appealed to the freeborn community to deal with the problem "socially." This attitude brings us to an aspect of colonial abolitionism that was most characteristic to British regimes. Social discrimination remained and was even encouraged, as Cooper (1980) and Twaddle (1988:138) also found in East Africa.

The interest in preserving the property interests of masters pervades accounts of other African societies under different European regimes. In Zanzibar, freedom-seeking slaves heard in court that "they would be turned off the land unless they paid rent." Many changed their minds (Cooper 1980:75). In Mauritanian Adar, slavery remained intact up to 1918 (McDougall 1988:366). An 1874 Gold Coast ordinance forbade administrators from interfering with master–slave relations, except by invitation (Dumett and Johnson 1988:85). Lugard, as British High Commissioner of Uganda, did not bother even to issue the usual regulatory ordinances in Buganda in the 1890s. He claimed that the system was benign enough. This attitude "is inconsistent, because 'benign' slavery was hardly effective in reinforcing the 'respect for rank' that Lugard wanted to promote" (Twaddle 1988:127–8). In Rio Nunez, coastal Guinea, a proclamation in 1904 specified the particular circumstances under which a slave would receive freedom. All of these circumstances were contingent on a master's failure to live up to his obligations, not on the slave's wish. Masters

arrested others while the police were in the town. The police tried to rescue the captives and arrest slave-born ringleaders but were beaten up and driven out of the area. A military patrol spent eight months "pacifying" the people. See OP/208/1921 ONPROF 7/8/200: "An Inquiry Under the Collective Punishment Ordinance . . . Holden at Oborka Before J. G. Lawton Esqre District Officer, Political Officer on Nkanu Patrol on April 2nd 1923."

[35] They claimed: "we originated with them [freeborn] on the land since in time of 4th and 5th generation of our fathers" [sic]. NAE OP 82/1924-ONPROF.

[36] In 1938, the freeborn of the Nkanu town of Amagu-Akagbe petitioned the resident of Onitsha Province that they were driven out of their town by the slave-born. See NAE OP 129-ONDIST 1/101.

[37] He met with the people, agreed with the freeborn that the distinction between slave and free people would for long be "a very definite one in the Ibo mind." He warned the freeborn that they would suffer "the emigration of their social inferiors" if treated too harshly. NAE OP 2893-ONDIST 12/1/1987: "Position of Freeborn and Slaves," D. O., Onitsha, to Senior Resident, Onitsha, 17 January 1928.

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warned the French administrators that such anti-slavery measures portended conflict and threatened labour supply (Klein 1988b:209, 216). For their part, the French reckoned that the raiding and the absence of labour mobility associated with slavery threatened the economy; yet they pandered to the traditional elites here (Klein 1988b;205, 215), as they did in the Congo's Ubangi Shari (Cordell 1988:152, 155, 156). The procurement of the freedom franchise upon request from government, as Robertson (1983:221) found among Ga slaves of Ghana, seems to have deviated from the norm. The real issue is that the lack of will to free slaves was sometimes explicit and other times not. For instance, an overwhelming number of available court cases among the same Ga dealt with slave dealing rather than slavery (Robertson 1983:222).

Lugard in Nigeria clearly recognized the destabilizing influences of raiding and kidnapping that slavery fostered. There was no substitute to "personal initiative, and personal and corporate responsibility" (Lugard 1919:par. 10). Lugard hoped as early as 1906 that Northern Nigerian masters would see the merits of contract arrangements and take advantage of his monetization project (Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993:202). So, why did colonial abolition policy falter? The question of the colonial state's weakness need not be belaboured. The administrators' hopes of undermining slavery without alienating their indigenous allies failed because these hopes derived from the faulty stereotypes of indigenous society articulated by such imperial theorists as Lieutenant Colonel Mockler-Ferryman and Lugard. (A reading of Mockler-Ferryman's brief suggestions for dealing with slavery shows that Lugard's measures explicated in the Political Memoranda were not original.) Addressing intricate social problems was generally beyond the purview of most administrators, who were mainly army officers (G. I. Jones 1989:1).

Afigbo observes that British officers assumed that supplying slaves was tantamount to incurring violence. They thought, therefore, that they could eliminate it by establishing "law and order." In reality, raiding was never a principal means of procurement. Besides, slave dealers by that time relied even more heavily on non-violent means like luring children away (Afigbo 1981:267). In 1912, long after the Aro expedition, another military expedition to the *Ibini Ukpabi* (or, Long Juju) rescued 22 young captives. The fact that these boys originated from widely distributed areas of the region indicates the extent of the Aro slave-dealing network up to that time. This trend continued into the 1920s, when a district officer declared "a perfect (sic) epidemic of slave dealing and child stealing" in his division.[38] The archival record on child dealing is particularly rich for the 1920s up to the mid-1930s. In 1934, a well-articulated child-dealing network, involving kingpins from all over eastern Nigeria, had fully evolved (see Bell 1934). We now know about this network and related activities probably because of the increasing interest in anti-slavery since the 1920s, rather than an actual increase in slave dealing. But child dealing was certainly

[38] NAE 63/1922-OKIDIST 4/4/51: D. O.; Awgu to D. O., Okigwi, 1922.

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on the increase. However, the police authorities in south-eastern Nigeria concluded, after an extended period of undercover operation in the mid-1930s, that child stealing was rare (George 1935:2a). Some people continued to sell their children to pay penal fines and taxes. Some participants of the famous Aba Women War of 1929–30 testified that taxation was one of the causes of child stealing (see George 1935b:2; Williams 1935:4). Many pawned either themselves or their children to landowners in order to get land. An interest of 50 percent plus "a goat, a hen, twenty yams, a jar of wine, a pot of palm-oil, a bunch of seasoning leaves, and four kola-nuts" accompanied repayment after a period of servitude (Meek 1937:205). The time of the colonial officers' observations and Meek's work, both on child dealing and pawnship, accords with the findings on French West Africa. Klein and Roberts (1987) report that pawnship experienced resurgence during the world depression of the late 1920s and the 1930s. Cordell (1988:166) also finds an increased number of transactions in children in Congo's Ubangi Shari.

The records also indicate an increased demand for, and sale of, women. Like child-commodities, the majority of these women were sent to coastal communities. Many others were used by Igbo market women for the "fetching and carrying that went with being a full-time trader" (Emechta 1977:58). This phenomenon is well captured in Felicia Ekejiuba's biography of the Onitsha-based merchant princess, Omu Okwei (Ekejiuba 1967). The colonial authorities calculated, correctly, that the practice of bridewealth payment masked these transactions. Indeed, Buchi Emecheta's novel, *The Slave Girl*, set in the first three decades of twentieth-century Igboland, indicates that the matrimonial idiom permeated transactions in female captives (Emecheta 1977:50). Lugard recognized that the bridewealth payment was "so engrained and so universal" among the south-eastern ethnic groups and regarded this "wife purchase" as slave dealing. He calculated that Western education would eradicate it (Lugard 1919:par. 20). He regarded "wife purchase" as repugnant because it enabled "the powerful and wealthy to gratify their own desires [and] deprives the class from which these girls were drawn of their proper compliment of women as wives" (Lugard 1919:par. 21). So, the criminalization of bridewealth payment became the main measure to work against the dealing in women. There was an embedded male bias in the law. In the event of the "crime" of bridewealth payment, a prospective male husband but not a female spouse[39] would receive a refund (see Lugard 1919:par. 40). At any rate, administrative officers soon found that it was "extremely hard to prove . . . cases of selling girls [since] they so frequently prove to be only a dowry question."[40] Had this law been effective, British administrators would have eliminated an institutionalized mechanism for emancipation and social mobility. If he figured that a woman was beautiful enough and her family was sufficiently resourceful, a prospective freeborn husband would marry a woman from a slave family because she would pass on these positive traits to

[39] Female-female "marriage" was recognized in twentieth-century Igbo society (see Amadiume 1987).

[40] NAE 1/1920-OKIDIST 4/2/1: D. O., Okigwe to D. O., Owerri, 26 Oct. 1920.

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her children and, thus, to his family (Okeke 1986:88). As already shown, slave-born women invariably obtained their freedom as a result of such marriages.

Mockler-Ferryman (1902:245) and Lugard (1919:12) projected that railways to the interior would discourage slaveholding. In 1914 the Eastern Railway, running through the Ibgo country, was commissioned. Paradoxically, the railway apparently made it easier for some dealers. Reports that the Aro were transporting their human cargo (mainly children) in railway coaches were still being received in 1935 (Williams 1935:5).[41] Also, based on the false premise that slaves were both a means of exchange and standard of value, Mockler-Ferryman (1902:246–50) and Lugard (1919:par. 13) postulated that a speedy monetization would be a panacea to slaveholding. The time when slaves partly served exchange purposes belonged to the past—not later than the 1880s (see Ekejiuba 1972b:15). Consequently, this measure had little desired impact. It was also possible that the alleged impact was the government's way of stimulating cash crop production and of justifying the imposition of direct taxation. The failure of this project derived from the fact that cowries and manilla, as opposed to slaves, were the predominant means of exchange since the early nineteenth century (Hopkins 1973:111; Jones 1989:1–2). These currencies had taken deep roots among the Igbo and their neighbours. Therefore, the people resisted the colonial state's attempt to undermine them. Meek (1937:202) recounts that the people of Awgu, north-central Igbo, ruled that bridewealth be paid in native currencies rather than in Britain's. Ben Naanen (1993) shows how manilla survived the state's attempt to rusticate it in the south-eastern Nigeria until 1948, when it was banned through legislation. Even then, the manilla's disappearance seems to have been due more to natural attrition than state decree.

Tied to the programme of monetization was the more relevant idea of proletarianization (see Mockler–Ferryman 1902:250; Lugard 1919:par. 15). Lugard instructed administrative officers to explain the "practical advantages" of contract arrangements, warning that labourers "must be paid fully in cash, at short intervals, and without the intermediary of any middleman or Chief" (Lugard 1919:pars. 13, 15). The decision to pay royalty per slave-turned-conscript-labourer to the prominent chiefs of northern Igboland (see Brown 1989, 1996; Onyeama 1982) may have been calculated as the most effective means of achieving both abolition and labour requirements for the mines and railway.

The establishment of rehabilitation centres appears to have been the most practical component of the emancipation agenda. Though the state subsidized some of these centres, missions and other humanitarian bodies initiated and ran them. The idea was to keep children under fifteen in orphanages, provide them with care and education, and offer them for state-supervised adoption to well-to-do individuals and families (see Lugard 1919:pars. 30, 31). A Mrs. Hilda Hamilton of neighbouring Calabar, a "foreign native,"[42] had become guardian

[41] NAE OW 301/1922-RIVPROF 8/10/244: Resident, Owerri, to Secretary, Southern Provinces, 1 May 1922, par. 8.

[42] This is the colonial era reference to a black person from outside a given outside colony.

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to a liberated slave girl in October 1906. The Provincial Commissioner committed her to giving the child "a liberal education," not to hold onto the girl at any time against her wish, and to allow her to marry whenever, as an adult, she saw fit to do so (NAE EP 688/6-CALPROF 16/1/247). In 1920, there was talk of admitting freed young captives to "some school under the Governement Mandate Scheme" (NAE 1/1920-OKIDIST 4/2/1). The operation of the orphanages and the welfare of liberated slave children needs to be studied. Ubah (1993) reports that the Northern Nigerian administration recognized the problem as special but was uncommitted to its solution. The rehabilitation measures that they took were, therefore, unsystematic and inadequate.

The tempo of governmental anti-slavery measures rose sharply in the 1930s. The colonial state was beginning to find its feet. In June 1931, the authorities found the seven years' maximum penalty for slavery offences too lenient and proposed to "put pressure on the Chiefs and people." They decided to increase the penalty to fourteen years in August (see Murphy 1931:1; NAE CP 2039-CALPROF 3/1/1928). In November 1933, a police task force was specifically constituted under an assistant commissioner of police, Haydock-Wilson, to deal with slave dealing in parts of the Igbo country. Within nine months of active work, intermittently between November 1934 and February 1936, constables got promotions and commendations as incentives and rewards for their work to oppose slavery; Captain S. P. George was drafted from the army to help; and convicted slave dealers received severe prison terms. The force had secured sixty-eight convictions out of forty cases. By contrast, only seventeen persons had been found guilty out of the meagre thirty-five cases prosecuted in the twenty-two months prior to October 1933 (Garden 1934:1), a feeble and ineffective effort by the local authorities to stop such operations. The Colonial Office insisted that there was room for more work (see NAE C136-CALPROF 3/1/1928). The differences between metropolitan and colony officers cut deep. One District Officer in 1936 expressed his exasperation with the new anti-slavery drive.

> The serfs are slaves. . . . They want land and to get it have to work for the landowner. Most of us are in the same toils. The freeing of the serfs by Government grants of land or capital is a socialistic ideal. There is no more justification for it than the Government to free me from the necessity of earning my livelihood in an unhealthy climate by granting me land and capital in England.[43]

By 1936, an embarrassed Colonial Office had had enough of the clichéd replies of administrators. It warned the southern Nigerian government that "the continuance of any form of servitude, even if described as 'voluntary' cannot be acquiesced to indefinitely" (see Ohadike 1988:454). In that same year a decree abolished slavery throughout Nigeria. Other colonial African cases equally reveal increased state attention to the slavery problem in the 1930s (see Miers

[43] NAE Conf. C4/45-AFDIST 6/6/5: D. O., Afikpo, to Resident, Ogoja Province, 9 November 1936, p. 5.

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and Roberts 1988). Before this time, the colonial state had embarked on undermining slavery. It did this, as we have seen, chiefly by promoting wage labour. Colonial officials in northern Nigeria began to encourage outright ransom when they found that the murugu was perpetuating slavery (Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993:205). Murugu was a system that exposed the slave to double exploitation by the master in the form of regular installments and by the state in the form of taxes. Indeed, Lugard himself went as far as persuading the masters of the merit of contract arrangements (Lugard 1919:202).

Was the African colonial governments' failure to decisively tackle slavery symptomatic of culpability or weakness? Let us refer to those areas with shared colonial experience. In the West Indies, the Colonial Office officials expected the planter-controlled colony assemblies and councils to attempt to undermine emancipation measures. Yet, the officials were eager not to antagonize the slave owners (Levy 1980:38, 50, 51, 53, 63). They were committed to safeguarding the labour needs of the plantation classes. The price of Crown Lands were kept out of the reach of (ex-)slaves to prevent them from becoming free peasants. Harsh vagrancy and poor laws aimed to ensure a disciplined workforce. Besides these measures, differences regarding the future of slavery remained strong. This difference was roughly one between the preference for servitude resembling wage labour and that for continuing slavery. Nevertheless, the planters were able to coerce the (ex-)slaves through various means during apprenticeship. The system retained (ex-)slaves in slave-like conditions while relieving the (ex-)masters of obligations (see Craton 1988, 1976:325–8; Levy 1980:38–70). The (ex-)slaves received pay only for work done in excess of the mandatory forty-five hours a week (Craton 1976:325).

Unlike in the West Indies, where the structures of colonial control had been institutionalized, the colonial state concentrated its resources and commitment to the pressing task of regime consolidation in Igboland and other non-settler African and Asian colonies. In India, slavery actually intensified with the advent of British colonialism in 1757 and survived the abolition of 1843 (see Banaji 1933; Chattopadhyay 1985:42; Patnaik 1985:5; Sarkar 1985:98). Officials of the East India Company took strong exception to the 1833 abolition in the British Empire (Manickam 1982:64). The small number of British officials responsible for enforcing anti-slavery had to depend on indigenes who had an interest in maintaining the institution of slavery (see Klein 1993b:19). The first measures of the ruling British East India Company closely resembled the Nigerian Native House Rule Ordinance and similar measures in colonial East and West Africa. In Tamil country, the British re-arrested runaway slaves and returned them to masters (Manickam 1982:60). As in Igboland, administrative officers seized the opportunity of slave crises to legitimate a fledgling colonial state, rather than rescue the slaves. These administrators were, in the main, ideologically committed to abolition, but the reality they met on the ground distinguished their methods from the visions of their metropolitan superiors.

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The British emancipation effort in Igboland and other colonies, was an exercise in contradiction. On the one hand, it aimed to free people from slavery. On the other, the exigences of stability required the proper subjection of ex-slaves to ex-masters. Though raiding and kidnapping continued in Igboland (Basden [1938] 1966:245), their decline was a fact. It is, however, noteworthy that the relationship of land to pawnship and that of pawnship to the "vicissitudes of the market economy" (Falola and Lovejoy 1994:3) implies that many emancipated slaves became pawns. Since the land tenure matter remained unaddressed, abolition rather than emancipation was possible.

SLAVERY, LAND TENURE, AND CLASS FORMATION

There are yet no detailed enquiries into the influence of slavery on class formation in African societies. A few Africanist scholars have stressed the importance of determining the social origins of urban dwellers and the role of ex-slaves in the urban centres (Dumett and Johnson 1988:92; Klein 1994). Dumett and Johnson tentatively remark (1988:92–93) that a few ex-slaves on the Gold Coast went into the low-wage cadres of the modern economy, but most remained in the rural areas as "subsistence" farmers after abolition. It is yet unclear what proportion and which categories of Igbo urban dwellers have slave origins. However, the connection between class formation and urbanization is certain. The interface is land tenure. The notion of slaves as property may have become abstract in Igboland, but, as Horton (1954:316) found in the important slaveholding society of Northern Igboland, the disadvantages of the land tenure system were still real for people of servile origin.

Land formed the capital base of the rural areas. To a significant degree, possession or non-possession of rural-originated capital defined an individual's entry points to the city. The slave-born who lacked this capital must have constituted a significant proportion of what Murray (1983:227) refers to as the "rural refugees" who inundated the cities. The demographic change associated with the migration of youths to the cities as an escape from rural oppression is well-documented in African studies (See Cohen 1971:113–4; Cooper 1983; Gutkind 1974, 1965:333; Iliffe 1983:33, Suret-Canale 1966:67; Wallerstein 1961:35). In colonial Igboland, rural oppression may have been a more significant factor for urban proletarianization than market incentives. The activities of the "warrant chiefs," the arbitrarily appointed local agents of colonialism, unsettled some rural dwellers who ordinarily preferred self-employment (see Brown 1985:6–8). Land-starved since the heyday of slavery, people of servile origin and their children were employed by the landowning classes to till the soil, cut palm fruits, and tap wine, which enabled the ruling classes to derive the surpluses that paid their sons' (hardly their daughters') school fees at home and abroad. Portions of rural land could be sold or rented to set sons up as small-scale entrepreneurs in the urban areas. (Land premiums were higher in places that quickly became urban centres.) The federal Land Use Decree of 1978 in-

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vested all the land with the government. In practice, this decree empowered the government to buy land from landowners, but because it required the exchange of land for compensation, the decree does not affect the lives of the landless.

I believe I am not exaggerating the impact of land tenure in an over-populated region, like Igboland, with its markedly poor agricultural land. True, trade, business, and the professions have come to confer both wealth and status (see Ohadike 1994). Added to this was the influence of the oil boom of the 1970s. These variables cannot, however, negate the impact that land—or the lack of it—has made upon class formation in Igbo society. Even after it abolished slavery, the colonial state in Igboland, like its post-colonial offshoot, could not alter the rural land tenure system that privileged certain groups with access to land on the basis of their charter status and continues to bind slave descendants as tenants, tributaries, or contract labourers to the freeborn.

The rulers of Eastern Nigeria were responding to a widespread disregard of the federal law when they re-abolished slavery in 1956. The regional law is not a mark of the messianic intentions of that government. In fact, the modernizing elites inherited not only power but also "prejudices, myths and misconceptions" from the colonizers (Andah 1988:5). Though agitations from slave and osu descendants were serious enough to threaten the fulfillment of the desire to attain self-government (Nwaka 1985:474), abolitionism became an official agendum tangentially. It was the Balonwu Commission on Bride Price that warned the government that slavery and its cognate practices called for direct intervention. The fact that a bride price commission uncovered slavery underlined the continued relationship between bridewealth and slave dealing. The title of the law, the Osu System Law, reflected the emphasis of the government on the social side of marginality. Since the 1956 law, many other re-abolitions have followed both at the state and town levels.

Like previous legislative acts, these "re-abolitions" did not address the crucial question of land tenure. Like the colonial state, the post-colonial authorities find it politically convenient to neglect this important question. This development is by no means peculiar to the Igbo emancipation experience. Historically, land redistribution has consistently failed to follow emancipation (Klein 1994; Lovejoy 1994). Politicians, anxious to maintain and widen their constituencies, embrace the traditional elites and pretend that discrimination against people of servile origin has disappeared or, like colonial administrators before them, hope that it will do so with the passage of time. Nwaka (1985:474) suggests that many people shy away from speaking out for fear of being stigmatized for associating with the slaves. For their part, military regimes have come to depend on the traditional establishments for much sought legitimacy.

Another element of class formation was the influence of the missions and Western education. People of servile origin were eager to benefit from these opportunities (see Ekechi 1972). This way, they attained significant measures of social mobility. But we must be careful not to assume that descendants of mar-

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ginalized pre-colonial groups have come to dominate the political and economic life of the Igbo. This view incorrectly assumes that the emancipation process has been completed. It is inconsistent with the incidence of re-abolitions. Although the slaveholding groups of Igboland could no more defend slavery in its vulgar form after 1936, they continued to retain a vested interest in preserving and promoting social attitudes that reinforce social and economic discrimination originating in slavery—and did so with a considerable degree of success. For instance, a traditional ruler could declare in the late 1980s that "titles are conferred only upon any free-born man. A foreigner or . . . slave descendant is not eligible" (Eneje 1988:7). A slave descendant still had a foreigner status in his community.

There is another problem with the view that slave descendants dominate Igbo life. It assumes that education was less available to the well-born. To Onyeama, an ex-long-distance slave trader and later the warrant chief of Agbaja, education became an instrument for rewarding favoured sons (Onyeama 1982:21–25, 79–82). Besides, the idea of the slave-born's dominance as the result of making use of educational opportunities tends to reduce colonial social mobility to the acquisition of Western education alone. It, therefore, misses the logic of colonial and post-colonial political economies. The segments of the Igbo elite who did not get official recognition, with its usual fringe benefits, still had their land and, as we have seen, slaves. Though capitalist dynamics would reshuffle both the freeborn and slave-born, virtually all of the most prominent among the early Western-educated Igbo came from well-established families. These include Nnamdi Azikiwe of Onitsha, Denis Osadebey of Asaba, Nwafor Orizu of Nnewi, K. O. Mbadiwe and Mbonu Ojike of Aro-ndi-Izuogu, Akanu Ibiam of Afikpo, the pioneer African professional historian K. O. Dike[44] of Awka, the Onyeamas of Eke, and the Nwodos of Ukehe.

CONCLUSIONS

This essay has used the Igbo case to argue that the dynamics of power involving the expatriate officials and slaveholding (often collaborating) indigenous groups provide keys to understanding the peculiar pattern of colonial emancipation. Two levels of analysis were employed in the evaluation of this problematic. On the one hand, Igboland was compared with other non-settler colonies of East and West Africa as well as India. On the other, these non-settler colonies and the settler ones of the British West Indies were compared. For all the variety of colonial situations in Africa, India and the West Indies, the colonial governments faced basically the same dilemma with regard to emancipation: resistance from the traditional ruling class. This resistance has roots in the pre-colonial period. A comparison of Igboland with other pre-abolition

[44] Dike's father is said to have been the last person to hold the highest title (Whum) in Awka. Taking this title involved feeding the whole community for days and providing for the needy until everyone expressed satisfaction (see Isichei 1978:67).

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settings of Africa and early medieval Europe underline reluctance and obstruction as common characteristics of the masters' response to emancipation. Further, emancipation took three distinct phases in all the colonial situations considered: the abolition of the slave trade; the implementation of policies that sought to tie slaves closer to masters; and, finally, the prohibition of slavery. As in colonial India and East and West Africa, those who depended on the system in the West Indies, the plantation owners, resisted as well.

In Igboland, as in other colonies, the property interests of the masters were central concerns in official abolitionism. The apprenticeship system in the British West Indies from 1834 to 1838 resembled the systems of ransom that prevailed in colonial Africa. Under the first Emancipation Act of 1834, it was the (ex-)master's prerogative to agree to grant freedom. Otherwise, he decided on a fee suitable to him, except the (ex-)slave could secure a judicial warrant authorizing the purchase of freedom (see Levy 1980:43). Also, the slave had somehow to find the ransom money in Africa, a task that was easier if the master allowed him time for independent economic pursuits. In both the West Indian and African colonies, the masters dictated the pace of emancipation to a large extent. The result was that, in all these cases, pre-abolition patterns of exploitation remained. This was so glaring in the West Indies that Craton (1988) and others insist that the post-abolition period was one of "continuity, not change." The appraisals of the African contemporaries of colonial abolitionism are similar. In Zanzibar, many failed to recognize colonial emancipation and derided free persons as "slaves of the white man" (Cooper 1980:76). The reference was literally the opposite in Nigeria but equally derisive: Freed persons had "whiteman's freedom" (see Lugard 1919:par. 6). Except in such Igbo communities as in Nkanu, where the slave-born forcefully seized land,[45] the landowning ex-slave masters generally dictated the conditions of the ex-slaves' access to land. The freeborn's control of land continued to place them as controllers of labour. Tenement arrangements were common. Ex-slaves also gained access to land through patron-client arrangements. This uniform pattern was not merely coincidental.

Parallels aside, the patterns of resistance of the slave-holding classes and rates of abolitionist success differed substantially between the African colonies and the West Indian settler colonies. Granted, abolitionism was a programme both in Africa and the West Indies. But socio-economic structures and developments were, if indeed still receptive to slavery, as some argue for the New World (see Beiguelman 1978; Bender 1992; Drescher 1995; Fox-Genovese and Genovese 1983), clearly conducive to abolition. Abolitionism therefore resulted at least in part from structural developments. Besides, the dominant intellectual values had come to disapprove of slavery. The plantocracies themselves

[45] NAE OP 129 ONDIST 12/1/101: "To Honour the Resident Onitsha Province," 7 Dec. 1938.

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even worried about receiving bad publicity in the mother country during the struggle for abolition (Levy 1980:62). They craved the image of gentlemen, and gentlemen no longer held slaves. By contrast, abolitionism did not result from structural developments in Igboland and the rest of Africa. It antedated a transition in the modes of production (Robertson and Klein 1983b:17). In Europe, emancipation was a long process, taking as long as it was necessary for such a transition (see Bloch 1975; Dockès 1979).

Differences in the masters' responses to abolition are also important. The plantocracies of the West Indies were operating within a politico-legal framework whose institutions they understood and respected. In Igboland and other non-settler colonies in Africa and Asia, abolitionism was the policy of an alien power. The slave-holding groups worked within colonial constraints but exploited new opportunities and traditional strengths to resist abolition. The administrative officers charged with implementating the anti-slavery policy were farther than the Colonial Office officials from the ideological climate of anti-slavery and closer to the realities of ruling unwilling peoples. Abolitionism threatened the very survival of a socio-economic class. Even Cooper (1980:40), who underrates the resistance of the traditional elites in African situation, accepts the fact that colonial officers desired slavery to proceed on a line of "natural death" until the colonial state could gather steam. In other words, the Europeans became tougher on slavery when the colonial state had been well-established. This accords with the situation presented in this essay.

As Klein articulates clearly in the French West Africa case (1988b:208), an interesting consequence of the early regulatory laws was that "slaves began to act in such a way that the [worried colonial administrators] had either to put the authority of the state behind the slave masters or let slave-based labour systems collapse." An impressive array of recent African slavery literature recognizes the agency of slave resistance to emancipation in the colonial period (Brown 1996; Cooper 1977, 1980; Klein 1993b, forthcoming; Roberts and Klein 1980; Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993:160; Manning 1990:161; Mires and Roberts 1988; Moitt 1993). In Senegal (see Klein forthcoming), the struggles of the slaves made administrative officers "look good." In coastal East Africa (Cooper 1980:24), the ex-slaves "pushed the officials." The British strategy for undermining the economic, political, and social power of Zanzibarian slave owners backfired, for it weakened the slave owners' control of labour (Cooper 1980:ix). Klein observes (forthcoming) for French West Africa that if colonial administrators "did not realize how lightly sat the hands of masters over their slaves, they were well aware how fragile their own ascendancy was." British administrators in Igboland had cause to interpret the violent Nkanu slave revolts as, in fact, resistance to colonial authority (Brown 1989). However, the imbroglio provided the British with an opportunity to establish their authority more firmly in the area. After the defeat of each town, they compelled its in-

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habitants to "elect" a warrant chief in an attempt to legitimate the colonial state.[46] In this kind of case, the slaves' quarrel with their masters buttressed the prestige of administrators in their role as mediators. A salient feature of the Igbo case was the intensity of the Nkanu crisis. The Nkanu slave revolt was possibly unparalleled in colonial Africa. Ex-slaves secured significant participation in the indirect rule system. Land tenure rearrangement, rare in the history of abolitionism, occurred forcefully in some communities.

Another consequence of the anti-slavery measures was a shift in the demography of slaves. In circumventing these measures, dealers in slaves increasingly resorted to peddling women and children. Children were easy to kidnap and indoctrinate. Transactions in women could be disguised as bridewealth. (The British did not have to grapple with this very complicated matter in the West Indies.) This demographic element, so blatant in the Igbo case from the 1920s through the 1930s, obtained also in other Africa colonies. Suret-Canale (1966:67) found long ago in French Tropical Africa that bridewealth "turned increasingly into a form of bride purchase [and] the position of married women came closer to that of the . . . slave." Besides these brief but incisive remarks, the outlines unfortunately are still hazy in the African literature. The shift appears rather implicitly in a few works, like Cordell's (1988:166) on Congo's Ubangi Shari and McDougall's (1988:372–3) on Moroccan Adar. Most writers on emancipation are fixated with the "end of slavery" and the incorporation of ex-slaves into the wage-labour market. The shift to child slavery is clearer in the Robertson and Klein (1983) volume. But the editors and contributors do not stress it. They seem instead to extrapolate from it to advance their thesis—hardly applicable to Igboland—that women constituted the bulk of slaves in precolonial times. More work on this aspect will clarify the extent to which slave dealers capitalized on bridewealth, the state's response to such practice, and the significance of this shift to slavery in Africa.

A related issue is the problem of freed slave children, "an important and very vulnerable group . . . who did not know what freedom meant and what to do with it" (Ubah 1993:208). Ubah (1993) is as yet the only scholar to have studied this problem in Africa. Contrary to his observation that the Northern Nigerian government may have stood out in establishing a slave home, however, one was already well-established in Afikpo (Igboland), and another in Lagos, as early as 1906 (NAE EP 688/6-CALPROF 16/1/247). In her study on the Ga of Ghana, Robertson reports (1983:223) that opportunities for freedom were more open to men than women. The evidence of the Igbo case does not yet permit a definitive statement. But, extrapolating from the colonial context of ideas about, and available opportunities to, the sexes, this would have been true here. The shifting demography of newly enslaved persons, the role of bridewealth in

[46] NAE OP 268/1921-ONPROF 7/8/2: The Nkanu Patrol: Progress Report No. 4, 1–31 May 1923.

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the enslavement of women, the increased incidence of pawnship, and the lot of the freed slave children all call for detailed investigation.

The colonial officers' use of slaves has been identified as one of the obstacles to early emancipation. The ruling British East India Company is said to have owned plantation slaves in the early nineteenth-century Tamilnadu (Manickam 1982:60). Accounts of enslavement by French colonial officers in Africa abound (see Cordell 1988:166; Klein forthcoming). Though my perception may well be a result of my restrictive conception of slavery, slave use by British colonial administrators in Africa seems to have been extremely rare. It is virtually unknown in the Igbo case, notwithstanding the rampant use of forced labour. The Igbo experience with colonial abolitionism stands out in other specific ways. Unlike in most other African cases, redemption by ransom was not a favoured paradigm, except in places where exodus or revolt loomed large, as in Nkanu and Isele Uku. Manumissions appear in the semi-annual provincial reports, but the method through which these came about and the sexes of beneficiaries are unspecified. The numbers were also too few (see, for example, Brooks 1920).

The serious anti-slavery measures of the 1930s made it increasingly difficult to obtain slaves. The historical conjuncture compelled abolition. Practical considerations, arising from the increasing incidents of slave unrest and the growing inefficiency of slave labour, favoured other forms of labour. Colonial officers would have seen that it was not in their best interests to encourage the continuation of slavery. They began to question the efficacy of an anti-slavery approach based on supply side economies. After all, slave-dealing persisted because people were demanding slaves. Arresting and convicting a few agents could not stop that (see Cook 1927; NAE C136-CALPROF:130). There were also pressures from the League of Nations and abolitionist groups. In the course of time, these developments went *pari pasu* with the structural process that began to de-emphasize reliance on slave labour. The market economy had opened new opportunities and avenues for exploitation other than slavery which included wage labour and even pawnship. Apart from the obvious impact of the modern economy, the missionary influence was particularly vital in Igboland (Ekechi 1972; Primitive Methodist Mission N'Ala Ndi Ibo 1930) and other areas of Africa (see Dumett and Johnson 1988; Herlehy and Morton 1988; McDougall 1988:370; Twaddle 1988).

This study has shown that the idea that the colonial officers imposed their will on the terrain of African slavery, towards its perpetuation or reform, is inconsistent with the Igbo case. The impression of a measured application of a preconceived scheme (albeit a flawed scheme, according to Cooper 1980) does not account adequately for the ways in which the views of the metropolitan and expatriate officials often diverged. Indeed, colonialism altered the indigenous social structures and relations but not in radical ways. Witness the persistence of slavery and rise of pawnship mainly in the rural areas. What else could have

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been responsible for the spate of post-colonial re-abolitions at both the governmental and community levels in Igboland?

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