PATRIARCHAL CONTINUITIES AND CONTRADICTIONS IN AFRICAN WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF CURRENTLY EMPLOYED UNIVERSITY EDUCATED IGBO WOMEN IN NIGERIA.

Philomina Ezeagbor Okeke

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To My Parents

James (late) and Carolyn Okeke,

and All My Siblings

Victor

Oddie

Chuks

Ngozi

Nelo

All of whom have always supported and encouraged

my ambition, from childhood, to study abroad

and become a "doctor"

Above all, to God be the glory

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that restricted access to formal education and wage employment offers Nigerian women limited prospect of social mobility. Nigerian women's lives, in particular, are shaped by both traditionally ingrained gender inequalities as well as new forms of subjugation attributed to Western influence. In their struggle to gain social status through education and formal employment, Nigerian women have to grapple with patriarchal continuities and contradictions of the present social arrangement.

This study looks at how the latter shapes the options and outcomes of formal training for women from the Igbo ethnic group. The main focus is on university educated women and the study undertakes a critical analysis of their experiences in three crucial sites: the family, formal education and wage employment. The analysis of the respondents' lives clearly reveals patriarchal continuities - in the school system, the family and the labour market. But we also see contradictions in the definitions of their roles, the specific requirements attached to them, and the rewards accruing from their efforts. Some of the vivid contradictions can be seen in the conflicting traditional and modern expectations, widening career options and rigid domestic roles, malestream work structures, work practices and policies unresponsive to domestic demands; and an autonomous source of income undermined by the conjugal division of financial responsibilities and rewards.

As their stories show, the respondents are fighting the system, but only with the limited means available to them. Of course, they do not always succeed. Some of their strategies successfully challenge patriarchal authority, while others actually reinforce their oppression. These patriarchal continuities and contradictions have to be considered in assessing the potential of formal education for Igbo and Nigerian women. It is evident that their struggle to establish a niche in the contemporary society does not stop at the door of higher education. Women must grapple with various facets of a fundamentally subordinate status at home and at work. In addition, the impact of social, economic and political change on the value of formal education should also be considered, particularly their differential impacts on men and women.

Nigerian women's representation in higher education, wage employment and in the government, amounts to a gross under-utilization of half of the population. Their social location as presently constituted not only keeps this state of affairs in place, but also curtails the range of influence available to the minority who enter the privileged ranks. For Nigerian women to contribute to nation building, they must be provided not only with the educational opportunities, but also with the freedom of equal participation with men.

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CHAPTER ONE
1.0. NIGERIAN WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN FORMAL EDUCATION AND WAGE LABOUR: A PROGNOSIS

It is commonly accepted that with greater educational attainment women in developing countries such as Nigeria can pursue careers in formal employment and thus gain more economic and social status within their societies (Smock 1981, Kelly 1989, Moghadam 1992, Namuddu 1992). This thesis argues that although education and formal employment remain crucial elements in the struggle for women's emancipation, the extent to which they can improve women's status depends on the conditions under which education and employment are acquired and utilized.

Nigerian women's lives, in particular, are shaped by both traditionally ingrained gender inequalities as well as new forms of subjugation attributed to Western influence. In their struggle to gain social status through education and formal employment, Nigerian women have to grapple with the patriarchal continuities and contradictions of the present social arrangement. This study looks at how these continuities and contradictions shape the options and outcomes of formal training for women in South Eastern Nigeria. The main focus is on university educated women and the study undertakes a critical analysis of their experiences in three crucial sites:

the family, formal education and wage employment.

This thesis responds to the dearth of qualitative studies on Nigerian women (Taiwo 1988). Many writers in the field have decried the lack of a data base reflecting in-depth cultural knowledge and the diversity of African women's experiences. Some scholars have attributed this problem partly to poor academic facilities and the limited number of indigenous feminist scholars. Yet others, in addition, blame the unequal production and distribution of feminist knowledge, arguing that it places contributors from the developing world at a disadvantage (Robertson 1987, Amadiume 1987, Zeleza 1993). This study hopefully offers a useful contribution in the midst of all the debates and controversies that have been raised. It represents a view from the inside by an Igbo female scholar of a social background similar to her respondents. In this in-depth analysis of their lives, Igbo women, themselves, reassess the implications of acquiring higher education and pursuing careers in an atmosphere of strong gender subordination and changing economic realities.

The strength of this thesis lies in its approach. Foremost, it projects the experiences and view points of women, themselves. Second, it brings to the fore the important factors that structure their lives. Such an analysis is crucial to the development of analytical approaches that are grounded in women's lived experiences. In this regard, the thesis represents part of the overall project of developing a

more coherent framework for analyzing the relations of gender in Nigeria and Africa. Moreover, it makes an important contribution to the public data base, particularly at a time when Nigerian women's input in policy decisions that directly affect their lives is increasingly sought (WIN 1985, Akande 1991, Shettima 1989).

This chapter provides a brief review of Nigerian women's participation in formal education and wage employment. The review is important because it shows, in broad terms, how patriarchal continuities and contradictions have shaped women's progress in contemporary society, especially that of the female elite from which the group of respondents were selected. Indeed, patriarchal continuities and contradictions are the themes around which these women's experiences are analyzed. Many writers have explored the dialectics between pre-colonial and colonial social orders, and their implications to African women's present conditions of existence (Afonja 1986, 1990; Robertson 1987, Robertson and Berger 1986, Stichter and Parpart 1988, 1990). However, as a concept, the term "patriarchal continuities and contradictions" came alive in the rigorous process of trying to establish the themes around which the respondents lives revolved.

1.1. Historical Beginnings: Women's Entrance into Formal Education and Wage Employment

Prior to the advent of formal education in Nigeria, young children were traditionally prepared for their adult roles through various non-formal means. Among the Igbos in particular, young boys followed their fathers to hunt and farm in preparation for their role as heads of households. Young girls helped their mothers in cooking, looking after younger siblings, farming and petty trade, all of which prepared them for their eventual role as mothers and wives. The structure of gender roles tended to place men in a superior status over women (Achebe 1981, Amadiume 1987:89-98, Obikeze 1988:61).

Eighteen hundred and forty-two marked the beginning of formal education in Nigeria with the establishment of the first primary school in Badagry by Christian missionaries. By the end of the 19th century, formal schooling had spread to other parts of Southern Nigeria such as Abeokuta, Calabar, Lagos and Onitsha. The primary agenda of the missions was to evangelize Nigerians, train the indigenous clergy, and later, junior personnel for the colonial administration (Fafunwa 1974, Taiwo 1980). The missionaries encouraged the enrolment of both male and female children. However, training for females was meant to help them become "modern housewives and helpmates" to the growing number of male civil servants (Pittin 1990:13). What became evident over time was that far more boys than girls embraced formal education, the gender inequality in enrolment being more pronounced at higher

levels. By the turn of the century, the sex imbalance in primary and secondary school enrolment was grossly in men's favour.

Compared to Southern Nigeria, access to formal education was more restricted in the Moslem North, where both direct colonial rule and Christianity were strongly resisted. The reluctant acceptance of missionary education resulted in a sharp regional imbalance in enrolment between Northern and Southern Nigeria. The female school enrolment was particularly affected by both Islamic and traditional restrictions. Tables 1.1a and 1.1b show the progression of this trend well into post independent Nigeria.[1]

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[1]Cited in Okeke Eunice (1989:47-48).

Table 1.1a
Primary School Enrolment, by Sex and States of Origin, 1959-1973

% By Sex	Southern States			Northern States			Total	
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
1959b	56.6	34.3	90.9	6.7	2.4	9.1	63.3	36.7
1965	49.5	33.5	83.0	12.0	5.0	17.0	61.5	38.5
1966	48.8	34.0	82.8	12.2	5.0	17.2	61.0	39.0
1967c	41.73	29.77	71.5	20.44	8.06	28.5	62.17	37.83
1968d	36.45	26.39	62.84	26.87	10.29	37.16	63.32	37.83
1969c	40.18	28.57	68.75	22.44	8.81	31.25	62.62	37.38
1970	59.1	23.0	82.1	13.9	4.0	17.9	73.0	27.0
1971	58.0	23.6	81.6	14.2	4.2	18.4	72.2	27.8
1972	57.9	24.0	81.9	14.0	4.1	18.1	71.9	28.1
1973	57.2	24.2	81.4	14.3	4.3	18.6	71.5	28.5

a Source: Compiled from statistics in the Annual Abstract of Statistics, Federal Office of Statistics, Lagos, 1966, and 1974.

b Source: Compiled from Digest of Statistics, Federal Ministry of Information, 1959.

c Numbers do not include enrolment in the Eastern States.

d Numbers do not include enrolment in the Eastern and Mid-Western States

Table 1.1b

Secondary School Enrolment, by Sex and States, 1959-1972 (in Percentages)*

	Southern States			Northern States			Total % by Sex	
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
1959b	75.7	20.1	79.5	3.8	0.4	4.2	79.5	20.5
1965	63.8	28.8	92.6	6.1	1.3	7.4	69.9	30.1
1966	62.2	29.4	91.6	6.9	1.5	8.4	69.1	30.9
1967c	55.9	29.9	85.8	11.7	2.5	14.2	67.6	32.4
1968d	--	--	83.3	13.4	3.3	16.7	-	-
1969c	44.3	83.3	77.5	17.7	4.8	22.5	62.0	38.0
1970	56.7	30.9	87.6	9.7	2.7	12.4	66.4	33.6
1971	54.6	30.4	75.0	11.8	3.2	15.0	66.4	33.6
1972	62.9	22.6	85.5	11.9	2.6	14.5	74.8	25.2

a Source: Compiled from statistics in the Annual Abstract of Statistics, Federal Office of Statistics, Lagos, 1966, and 1974.

b Source: Compiled from Digest of Statistics, Federal Ministry of Information, 1959.

c Numbers do no include enrolment in the Eastern States.

d Numbers do no include enrolment in the Eastern and Mid-Western States.

The higher education statistics for this period are scanty, the available data indicating mainly the widening of an already established gender inequality. The first post secondary educational institution in the country, Yaba Higher College, was established in 1932. It admitted its first female student in 1945. However, a handful of Nigerian women trained in England between 1920 and 1945. The University of Ibadan, established in 1948, started with 4 female and 100 students. The number rose to 11 and 327 for female and male students respectively in 1952. Female enrolment came up to 92 by 1961. The average male/female ratio of new entrants (from selected states) into Nigerian universities in 1972 was about 8:1. Northern states, such as Kano and Plateau recorded much higher ratios of 16.5:1 and 12.6:1 (Mba 1982:66, Otu 1989:10).

The gender inequality in formal education was reflected in wage employment. Denzer (1987) traces the first documented evidence of women's employment to 1885 when Hannah Cole, referred to as a "native of West Africa", was hired as a nurse in the colonial civil service. In 1939, total female employment in the colonial civil service stood at 260 when male employment had risen from 39,798 to 65,422 between 1931 and 1938.[2] According to Mba, only seven African women were employed in the clerical and technical services in 1944. In 1954, the number of senior female civil servants was a mere 23. Pressure from elite women's groups, notably the Lagos

[2]Nigerian Blue Book, 1931:W2-W3, 1938:W2-W5. Quoted in Denzer (1987:14).

Women's League (LWL), and the shortage of qualified men during the Second World War boosted female employment, which stood at 500 in 1945 (1982:64-66). However, this upsurge could not overturn the solid pattern of gross female under-representation and segregation in formal employment that was already in place.

1.2. The Boom Years

Female school enrolment rose considerably during the 1970s with the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme in 1976. Female children in Northern Nigeria also benefitted from public education programs aimed at eliminating the regional imbalance. The national female primary school enrolment rate had risen to 44% by 1983-84 and at the secondary level, to 35.5% by 1980-81 (Okeke 1989:51-52). The dearth of statistics does not permit a more accurate assessment, but the available data indicates a declining but significant gender/regional gap in enrolment.

However, unlike the case in Northern Nigeria, the gender imbalance has narrowed considerably in the South. In fact, the current figures for Anambra State, where this study was carried out, have girls in secondary schools numbering 104,989 and boys only 74,867 (GASN 1989:22). This trend has prompted a plea from educational authorities to parents, to enrol their

boys in secondary schools.[3] However, despite the gains Nigerian women have made in both primary and secondary education, men have maintained their lead in all levels of education, particularly in the technical and science subjects (Fapohunda 1988:206, Okeke 1989:52).

Although the gender imbalance in higher education is, as would be expected, more pronounced, female enrolment has also been on the rise. The oil boom, which erupted in the early 1970s and lasted for most of the decade, was an instrumental factor. It led to the expansion of higher educational facilities and opened up employment opportunities in both the civil service and the private sector. With public subsidies, higher education was fairly affordable and the economic prospects equally attractive. However, university education in Nigeria has tended to focus more on intellectual training than the development of technical skills. The formal sector[4], since

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[3]This trend may not be unconnected with the remarkably declined economic value of education below the tertiary level, which Robertson (1986) examined at length. In the particular case of Eastern Nigeria, the tide of commercial ventures may present a quicker, more lucrative option than the long and uncertain educational route.

[4] The terms "formal" or "modern" sector generally refer to the totality of locations and institutions where Western influence and subsequent development initiatives have significantly taken root. "Formal" and "capitalist" sectors can also be used interchangeably. Capitalist expansion in Nigeria is limited to a few sectors which account for only a small segment of the labour force. Although a clear distinction from the "informal" is hardly possible, the formal employment sector can be narrowed down to "medium to large scale establishments employing no fewer than ten persons" including "private and business establishments, federal and state governments' departments, ministries and parastatals." The Informal sector refers to "small scale organizations engaged in the production of goods and services and employing no more than ten persons." This sector includes subsistent farmers, local artisans and petty traders. Seldom subject to government regulations, this sector rarely operates on a wage arrangement, often relying on household labour. See (Soyombo 1985 and Heyzer (1981) in Alo and Adjebeng-Asem 1988:218-9).

the colonial period, has been drawing its middle and senior level staff from this intellectual pool. The low level of specialisation required for most jobs has meant a high degree of substitutability among job seekers and this benefitted the university graduates of the 1970s. Many of them sought employment in the more lucrative and rapidly expanding private sector. Although economic conditions have changed in more recent times, the available data which report mostly post-1970s' trends, still reflect the "oil boom" effect.

Tables and 1.2a and 1.2b show the distribution of female university students from 1981 to 1985, and graduates from 1980 to 1984.[5] Evidently, female enrolment at this level has improved greatly, but the gender imbalance and segregation in female disciplines are still very significant.

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[5]Cited in Okeke Eunice (1989:54-55)

Table 1.2a
Distribution of Female University Students in Nigeria, 1981-85

Year	Females	Total enrolment	% of females
1981	17,099	77,791	21.9
1982	20,386	90,751	22.5
1983	25,219	104,774	24.1
1984	26,587	116,822	22.7
1985	28,739	126,285	22.7
Total	118,030	516,423	22.8

Source: National Universities Commission Annual Report December, 1985

Table 1.2b
Percentage of Female Uni sity (Federal) Graduates, by Faculty 1980-1984*

Faculty	1980/81	1981/82	1982/83	1983/84	Total % Inc
Business Admin.	9.9	9.6	10.5	17.2	7.3
Agriculture	13.4	13.6	8.2	12.4	-1.0
Arts	17.7	20.9	20.5	24.4	3.7
Education	26.6	32.1	31.7	31.5	4.9
Engineering/ Technology	4.5	3.0	4.2	4.3	-0.2
Environmental Design	8.0	8.2	6.4	10.1	1.2
Law	21.1	24.1	20.5	23.1	2.0
Medicine	17.1	21.6	26.7	26.5	9.4
Pharmacy	22.3	27.0	26.0	35.4	13.1
Sciences	16.6	17.0	18.0	21.6	5.0
Social Sciences	11.6	17.1	13.0	13.9	2.3
Veterinary Medicine	8.5	4.9	8.6	7.0	-1.53

Source:Federal Ministry of Education, Lagos. December, 1985.
*This includes about 2 percent who enroled in diploma and other non- degree courses.

Nigerian women's representation in formal employment has also improved, although the historical pattern persists to some extent. The sex distribution of civil servants shown in Table 1.2c clearly indicates that men predominate in all departments.

Table I.2c.
Federal Civil Service Established Staff by Ministry/Department and Sex, as at December 31, 1986

Department	1982		1984		1986	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
State House	304	82	365	98	364	108
Cabinet Office	749	268	833	402	886	413
Office of the Head of Service	2,179	1,010	2,193	1,058	1,865	1,007
Police	91,537	1,437	109,377	1,947	107,708	2,067
Agriculture & Water Resources	7,859	1,036	9,103	1,455	8,331	1,357
Commerce & Industries	3,094	1,056	3,897	1,363	3,854	1,438
Communication	27,644	6,100	28,410	6,092	206*	91*
Defence	9,499	2,917	15,983	6,476	10,747	5,675
National Planning	4,045	1,913	4,885	1,007	4,822	1,172
Education, Science & Tech.	6,099	2,268	6,213	2,345	6,166	2,345
External Affairs	2,489	704	2,489	704	2,489	704
Finance	17,503	4,367	17,413	4,534	2,540	1,207
Health	2,464	1,333	1,969	898	1,993	1,240
Info., Soc. Dev., Youth, Sports $ Culture	6,030	1,377	6,291	1,585	4,622	1,758
Internal Affairs	16,256	1,283	16,832	2,705	29,546	4,611
Justice	359	246	372	268	351	279

Department	1982		1984		1986	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Employment, Labour and Prod.	2,183	368	2,393	644	1,859	628
Mines, Power $ Steel	1,326	346	1,753	390	1,788	446
Transport and Aviation	8,281	1,603	8,723	1,857	8,476	1,733
Works $ Housing	16,019	2,090	18,223	2,320	18,747	2,420
Audit	677	157	1,176	190	919	242
Civil Service Commission	327	202	379	227	369	231
Police Service Commission	117	40	143	64	446	202
Public Complts. Commission	792	251	832	209	832	209
National Pop. Bureau	383	231	722	347	655	358
National Assembly	1,714	653	-	-	-	-
Judiciary +	1,072	288	1,670	431	1,563	496
Fed. Capital Territory	149	56	149	56	149	56
Fed. Electoral Commission	707	148	-	-	-	-
Total	230,143	33,177	262,698	39,651	222,293	32,493

Source: Establishments Department, Office of the Head of Service. December, 1986.

Note: - Indicates no returns

+ Including Advisory Judicial Committee as from 1983.

* Post and Telecommunications figures not included.

More recent data collected during the field work for this thesis showed that women made up only 33.9% of university graduate teachers, 19.5% of legal practitioners, 10.3% of registered accountants, 17.3% of full time medical practitioners and 4.3% of registered architects.[6]

The available statistics do not reflect the persistent regional/gender imbalance in both formal education and wage employment, which has posed a challenge to every government regime. Various policy measures introduced in the 1970s have led to a marked improvement in the representation of Northerners, but the imbalance is still significant (Okeke 1989, Agbese 1992).

1.3. Assessing the Gender Imbalance: Patriarchal Continuities and Contradictions

The emergence of a gross gender imbalance in formal education and wage employment in contemporary Nigeria has been attributed to several factors. The debate surrounding the origin and perpetuation of female disadvantage in contemporary Nigeria often centres around the roles played by two major factions; the Christian missions and the colonial administration on one hand, and the Nigerian ruling class on

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[6]Statistics collected from the National Secretariats of the following: The Nigerian Institute of Chartered Accountants (NICA), The Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), The Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA), The Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) and the Nigerian Bar Association (NMB); all located in Lagos.

the other hand. The literature on the development of female education in Nigeria has tended to emphasize mainly the individual contributions of these factions. Analytical convenience does call for such a distinction, but the dialectical relationship among these groups has to be recognized. It is this dialectical relationship which has given rise to patriarchal continuities and contradictions in women's acquisition and utilization of educational training.

1.3.1. The Colonial Administration and Its Missionary Allies

The analysis in the previous section reveals some of the imprints of Christian missionaries on the country's formal education system. Missionary education came with its own sexist norms, offering Nigerian male children far more labour market options than female children. Hence, compared to the former, there was less incentive for girls to attend school. In fact, the missions were reluctant to extend women's training beyond the primary level and only yielded to pressures from elite parents (Mba 1982:61). As women's vulnerable position in modern society became more apparent, elite parents began to appreciate the importance of academic training for their daughters (Mann 1985:77-91).

It must be noted, however, that the mission's attitude to women's education reflected the prevailing situation in England. According to Mba (1982:61) British public schools of this period emphasized literary more than technical skills,

admitted "far fewer girls than boys", and restricted the former to domestic education. The pattern of emphasizing more of literary than technical skills was also translated into the Nigerian school system. Further, the initiative for women's higher education may not have easily suggested itself given English women's own restricted access.[7]

Entering the scene long after the missions had consolidated their position, colonial education policy did not introduce any radical departures. In fact, Mba (1982:62) argues that "the provisions made by the colonial administration for the education of girls were grossly inferior to those made by missions. Even within the narrow scope of colonial education, the education of girls was conspicuously neglected." Similarly, this attitude to the education of Nigerians and women in particular reflected the prevailing state of public schooling in England.

However, unlike the latter, formal education in Nigeria was primarily meant to serve an imperial agenda. The colonial administration was not prepared to risk the emergence of an educated class that might jeopardize their interest in the long run. Thus, the education policy was tailored to meet local employment demands for the colonial administration. Uduaroh Okeke (1964:8) identified this trend as a major obstacle to the development of a viable educational system:

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[7]For instance, English women did not gain access into the universities until 1870 and they were restricted to certain faculties. See foot note in Mba (1982:66)

> To push a pen behind an office desk is the dream of an educated Nigerian. Anything less is held to be derogatory and below his dignity. The government and firms recruit largely from this source and pay them better than any other group. No serious attempt was made to train Nigerians in higher skills. So the Europeans were the skilled technicians and administrators, and Nigerians were [only] happy to be clerks and labourers doing what they were told.

With particular reference to higher education, it was, in fact, the Christian missions who first broached the issue of setting up local institutions, following mounting pressure from the few indigenous elite (Ikejiani and Anowi 1964:128). The colonial administration reluctantly pursued this project, making its stance regarding the crop of highly educated Nigerians to be raised quite evident in Sir Hugh Clifford's statement:

> It can only be described as farcical to suppose that... continental Nigeria can be represented by a handful of gentlemen drawn from a dozen coastal tribes - men born and bred in British administered towns situated on the seashore - who in the safety of British protection have peacefully pursued their studies under British teachers.[8]

This line of thinking gave support to the establishment of Yaba Higher College, where Nigerians were trained to serve as assistant officers in the medical and technical departments within the civil service. Ikejiani and Anowi (1964:130) draw attention to the underlying emphasis on training offered:

> The operative word here is "Assistant." There was no intention when the... College... was established to give the Nigerian an education that would make

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[8]Eastern Nigerian Printing Corporation (1960:4-5). Cited in Ikejiani and Anowi (1964:129).

> him an authority in his field and one that would give him poise and dignity in the presence of his fellows. His duty, as a colonial, was to assist his imperial masters, not to supplant them.

Where a diluted form of advanced training was reluctantly provided, the case for women's participation did not raise much public concern. In any case, furthering women's education could not have been particularly crucial. There was initially no intention to employ them in the civil service. Although they were not denied admission into higher education, the already instituted gender inequality in the educational system meant access to a limited few. The colonial administration refused to employ women until almost a century after its inception. Their eventual employment was restricted to occupations considered suitable for women by British middle class standards, and in positions where men would not be under their supervision. Given women's limited access to schooling, the few who qualified for civil service positions were outnumbered by men. Female workers were placed in separate ranks with less attractive conditions of service compared to the men (Denzer 1987).

These arguments clearly show that the colonial administration, with the missions as allies, legitimized Nigerian women's discrimination in formal education and wage employment. They introduced gender stereotypes which, although foreign to the Nigerian culture, have taken root and continue to flourish in contemporary society. Bujra (1983:30) points out that the colonial pattern of segregating women into "pink

characterized female education was an added disincentive. Even with the provision of more academic education for girls, early marriage presented a more reliable financial pay-off for parents. The transition into a cash economy gave a new meaning to what was originally seen as an exchange of gift and goodwill from the bridegroom's family to the bride's. As Eunice Okeke (1989:51) comments:

> Marrying daughters off to men with ready cash became a source of income for parents. Allowing a girl to go to school or remain in school would therefore delay the income or cause the parents to miss the chance of having a wealthy son-in-law. When the parents did not have enough money to pay the school fees of all their children, it was the girls who were withdrawn from school to get married. The bride price realized was used to pay school fees for sons. Consequently, the dropout rate of girls was excessively higher than that of boys. Theoretically, the school doors were open to both boys and girls, but the nation's societal/cultural values and practices interfered greatly with women's education.

Achebe (1981) cites the poor social value placed on women as a major contributing factor. According to her, this is reflected in the "initial manifestation of disappointment when a female is born" into a family in succession (p.6). It is further imprinted in the vicious cycle of socialization which teaches women to accept their subordinate position, and to inculcate this sexist preference in their children. This same preference, Achebe argues, is translated into prevailing attitudes toward women's education.

Evidently, women in Northern Nigeria face more odds than their southern counterparts. In the rural communities, young

Northern girls are expected to help out in the farm labour. They help to coordinate the commercial activities of women in seclusion. Pittin (1990:14) in her historical essay on the beginnings of formal education for girls in Katsina observes that:

> The restriction of women's formal education to small numbers drawn from limited sections of Hausa society was justified in terms of its perceived irrelevance to the lives, and particularly the future work, of the majority of women. But perhaps equally important was concern over its effect in removing girls' labour. The Hausa system of house trade has depended upon the assistance of girls, generally daughters or other relations, for the actual transfer of goods and services. This applied in both rural and urban areas, as did also the importance of girls' involvement in domestic labour, including the care of younger siblings. Rural production requires additional heavy input from both boys and girls, but whereas boys have been spared for education when it appeared that this could improve their future chances through access to wage labour... education for girls was seen more as a temporary diversion before entering marriage, childbearing, and home- and farm- based subsistence production.

The fact that Islamic marriage practices sanctioned the early marriage of girls, often to older men, strengthened the negative attitude towards women's education in the North. Young girls of 10 or 11 years of age could easily be kept in seclusion and away from the moral dangers of the world outside their husband's compound (Okeke 1989:51).

Persuasive cultural myths also helped to discourage Nigerian women from embracing formal education and wage

labour, especially for the highly ambitious women, or "acada"[9], as they have been dubbed (Ekiyor 1989). The dictates of culture, with respect to female chastity and fertility in particular, have proved quite useful in subjugating women. Formal education for women seemed to hold the potential to undermine these cultural standards. Okeke (1989:50) notes that:

> Although males could have concubines and the wives were expected to accept this situation as normal, the wives could not have any form of association, no matter how platonic, with other men. Hence, the fear arose that if women received the same education as men, they would be discontent with their lot. Again, as much as the acquisition of formal education raised the status of men..., the status of women who acquired formal education also went up.

Indeed, a number of myths about educated women arose. Okeke cites, in particular, some prevailing myths identified by Alele-Williams (1987), which suggest that educated women may not be submissive to their husbands, that they are morally corrupt, barren and often would have difficulty attracting husbands. Such myths have tended to discourage parents from sending their female children to school, especially mixed schools, or educating girls beyond the primary and the secondary level.

Cultural myths also found a close ally in colonially introduced Victorian ideals of womanhood. Apparently, the

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[9]Acada is a corrupt form of the word "academic." Generally, it refers to one who is very studious or has very high educational ambitions. It is used derogatorily to describe highly ambitious women, especially career women who are single.

latter appealed to many elite Nigerians, who promoted it as the model for Nigerian women in the post independent era. Mann (1985:88) indicates that many elite women at the turn of the twentieth century were strong advocates of female domestic education. Understandably, elite men were more forceful in espousing the virtues of women's assumed primary vocation. Ikejiani (1964:88-89), then a leading national figure, criticises what he sees as misplaced ambition by Nigerian women who pursued careers:

> A Nigerian housewife who cannot bake a light loaf of bread or prepare a good dish or soup that is tasty, or happily employ her odd moments with a needle, or darn the stockings of her husband, and who relies on servants and cooks to carry out all the routine of the house, may be a very charming lady; she may keep her husband and friends posted about the new novels and new articles in the [newspapers]; she may try to make up her serious shortcomings by teaching in a school or being a nursing-sister or secretary-typist; she may be a good writer in the columns of our papers and participate actively in many of the social and political courses of the day, but she is an inefficient housewife and home-maker, and today in Nigeria it is not given to many to make up for that. The lack of efficient housewives is as serious as the dearth of efficient mechanics... If more of the time of schools is given to these simple things, with a stern eye to efficiency..., we should soon see a new and auspicious epoch in Nigerian education...

More than twenty years after, Tony Momoh (1985:5), a one time Minister of Information, re-echoes Ikejiani's view:

> I submit that woman can only creditably perform a lasting role in development if she stops to compete with man [or] imitate man... A woman that wants to play a [lasting] role in development... must refrain from activities that are too physical (coarse) and so intellectual that they would assault her sensitivity. She has gentle and fine

> feelings that well make up in her and she should keep them. If she strives for men's roles, she must lose such fine traits and be unable to trap and transmit those powers which the traits confer.

If colonialism hindered Nigerian women's education, culturally legitimized gender inequalities reinforced this trend. The extent of women's progress in the decades after independence lends credence to such a conclusion. As Robertson (1987:102-103) states, women's restricted access to formal education was highly instrumental to the consolidation of the ruling class of male elite in most African countries. Awe (1989:19) argues that the reluctance of several post colonial regimes to take action, largely exonerates the colonial masters from charges that have been made in the past. For instance, Mamuddu (1992) points out that the apathy of African universities over the issue of gender equity in admission, points to a prevailing lack of recognition of the importance of equal participation and full resource utilization in the development process.

A similar argument can be advanced with regard to gender discrimination in wage employment. Although gender segregation in wage employment was a foreign invention, it seemed to find support in an already existing gneder hierarchy. Denzer (1987:8) remarks that:

> British officials were quite explicit in their reasoning - they did not want to risk unsettling male civil servants who might resent female competition. On this point British male chauvinism coincided with African male chauvinism to limit opportunities for women.

Denzer refers, for instance, to a colonial directive to the Secretary of State for the colonies in 1950, regarding the promotion of female nurses:

> The idea of a comparatively young African female nurse being placed in a position of authority over African male nurses where she will be required not only to control them, but to teach them is still strange in Nigeria. There is considerable difficulty in filling positions of responsibility, and it is essential that their [women's] capacity to occupy such positions should be thoroughly tested locally before they are promoted.[10]

Awe (1989) similarly implicates cultural sexism and, in particular, Nigerian male elites for their role in the creation of gender stereotypes in formal employment. He notes that female elites were often expected to resign and seek alternative employment when their spouses were transferred to new locations. A few had to resign in deference to their spouses' high position in the government. It was therefore not surprising that most Nigerian women who pursued educational careers, especially before the 1970s, tried to tailor their ambitions to suit prevailing expectations (p.4-6).

What becomes evident is that women's status in contemporary Nigeria has been shaped by both cultural and colonial sexism. It is not formal education and wage employment, per se, that became the determining factors of women's present social status. It is the pattern of their evolution both as avenues for social mobility and as vehicles

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[10]Nigerian Archives, Ibadan. CSO26/2/11833, Vol. II: Confidential GDSS, draft, 31.10.50. In Denzer (1987:16).

for perpetrating cultural and foreign forms of gender subjugation.

1.4. Emerging Trends

Despite their progress in the formal sector, Nigerian women are still far behind their male counterparts. More disturbing, however, are some emerging trends which threaten the gains women have made. These trends must be taken into consideration in assessing the prospects of women's schooling and formal employment in present day Nigeria.

Coupled with endemic political upheavals, the Nigerian economy has suffered a gross decline in the aftermath of the oil boom. The country's mounting foreign debt, which led to the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP), forced a down-scaling of the public service and virtually slowed economic activities to a halt. Major cuts in public funding for education already pose a serious threat to any further progress by women (Shettima 1989:85).

Earlier the government, with its buoyant resources, was able to stem the rise in unemployment, at least among post secondary graduates. Since the 1980s, unemployment has been on the rise and the shrinking formal sector can hardly absorb the large number of graduates churned out by the school system annually.[11] Many of the unemployed turn to unofficial

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[11]In fact, more recent studies confirm the downturn as a wider trend across the continent. Robertson (1986) has already shown that primary education for African women is dysfunctional where they have no prospects of entering secondary

channels in the race for the few available jobs and the versatility of university degrees only heightens the competition. Women are already grossly under-represented in this sector and may have even fewer options than men where job descriptions and wage scales have been structured to suit the malestream working arrangement.

Inflationary pressures following the economic crisis have also depressed real wages. The brunt of the decline in real wages is borne by the public sector where women are more represented. A growing economic gap is emerging between the public and private sector workers and women seem to be increasingly ghettoized in the former.[12] Foreign exchange deregulation that came with SAP, among other factors, has led to a rapid expansion of the financial sector. For instance, between 1986 and 1991, the total number of commercial and merchant banks in Nigeria rose from 41 to 120 (Dada 1991:6). The boost in employment, however, has benefitted mostly men who are educationally more advantaged.

Apparently, far more men than women are leaving the public service in search of better opportunities in the private sector. The "brain drain", in a sense, benefits women

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and tertiary institutions. The Economic Report on Africa (UNECA 1990) also draws attention to the rapidly growing unemployment in most African countries including Nigeria which is "creeping up the educational ladder to include university graduates". Women, in particular, are "twice as vulnerable as men" (p.21-22).

[12]An earlier study (ILO 1989:33-36) also reports the decline in real wages, particularly in the civil service, sighting Nigeria among other African countries affected.

who are left behind to fill the gaps (UNECA:21). For instance, Nigeria reported a mass exodus of three thousand professionals in the first quarter of 1992 alone. The disgruntled workers (at this level mostly men) left because, among other reasons, "they did not rate their chances of advancement in the professional civil service" high enough (West Africa 1992:683).

The crisis in the labour market has heightened a resort to unofficial channels, encouraged by corruptive networks endemic to the rank and file of the formal sector establishment. According to Agbese (1992:14), Nigeria has found herself in economic decline facing a situation where the "opportunities for competition are circumscribed by unfavourable social and economic development" and for many people, the resort to informal short cuts is almost inevitable. The sharing of employment opportunities along ethnic and religious lines further complicates the gender politics in the labour market.

These trends point one towards a re-examination of the value of education and wage employment, per se, as assets for Nigerian women's social mobility. The economic decline means not only fewer educational and employment opportunities than before, but also a diminished value attached. It means that schooling, even as a prerequisite, has to become more specific as well, in terms of kind and level. Beyond the aspiration for higher education, Nigerian women may also have to diversify

their educational options in preparation for the challenges of a changing labour market.

1.5. Researching Patriarchal Continuities and Contradictions

The discussion in the previous sections provides a broad outline of Nigerian women's progress in formal education and formal employment in Nigeria. However, the review does not reveal much about the experiences of specific groups of women. The patriarchal continuities and contradictions of the present social arrangement can be seen from three perspectives. First, the internal structures of what may be seen as the "new" and "old" social order are hardly homogenous and their co-existence is not entirely symbiotic. Thus, while the process of social transformation has visited more disadvantages on Nigerian women than men, it has also left in its wake contradictions, some of which have benefitted women. Second, in the midst of these continuities and contradictions, women actively struggle exploiting various avenues and strategies to carve out a niche for themselves in a male dominated society. Finally, the collective experiences of Nigerian women are mediated by class, ethnicity and religion, as well as by political and economic trends.

This study attempts to make visible the lives of the participants and how their experiences relate to the larger trends in the society. It sets out to investigate the case of currently employed university educated Igbo women in Enugu,

the capital of the old Anambra State.[13] The Igbos are located in south-eastern Nigeria. The field work was carried out between September 1991 and March 1992, a period of about seven months. During this period, in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with the participants along with the collection of data from relevant institutions. Various professions are represented within the group of Igbo women including teachers, accountants, lawyers, and middle and top level civil servants. The participants include both married and single women and their ages range between thirty and fifty-seven years old. The thesis is divided into nine chapters.

Chapter Two examines two broad feminist theoretical frameworks considered relevant to the issues discussed in the study - liberal (socialization) perspectives and Marxist-based analyses. It identifies both the limitations and the useful insights from these positions. As a point of departure, the chapter attempts to align the main arguments of this thesis with emerging trends in feminist discourse.

Chapter Three explains the research method employed in this thesis and the methodological assumptions embraced. It makes a case for critical ethnography from a feminist standpoint, with due consideration to the dearth of theory and

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[13]The field work for this research coincided with the recent creation of more states in the federation, which brought the total number to thirty. Anambra State has been divided into two new states, Anambra and Enugu. This entailed the re-posting of state public servants to their new state of origin. Fortunately, the field work was completed well before the affected respondents left Enugu.

methodological approaches for the study of African women. The chapter further explores the position of the researcher, who, sharing many of the participants' experiences, must critically analyze these experiences as a scholar. The last section takes the reader through the various stages of the study. A brief description of the participants is also included.

Chapter Four looks at the structure of gender relations in contemporary Nigeria, especially the Igbo elite circle. It identifies the patriarchal continuities and contradictions structuring the relations of gender within the family and the larger society. This background is crucial to understanding the respondents' experiences and perceptions discussed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Five explores the gendered nature of Igbo women's educational training through the eyes of four of the participants in this study. The family/career conflict is examined in the light of old and new expectations created by patriarchal continuities and contradictions. The experiences of these women clearly show that even before entering formal education, their career aspirations, actual training and labour market opportunities have already been defined by social boundaries largely outside their control. In effect, the seemingly widening set of career options only introduces more conflict where the demands of women's primary role have not changed remarkably.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight bring to the fore the

respondents' struggles to maintain their niche in a malestream social order. As in the case of many Igbo women who pursue educational careers, these women project themselves not only as subordinates who recognize their position in a malestream society, but also as rational actors who exploit various avenues to carve out a niche for themselves in the elite society. Chapter Six examines the respondents' labour market experiences in the light of emerging trends briefly discussed in Chapter One. As victims of discrimination, the respondents accept the limited opportunities wage labour provides for Nigerian women. As actors, they understand very well the gender politics involved and exploit various cracks within the system to advance their status. With the emerging trends in the labour market, the crucial issue is not merely women's acquisition of higher education, but the kind of training acquired and the social forces which must determine the extent its utilization.

Chapters Seven and Eight focus mainly on the experiences of married women in the study. Chapter Seven takes a critical look the domestic relations of gender in elite Igbo households. The women's experiences support the more recent argument that the sexual division of domestic work in the elite Igbo family creates a double burden for working mothers despite the availability of housemaids (Stichter 1988, 1990, Parpart 1990). However, the chapter goes beyond these studies to place domestic labour within the wider structure of gender

relations. It argues that this structure legitimizes women's subordinate status in the family and society; that domestic labour, although a crucial aspect, is but one reflection of this status.

Chapter 8 analyzes the conjugal division of financial responsibilities and entitlements. This chapter highlights, especially, the tension between separate resource structures translated into the elite circle as a traditional practice, and the conjugal pooling of resources which recommends itself to the Western oriented nuclear family. Customarily, the respondents can manage their finances, but this privilege seems to be predicated on their responsibility for their children's welfare. Their economic independence is therefore tied to their familial responsibilities, especially with the economic realities of the SAP era.

Chapter Nine summarizes the findings of this study as well as the emerging research and policy implications.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0. FEMINIST ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS, FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP AND THE STUDY OF AFRICAN WOMEN: AN OVERVIEW

> Unlike the early years of feminist theoretical analysis when we searched for the unifying theory of women's oppression, today there are many theories which tackle different aspects of sexual difference and gender relations. This theoretical pluralism has resulted in considerable advances in feminist analysis on many fronts, and it seems likely that a continuing plurality of theories is the way in which our theory will go on developing. It is most important, however,... that we use our theoretical analysis not just to understand how gender relations have been constructed in the world we live, but also to envisage a future in which relations between the sexes... can genuinely be transformed.
>
> Veronica Beechey (1987:16)

Most of what is regarded as the prevailing knowledge about the social conditions of women's lives today can be traced to feminist writings of the past three decades. Research on African women in particular and the literature it generates have become inevitably tied to developments in feminist scholarship (Redclift 1988, Rathgeber 1989, Amadiume 1987, Zeleza 1993). This thesis hopes to contribute to some of the issues and debates being addressed. What follows in the next chapters is an in-depth analysis centred around the lives of a group of African women - university educated wage earners

from the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria. The discussions in the following chapters project the voices and perceptions of the participants, bringing to the fore the particular circumstances of their social location. Such an investigation, it is hoped, will contribute to filling the gaps in existing knowledge, which should inform both theory (how we view the conditions of women's existence) and social policy (one important means of initiating positive change).

In attempting to generate new knowledge, this thesis has to build on existing literature. The latter is needed to provide both background information as well as the theoretical framework for a meaningful analysis. However, the intention here is not to go into an extensive review of feminist scholarship. Rather, the purpose is to identify both the insights and limitations that feminist analyses have brought to the issues under study here - the relationship between (African and Nigerian) women's education and their socio-economic status.

The study of African women has not only borrowed ideas from Western literature in general, but it has also inherited the multi-disciplinary nature of its parent disciplines, African Studies and Women's Studies (Robertson 1987:98). In terms of broad representation, the existing literature is thinly spread and does not provide a concentrated reference point for research on specific groups of women. In particular, the literature has focused more on rural women, who are in the

majority, than on urban women (Zeleza 1993:108).

With the limitations of this literature in mind, the chapter focuses especially on two paradigms - liberal feminist perspectives (socialization) and Marxist based analyses. The first section looks at the origins of liberal feminist analysis (with respect to education and formal employment) and its application to the study of African and Nigerian women. The following section deals with Marxist-based analyses in a similar manner. The third and final section turns to emerging trends in feminist analyses. It relates them to the African situation, especially the case of elite women who are the subjects of this study. This section concludes by highlighting the useful insights from the review as well as the gaps, which this study hopes to fill.

2.1. Liberal Perspectives: From Biological Determinism to Gender Socialization

Feminist theorizing of the relations of gender emerged partly as a challenge to the functionalist paradigm. Talcott Parsons, the key figure in the development of Functionalism, attempted to bridge the gap between the individual and society using his synthesis of anthropological analysis of kinship structures, sex role socialization and psychoanalytical theories. Parsons rejects the thesis of sex roles based on biological difference, arguing that the sexual division of labour in the family and in society represents a normative and

complementary standard for sustaining a functional society. He explains that the role of social institutions such as the family, school and the church, is to nurture individuals to internalize the gender appropriate characteristics necessary in order to embrace their adult roles (Frank 1990:24).

The functionalist thesis has been largely discarded because of its ahistorical nature and uncritical view of society. Functionalism failed to recognise the underlying power relations structuring the seemingly complementary division of sex roles and the contradictions in human behaviour, which defy the harmonious view of the socialization process (Frank 1990:23-28). The functionalist thesis not only legitimized gender inequalities in Western capitalist societies but provided, as well, the impetus for superimposing their cultural ideologies on other societies. For instance, early Western anthropologists writing from a functionalist perspective, presented a distorted view of life in African societies and the place of women in the social structure. These studies were to influence some of the early feminist writings on African women (Amadiume 1987:1-10)[14]

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[14]For instance, the early perception of Africans as primitive peoples has persisted to some extent in present times (Amadiume 1987:1-4). Robertson (1987) also notes that Western male anthropologists dominated African studies until the 1960s and provided most of the early historical account of gender roles and relations in various indigenous societies. Writing from an essentially functionalist perspective, they examined African women's roles in the context of their "natural" subordinate status in the family and society. They assumed the complementarity of gender roles, and turned their attention to the customs, rituals and practices surrounding marriage and the family, perceiving any departure from the "Victorian middle-class stereotypes" a deviation from the norm (p.98). For instance, African women's involvement in agriculture and trade were seen as evidence of their complete subordination to men who used them as "beasts

The second wave of feminism drew momentum from early radical feminist literature (de Beauvoir 1952, Greer 1970, Millet 1970, Firestone 1970, Mitchell 1971). For radical feminists, women's oppression stemmed from their biological role and its cultural exaggerations. Their emancipation was therefore tied to eliminating, as much as possible, sex related differences between women and men. Women's sexual freedom was seen as the spring-board for their full integration into the main stream of society. Freed from patriarchal shackles tied around their sexuality, women could pursue formal education, aspire to positions of power in the public sphere, and consequently, alter the balance of power in their favour.

Radical feminists presented an elaborate explanation of women's oppression based on sexual power, forcing a rethinking of the non-problematic view of sex differentiation and complementary roles. However, like the functionalist explanation, their analyses remained ahistorical and universalized. The narrow emphasis on women's sexuality meant an inevitable slide into biological determinism (Armstrong and Armstrong 1978: 102, Eisenstein 1979:16-19, Beechey 1987:6). What gained prominence was their emphasis on women's full integration into the public sphere, which gathered force under the liberal feminist socialization literature (Armstrong and Armstrong 1978:110).

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of burdens" (Afonja 1990:198-201).

Nowhere was the emphasis on gender socialization more strongly felt than in the literature on women's education and formal employment. Early feminist educational research in North America and Western Europe indicted the school system for reinforcing gender inequalities in society through its practices and policies. This research provided evidences of sexism in curricular materials, career counselling as well as classroom interaction. Gaskell and McLaren (1986:7) comment on the thrust of feminist educational research in the early 1970s:

> Feminists wanted to eliminate the emphasis on sex differences, to make education blind to gender, and to replace sex roles with androgyny. "Sex appropriate roles" could also be called stereotypes; "sex role socialization" could be called discrimination, and "sex differences" could be called inequalities. Renaming the world and giving voice to women's experiences was what feminism was about. In this spirit, feminists documented gender stereotypes in many jurisdictions and in various ways. Their research was an assault on the notion that the sexes were separate but equal, and an assertion that "sex roles" rather than serving everyone's interest, inhibited achievement among women and the full development of both sexes. The female stereotype, feminist research showed, had negative consequences. Sexism was defined not just as a system of difference, but as a system of oppression.

Gender inequalities in schooling were consequently linked to occupational sex segregation and discrimination in the labour market (Epstein 1970, Bryne 1978, Deem 1980). For instance, Matina Horner (1970) in her study of college students attributes women's "fear of success" to both socially and psychologically ingrained pressure which compels them to

lower their career ambitions in order to enhance their femininity. More than a decade later, Colette Dowling (1981) in The Cinderella Complex, re-echoes Horner's findings:

> Women... have been encouraged since they were children to be dependent to an unhealthy degree. Any woman who looks within knows that she was never trained to feel comfortable with the idea of taking care of herself, standing up for herself, asserting herself... It is not that nature bestows this self-sufficiency on men; it's training. Males are educated for independence from the day they are born. Just as systematically, females are taught that they have an out- that someday, in some way, they are going to be saved (p.15-16).
>
> This tendency we have; to scale ourselves down, to step back from our natural abilities rather than risk the loss of love, is a consequence of what I refer to as gender panic - the new confusion about our feminine identity. Rather than experience the anxiety of doing (and possibly feeling unfeminine as a result), we don't do (1981:175-176).

Early feminist research on gender socialization succeeded in raising awareness of women's experiences. It provided the initial framework for a more sophisticated scholarship by presenting extensively documented evidences of sexism. However, similar to radical feminist analysis, the socialization literature assumed an essentially liberal stance. For example, Weiler (1988:28) comments on the literature on gender and schooling:

> While the strength of the liberal perspective lies in its documentation of gender discrimination and the analysis of specific sexist texts and practices, its lack of social or economic analysis limits its ability to explain the origins of these practices or the ways in which other structures of power and control affect what goes on within schools. Its lack of class analysis leads to a blurring of what actually happens in schools as individuals are described only in terms of their

> gender and are not viewed in terms of their class or race...

According to Weiler, the liberal emphasis on ideas buried the underlying relations of power; of domination and subordination characterizing women's oppression:

> There... [is] the implicit assumption that sexism exists within the realm of ideas, and that if those ideas are changed, then social relationships will also change. Such a view ignores the constraints of the material world and the various forms of power and privilege that work together in a complex and mutually reinforcing process to make up social reality as we know it. It also ignores the complexity of consciousness and the existence of ideology and culture (1988:28).

Similarly, Armstrong and Armstrong (1978:112-118)[15] question the link between socialization and sex segregation in the labour market. They argue that the paradigm does not fully account for the origins and variety of social ideologies that reinforce occupational sex segregation, the dominance of specific ideologies over others, and the interests served by dominant ideologies. They argue that often vague references are made to men as an undifferentiated group of interested parties, and forms of gender inequalities in the family, at work and in the society, are treated in an isolated fashion. In the end, the institutional backdrop sustaining gender inequalities are neglected:

> [Even] if by some miracle these ideas could be altered without changing the accompanying

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[15]Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong's writings focus mainly on political economy, but critiques of both radical feminist perspectives and feminist socialization literature set the background for this 1978 essay on Canadian women in the labour force.

> institutional and power structure, the effect would be minimal. Even if little girls are dressed in blue and convinced that girls should not be housewives, the employment opportunities, wages, and scarcity of day-care would ensure that women would still be housewives (1978:115).

Citing Horner's study, Armstrong and Armstrong also argue that women's "fear of success" may, in fact, represent a rational response. "They are punished for or prevented from succeeding. In fearing success, they are perceiving the situation accurately. Their fear is related to a scientifically verifiable condition and its consequences" (114-115).

The reassessment of the socialization process and its results, was indeed a shift away from the less critical stance of earlier studies. For instance, feminist educational research of the 1980s questioned the degree to which the socialization process of schooling influences women's actions. Many studies drew attention to the resistant cultures of female students, particularly those from racial and ethnic minorities (Fuller 1980, Kelly and Nihlen 1982, Anyon 1983).

Similarly, Gaskell (1981), in her study of Vancouver grade 12 students, attempts to explain the career preference of female students towards job specific training and male students for more advanced professional training beyond high school. According to Gaskell, the girls settled for options that might guarantee easy access to jobs after high school because their socio-economic backgrounds held very little prospects for further training.

In the same vein, Machung's (1989) study of Berkeley undergraduates explains the female students' actions as a rational response to social conditions and expectations. She notes that even when women achieve academically, they are not likely to ignore the potential marriage/career conflict. The contradictions in the female students' conception of career prospects, she points out, can therefore be seen as a response to anticipated constraints of work and family responsibilities:

> Like the men, the women want to enter highly paid, very demanding careers, but unlike the men they do not anticipate congruity between their future career and family life. Like the men, they want to have families, but unlike the men, they are charged (and charge themselves) with reconciling these two, often conflicting domains. They resolve this conflict between work and family (a conflict they are already experiencing) by redefining career. They hope, that is, to be able to enter good, well-paying jobs and to find satisfaction and fulfilment in work but also to be able to move in and out of the job world, responding ultimately not so much to the demands of their careers as to the needs of their families and children. They are talking career but thinking job (1989:52-53).

More recent studies expose the contradictions evident in the socialization process, pointing to the complexity of women's oppression. Far removed from the thesis of biological determinism that plagued radical feminist analysis, the socialization paradigm was able to direct more attention to the relations of gender. However, the extreme emphasis on structures and institutions of socialization veiled the role of human agency and the power relations that perpetuate specific patterns of socialization to women's detriment. Such

a liberal view underlies a basic contradiction: while women's "inappropriate" orientations to adult life are seen as a response to the social construction of their role, they are expected to reach within to unlearn these same orientations (Wolpe 1978:176).

In the end, the important questions concerning the origin and perpetuation of women's oppression remain unanswered in liberal feminist analyses.

2.1.1. Liberal Perspectives on Women's Education and Formal Employment in Africa and Nigeria

As mentioned at the beginning of this review, the literature on African women is thinly spread with a multi-disciplinary base, favouring women outside the formal sector. The feminist literature, in particular, has integrated some insights from the traditional Social Sciences, including the development literature.[16]

The emphasis on socialization in early feminist analysis similarly influenced the study of African women, incorporating both its strengths and weaknesses. Liberal feminists followed the cannons of modernization, emphasized African women's integration into existing modern structures, notably education and formal employment. However, it was argued that the basis

[16]What may be referred to as the "mainstream" literature on African women in the formal sector consists mostly of general reviews of women's participation in formal education, wage employment. A small body of related sociological literature focuses on elite women's status in the family and society.

for integration was not found in African women's historical experience, but on Western assumptions about women's oppression. The controversy arising from this initial feminist incursion stalled further developments in this literature until the early 1980s.[17]

Feminist comparative analysis re-emerged in the late 1980s finding a more acceptable platform under the autonomy thesis. The latter attempted to counter the sexist and racist impressions created earlier by anthropologists. It stressed African women's traditional autonomy, which was eroded by colonialism and capitalist expansion and cites in many cases, historical vestiges linked to an egalitarian pre-colonial era (Afonja 1990:198-199). The autonomy thesis also found an ally in Boserup's (1970) study. By linking African women's diminishing economic status with colonialism and capitalist expansion, Boserup's study, among others, lent weight to the idea that a more egalitarian social order existed in the pre-colonial era (Afonja 1986, 1990).

Thus, the argument for African women's integration into existing modernization strategies such as education and formal employment was further strengthened. The autonomy thesis

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[17]Amadiume (1987:3) argues that early feminist writings in this regard appeared to embrace the earlier anthropological conceptions of African women, placing them in an inferior status compared to Western women. She also asserts that these early studies tended to universalize the debate over the gender division of domestic labour, neglecting the pressings concerns of the majority of African women (p.4). The sharp response of African female scholars to this development was to create an impasse, which discouraged many Western feminists from venturing further into inter-cultural analysis (Amadiume 1987:5, Parpart 1990:161).

equally advanced the feminist quest for "a tradition which would reaffirm the independence and autonomy of women at any period in the past" (Lerner 1986:921). As Afonja (1990:98) notes, the African woman's celebrated autonomy was " attractive to women in other parts of the world because of the amount of control she appeared to exercise in both the domestic and public domains".

The autonomy thesis also influenced the approach of comparative studies which contributed greatly to the development of the literature on gender and schooling in Africa. Most of the studies discuss the implications of cultural ideologies on women's access to social opportunities, but focus mainly on how colonialism and capitalist expansion have shaped the structure of gender inequalities. For instance, Smock (1981)[18], draws attention to the results of differing rates of Westernization on African women's access to and progression through the formal school system. She cites, in particular, the educational disadvantage Moslem women suffer. Similarly, in Kelly and Elliot (1982), many of the contributors emphasize the historical gender imbalance in both the educational system and the wage labour force. Cochrane, in the same volume, shows how the process of social transformation has shaped the nature of the family/career conflict African female wage earners face.

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[18]Smock focuses primarily on Mexico, Ghana, Kenya, Pakistan and the Philippines but draws evidences from other Less Developed Countries (LDCs) including Nigeria.

For the most part, the comparative literature lacks specific details of the peculiarities of individual countries, and provides mainly an overview of the cultural diversity existing within and among geographical regions. However, many of the studies highlight the commonalities in women's experiences. In general, this literature presents education and wage labour merely as crucial assets to African women's economic emancipation. Most of the studies advocate increasing the opportunities for women's participation. While decrying the post-colonial states' insensitivity to existing gender inequalities, the consensus appears to prevail that public policy remains the most effective tool for breaking existing sexist barriers and improving the conditions of women's lives.

Studies on Nigerian women adopted the liberal stance of comparative literature. The emphasis on survey studies has also continued a tradition, even in more recent studies, of merely presenting an overview of the effects of colonialism and capitalist penetration on women's social status. As evident in Chapter One, there has been a lot of emphasis on colonial sexist policies for promoting gender segregation and discrimination in formal education and wage employment. More recent studies, for the most part, follow up reviews which highlight the fact that, despite considerable improvements in women's education and wage employment, the imbalance created during the colonial era has persisted (Agheyisi 1985, Otu 1989, Okeke 1989).

Other writers focus specifically on the impact of sexist cultural ideologies on Nigerian women's progress in contemporary society. They highlight the conflicts Nigerian women face between pursuing educational careers and fulfilling social expectations of marriage and family, decision-making in elite families and the pressure of carrying domestic and wage labour. For instance, Achebe (1981) criticizes the narrow conception of the Igbo woman's role as wife and mother, drawing attention to the importance of having children, especially sons, to women's marital stability and consequently, their pursuit of extra-domestic ambitions.

Ekiyor (1989) examines the cultural underpinnings of prevailing social perceptions about highly educated Nigerian women, which cast doubts on their marriageability. Biraimah (1987) finds that Nigerian female university students tend to settle for gender stereotypical career choices even though, in proportion to their male counterparts, more of them come from high social class background. The cultural and economic factors limiting these women's choices lead her to conclude that "gender, more than class", is responsible for their educational profile (p.576). In a similar study, Peters (1988) highlights the increasing anxiety of female undergraduates over finding a marriage partner as they near graduation. Often, many of them try to resolve this conflict by virtually putting their career on hold.

The major strength of this literature is that it has made

gender inequality in Nigeria visible. In other words, it has helped to raise public awareness of women as a disadvantaged social group. The literature not only condemns women's relegation to an inferior social status, but presents both statistical and qualitative evidence that policy makers cannot ignore. Most importantly, this body of literature provides most of the background information (including statistics) on Nigerian women's education, wage employment and status in the family. The time frame and spread of the references clearly show that the liberal perspective still dominates research in the field.

However, like the comparative literature, most of these studies assume an essentially liberal stance in terms of depth of analyses and the recommended strategies for improving Nigerian women's social status. In fact, many of the studies simply review the general conditions of women's lives in the formal sector. The few studies such as Fapohunda (1983) and Biraimah (1987) which focus on a specific group of African women do not offer any in-depth analysis. The emphasis on surveys and overviews does not provide the much needed qualitative insights into the lives of individual women.

As in the case of similar studies on Western women, this literature neither gets to the root of African women's oppression nor offers an adequate explanation for its perpetuation. Although "socio-cultural factors" are blamed for hindering women's progress, the analyses rarely go into great

detail about the interaction of these factors in women's lives. Moreover, the underlying assumption seems to be that fundamental change will materialize from fine-tuning an essentially unequal social arrangement. Consequently, the question of who benefits from the latter can hardly be posed.

Similarly, schooling, itself, is mainly perceived as a vehicle for changing prevailing attitudes. The relations of power structuring women's education and employment are not addressed. Public policy is seen as a neutral agent that can speed up the process of women's emancipation. Yet the vested interests underlying this public machinery are ignored. Moreover, women are treated, in most cases, as a monolithic group. Where the elements of class and/or ethnicity are acknowledged, the implications are not usually drawn out. Further, many of the studies do not reflect the impact of political and economic trends which have seriously affected Nigerian women's status in the family and their progress in the formal sector.

The literature leaves one with the impression that the solution to Nigerian women's problems is merely formal education and wage employment. Hence, those who manage to acquire higher education are seen to have escaped the shackles of male subordination. Such uncritical and ahistorical assessments of the prospects of women's formal training no doubt reinforce the image of an undifferentiated group of female elite.

Like the autonomy thesis which drives it, liberal feminist analysis of women's education and formal employment in Nigeria does not fully explore the patriarchal roots of gender stratification on which Nigerian women's present subordinate status is constructed. Such a view does not come to terms with the progressive deterioration of African women's status which has led to a re-assessment of existing evidence on pre-colonial social stratification.

2.2. Critical Perspectives

Unlike the socialization paradigm, Marxist analyses of women's oppression integrate a historical and materialist perspective. However, the emphasis has been mainly on women's work and how it is structured in industrial capitalist societies.[19] Engel's On the Origin of the Family, Private and the State was a crucial starting point for a feminist reconstruction of Marxist political economy:

> According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is of a two-fold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter

[19]The analysis of women's schooling within a Marxist framework does not appear to have gathered as much momentum as it did under the socialization paradigm. Feminist educators have responded to the analyses of women's schooling within the mainstream critical traditions, but not distinctly under a Marxist banner. Kelly and Nihlen (1982) observe that "much of our evaluation of the school's role in reproduction of the division of labour within the society is framed in terms of wage and workforce status of women versus men... An evaluation of the school's role in reproduction of the sex division of labour cannot proceed on the basis of whether the schools prepare women for the same "public" or workforce roles as men. Rather, it must also deal with forms of inequality in terms of responsibility for domestic life... (p.162-163).

> and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production; by the stage of development of labour on the one hand and of the family on the other (1972:71-72).

According to Engels, the accumulation of private property and the shift from familial to the public production sphere, transformed the sexual division labour in the family into one of power by domesticating w Totally dependent on men, women were compelled to perform unpaid domestic work in exchange for their maintenance. Women's entrance into the wage labour market was therefore considered a crucial step to their emancipation.

Marxist feminists criticised Engels for not paying sufficient attention to the family and the conditions of women's work under industrial capitalism. They employed the concept of a reserve army of labour to explain women's labour market and familial status (Sokolof 1980, Beechey 1987:4-6). Marxist feminists argue that women meet the basic conditions of a reserve army - cheapness, availability and competitiveness. According to them, the organization of capitalist production compels women to marry and assume the position of unpaid domestic workers and/or undervalued wage labourers. As full time housewives, substitute and part-time workers, women constitute both an active and inactive labour pool to be drawn upon according to the dictates of capital.

Finally, as a segregated workforce, female wage labour provides a cheap pool that capital can always use to weaken men's bargaining position (Connelly 1978:34-50).

The functionality of women's domestic work to both capitalism and patriarchy became the focus of a protracted "domestic labour debate", which proceeded among mainstream Marxist theorists, Marxist feminists, radical and socialist feminists (Molyneux 1979, Walby 1987, Barrett 1980). Details of the debate are not particularly relevant to this review. What is important is the emergent socialist feminist synthesis.

Socialist feminists tried to loosen the deterministic categories of Marx, presenting a more expansive analysis of the relations of gender. Rathgeber (1989:4) explains that:

> Socialist feminists identify the social construction of production and reproduction as the basis of women's oppression and focus attention on the social relations of gender, questioning the validity of roles which have been ascribed to both women and men... Although they do not trivialize the importance of greater female participation in all aspects of social, political and economic life, their primary focus is an examination of why women systematically are assigned inferior and/or secondary roles.

One of the early studies to articulate a socialist feminist perspective, Hartmann (1979), draws extensively from anthropological accounts of the origins of the sexual division of labour and historical literature on the development of capitalism in England and the United States between the 15th and 18th century. Women's oppression in the capitalist

society, she argues, is rooted in men's control of women's labour, which is sustained by sex segregation in the labour market:

> Job segregation by sex... is the primary mechanism... that maintains the superiority of men over women, because it enforces lower wages for women in the labour market. Low wages keep women dependent on men because they encourage women to marry. Married women must perform domestic chores for their husbands. Men benefit, then, from both higher wages and the domestic division of labour. This domestic division of labour, in turn, acts to weaken women's position in the labour market. Thus, the hierarchical domestic division of labour is perpetuated by the labour market and vice versa.

As in the case of most of the early socialist feminist writings (Eisenstein 1979, Beechey 1979, Barrett 1980), Hartmann places the relations of gender within the capitalist patriarchy synthesis:

> This process is the present outcome of the continuing interaction of two interlocking systems... Patriarchy far from being vanquished by capitalism, is still virile; it shapes the form modern capitalism takes, just as the development of capitalism has transformed patriarchal institutions. The resulting mutual accommodation between patriarchy and capitalism has created a vicious circle for women (Hartmann 1979:208).

Early socialist feminist studies aimed at capturing the interrelationship between women's productive and reproductive roles. Hence, the analysis of the relations of gender is taken beyond Marxist categories, although the main emphasis remains on the material base of women's oppression (Beechey 1977, Eisenstein 1979, Chodorow 1979, Hartmann 1979, 1981). Hartmann, in particular, succeeded in making male domination

the central element of an analysis that was essentially Marxist. The interests of capitalists are differentiated from that of individual men, thus drawing attention to women's unique interests which could easily become subsumed under the overall male agenda (Beechey 1987:11)

However, one major weakness of these arguments stems from a down-playing and/or simplification of the relations of gender; the impact of social forces outside the sphere of production, especially the role of culture and ideology. Socialist feminists start out recognizing the ideological and historical construction of women's familial responsibilities, but rationalize the present social arrangement mainly in economic terms. Hartmann's analysis, for instance, does not fully explain the situation of highly paid independent female professionals who continue to marry and assume responsibility for housework (Kusterer 1990). In the end, the attempt to create a synthesis of capitalist patriarchy slides into a duality trap "because the sexual division of labour is treated as external to capitalism proper, capitalism is still narrowly defined, and gender divisions are treated in a universalistic manner" (Beechey 1987:11).

Besides the weakness in the internal structure of the socialist feminist argument, the basic flaw, perhaps, which has pervaded feminist scholarship up to this point, lies in the underlying quest to develop a universal theory of women's oppression. Like their antecedents, socialist feminists start

out with an obvious emphasis on Western middle class full-time housewives. They built a theory around the domestic lives of the former and proceeded to fit "other" women into the picture. In the end, the attempt to squeeze the relations of gender into a materialist framework, however modified, leaves many gaps unfilled (Beechey 1987, Walby 1986).

Redclift (1988) offers a biting criticism of a universal socialist feminist theory. Redclift questions the obvious emphasis on married women as the normative subject of what is presented as a critical analysis of women's position in society. According to her, such a starting point conflates single women, full-time housewives and married working women into a single analytical category. Within such a context, dependence on a male wage cannot be central to every woman's oppression. She also criticises the rationale for using the Western nuclear family as the basic unit of analysis. Such a narrow conception of family not only assumes away other familial structures outside Western capitalist societies, but also the material locations of family members (429-431).

As the analysis in the second part of this section suggests, these limitations are, to some extent, being addressed in more recent writings.

2.2.1. Marxist Perspectives on African Women

Marxist perspectives on the study of African women only took root in the 1980s, decades behind a burgeoning Marxist

tradition in African Studies (Robertson and Berger 1986:7-8). Stichter and Parpart (1988:1) comment:

> Marxist analyses focusing on modes of production, capital accumulation and class formation in Africa have abounded, yet most of these have paid scant attention to feminist concerns. On the other hand, empirical studies of the position of African women have flourished, yet the implications of these for a marxist-feminist approach have not been drawn out.

Marxist-based analyses of the conditions of African women's existence have been influenced by the feminist development literature, which has focused mainly on women outside the formal sector. Again, the existing literature is thinly spread and does not exactly capture the contours of debates in the mainstream. Nonetheless, it has integrated insights from the latter. Most of the studies to date have been carried out by feminist historians. This section reviews Bujra's (1983) essay on women and capitalist development in Africa because it captures the initial conceptions of African women's lives from a Marxist perspective, especially the case of women in the formal sector.

Bujra admits, at the on-set of her essay, that social relations in Africa cannot easily be translated into Marxist categories. She argues that capitalist expansion in Africa is uneven, the formal sectors of most countries small and generally undeveloped. In addition, the indigenous capitalist class is, for the most part, agents of or subordinates to foreign holdings, so that a clear distinction between the dependent bourgeoisie and the proletariat cannot be made. The

process of proletarianization, itself, not only differs from the Western pattern, but also varies within African countries depending on local conditions (1983:17-20).

In her review of labour proletarianization in Africa, Bujra draws attention to the exploitation by foreign capital of the pre-capitalist sexual division of labour to obtain male labour at a cheap wage augmented by women's subsistence production outside the capitalist sector. The availability of "alternative modes of survival", she notes, has been crucial to, and in many cases has restricted women's absorption into wage labour (1983:29-31).

Bujra describes the existing occupational sex segregation in formal employment as reflective of the contradictions evident in the uneven duplication of Western capitalist patterns. She notes that African men dominated wage labour for most of the colonial era. Western stereotypes of female jobs became more defined as more women entered formal employment and men, who had an earlier start in formal education, moved on to more lucrative government jobs. However, these stereotypes of female professional occupations co-existed well after the colonial period with other patterns not common to the West such as male clerks and domestic servants. Bujra argues that these contradictions point to the unnaturalness of sex typing itself:

> Establishing foreign stereotypes entails definitive cultural re-socialization, not simply in the skills of the job, but in terms of what it is to be a woman. Such women are forced to create a model of

> womanhood which has no precedents in African society... On the one hand, men are here found doing work which in Europe is thought of as "women's work"... On the other hand, where women are in occupations which in Europe are thought of as "naturally" female, they are not in practice building on existing cultural stereotypes of women, but creating new ones (1983:33).

Bujra also highlights the emergent class divisions among women which have placed poor rural women at the base and elite female housewives and/or wage earners at the top. She describes the latter as a privileged class, who are not only removed from the reality of the female majority, but also whose status militates against their emancipation:

> In Africa, petty bourgeois wives seem rarely to be immersed in domestic concerns. to begin with, they almost universally employ domestic servants to carry out all the "dirty work" of the household, and to nurse and tend young children. Such servants, who are amongst the worst paid of workers, are today often women. To some extent, this devolution of responsibility allows petty bourgeois wives more leisure to act as ornaments to their husbands' success... More often, though, such women utilize paid domestic help in order to free themselves to work in high income white-collar or professional jobs or engage in petty entrepreneurial activities...(1983:35).

Bujra, among the early contributors to the debate, set the platform for a more critical examination of African women's present status than previously obtained. While placing her analysis within a Marxist perspective, she does not lose sight of some of the peculiarities of African social formations which have yielded other patterns contradictory to Western norms. Bujra identifies class divisions among African women as one the crucial implications of capitalist

development. She punctures the previous image of an undifferentiated group of victims, and points to the relative locations of specific groups of women in the present social arrangement.

However, as in the case of early studies that attempted to integrate the insights from mainstream debates, Bujra succumbs to the duality trap of analyzing the relations of production and reproduction in isolation. She starts her analysis with a clear emphasis on the pre-colonial base of capitalist expansion in Africa, but in the end, explains the emergent relations of gender mainly in material terms. She ignores the fact that patriarchal relations also impacted on foreign capital in specific ways that benefitted the indigenous male ruling class. For instance, she defines the initial segregation of the African wage labour force by gender as a Western stereotype, assuming away the basis for other patterns that contradict this stereotype. Moreover, African men's progression to more lucrative and prestigious formal employment is rationalised on the basis of their early start in formal education. Capitalist expansion is blamed for introducing (or reinforcing) sexism in the contemporary society, and the rationale for men's initial privilege is left unquestioned.

Although Bujra brings elite women into her analysis, she does not deviate much from earlier studies that were primarily concerned with the larger female majority. Her analysis also

reflects the preoccupation with work in mainstream feminist analyses. It is therefore not surprising that she focuses primarily on class divisions among women. However, the emphasis on class leads to a simplistic view of women's oppression and the interrelationships among different female groups. For instance, she stereotypes "elite" women and non "elite" women as monolithic groups. She ignores the fact that these women share a common basis of oppression and that many women within either group do not fit the description. In projecting elite African women as merely a privileged female class, Bujra fails to understand the nature of their own oppression and the ideological base that has instituted and continues to reinforce their position (Fatton 1988, Parpart 1990, Okeke 1993).

As many feminist scholars are beginning to recognize, the problem with this approach lies not so much in the internal logic of particular lines of thought, as in embracing the idea of a universal theory. Bujra's work is essentially an attempt to develop a socialist feminist analysis of African women's situation. She identifies the limitations of Marxist analytical categories, but fails to consider how these limitations may shape our conception of the subjects of her analysis.

More recent critiques of the socialist feminist argument question its very foundations as a universal theory of women's oppression. For instance, Redclift (1988) argues that, given

the nature of the capitalist sector in most developing countries, it is difficult to assess the strength of family/capitalist relationship and its impact on the relations of gender. She further notes that the capitalist sector in these countries is peripherally located and "full employment and a family wage have never been options for more than a minority of the labour force" (1988:434). In a country such as Nigeria, women's contribution has always been crucial for family sustenance.

Igbo women, in particular, have traditionally engaged in subsistence farming and petty trading as part of their domestic responsibilities. Women's economic welfare and that of their children depended, for the most part, on proceeds from farming and access to farmland that was linked to their relationship to men as daughters, sisters, but mostly as wives. Igbo women were normally assigned the production of family staples such as cassava and vegetables and men, that of status enhancing and revenue yielding crops, notably yam. Iweriabor (1985:146) makes the point that:

> It was through the effort of their [women's] labour that they in actual reality, supported the man [husband] and themselves. It was the fruit of the sweat of their labour that constituted the surplus out of which the man paid them back by "providing" shelter and maintenance. It was also the only way for women (with the exception of a few eccentrics or beloved daughters of son-less fathers) to have access to shelter and a means of livelihood since carefully designed, revered and guarded inheritance laws dispossessed females of land. Even where dispossession was only partial [through natal family]..., marriage inevitably dispossessed her of it, as both she and her property, in general

practice, belonged to her husband.

As Redclift argues, the structure of families and the relations of gender within are also crucial in assessing women's position in a specific society. Not only does the concept of family in Nigeria and most African countries go beyond the nuclear form, but also emerging familial structures in many ways contradict both cultural antecedents and Western stereotypes (Fapohunda 1982, Karanja 1986, Stichter 1990). Essentially, women assume the position of subordinates in these familial structures, but their ideological and material locations may differ (as mothers, monogamous/polygynous wives, mothers/sisters-in-law, etc).

Customarily, Igbo women do not have established inheritance rights either in the natal or marital family. The present legal system does not even protect those in monogamous unions (see Chapter Four). Customarily, couples do not pool resources together and women are allowed to manage their own finances. Of the case in many pre-colonial African societies, Robertson (1986:5) points out that the non pooling of resources "gave women a great deal of autonomy in handling their finances." It cannot be denied, however, that this autonomy was tied to women's direct responsibility for children's welfare, given the structure of polygynous marriages and the conflicting loyalties owed to the immediate and extended family (Caldwell 1976, Fapohunda 1982:281).

The tradition of separate property holdings has

significantly shaped contemporary conjugal relations even in African elite circles, where couples, for the most part, do not maintain joint financial accounts (Oppong 1974, Stichter 1988). In Nigerian elite circles, women are still directly responsible for their children's welfare and the nuclear family has not extricated itself from both extended family and polygynous incursions (Karanja 1987, Fapohunda 1982:279-281, 1988:205).

These crucial aspects of the relations of gender point to three important conclusions. First, the peculiarities of the African situation cannot be subsumed within a universal theory of women's oppression. As Robertson (1986:10) points out "the Western assumption that women share, however marginally, in the class status of associated men has to be re-examined as do definitions of class in the African context." Second, beyond the material relations of gender, there must exist a wider ideological base on which African women's roles and expectations are anchored. We see both patriarchal continuities and contradictions in the social constructions of these roles and expectations in contemporary society. Hence, one can no longer ignore the impact of the pre-colonial social stratification.

Third, what may be seen as the peculiarities of the African situation cannot be generally applied because they manifest into different local configurations of gender relations. The experiences of specific groups of women is

therefore crucial to developing a meaningful analysis. As will become evident in the next section, more recent writings along this line are already responding to the limitations of earlier studies.

2.3. The Limitations of Theory, The Complexity of Reality: Emerging Trends in Feminist Scholarship

Feminist scholarship has certainly moved further from the earlier stance of socialist feminists. The preoccupation in more recent times is not so much with identifying the limitations of existing theories as with questioning the underlying assumptions behind the explanations offered. In the gradual evolution of a more independent discourse, (otherwise dubbed the post modern approach) the emphasis appears to be on placing the relations of gender within a wider social framework. In particular, culture and ideology are recognised as major components shaping gender relations both within and outside the sphere of production (Beechey 1987). Feminist scholars are coming to terms not only with the internal contradictions of both patriarchal and capitalist relations (that is, if one can analytically separate them), but their heterogeneity across time and space (Walby 1986, Barrett 1980, Argawal 1988, Redclift 1988).

This trend is also reflected in recent feminist methodology literature. They stress a revisit of the fundamental project of empowerment - emphasizing women's

voices, perceptions of their situation. There is also an increasing emphasis on a holistic and in-depth qualitative analysis of women's experiences as the crucial base for theory building and policy formation (Shields and Dervin 1993, Bhavnani 1993).

In the light of these trends, the final part of this chapter examines recent studies on African and Nigerian women and the implications for this study.

2.3.1. Emerging Trends in the Study of African Women

Although Marxist oriented analyses seem to have had the most impact, the whole debate as to the origins and continuities in African women's subordination has changed in a number of ways. First, there is a significant departure from modifying Western analytical categories. For instance, Stichter (1990), in a comprehensive review of women's labour force participation across countries, attempts to develop alternative approaches that may capture the peculiarities of households in developing countries such as Nigeria. Similarly, Marxist feminists studying African women are increasingly focusing on women's access to and control of critical resources, an approach that has been welcomed by many outside the framework (Robertson and Berger 1986, Robertson 1987, Afonja 1990).

The continuous decline of African women's status is prompting a re-examination of the autonomy thesis. The latter

was useful in expunging the earlier anthropological perceptions about African women. However, it left unanswered the questions surrounding the link between the pre-colonial relations of gender and women's declining status in the contemporary society. The previous emphasis on the impact of capitalist expansion on African women's lives is criticised for failing to recognize the unequal sexual division of labour as "arising from the interaction between pre-existing and new forms in production and reproduction" (Afonja 1990:20). The persistent deterioration of women's status in the post-colonial era suggests that "colonial sexism was often imposed on already inegalitarian societies that contained the seed of sexist ideology [which]... flourished with colonial nurturance" (Robertson 1987:111).

More recent Marxist-based analysis explains African women's status in terms of their access to and control of critical resources. The nature and composition of these critical resources may have changed over time, but as recent trends indicate (see Chapter One) women's relation to these resources as peasants, petty traders, wage earners and housewives has not changed significantly. With their limited control over critical resources and access to them tied to their relationship with men, the assumed economic autonomy of African women within and outside the home has to be redefined (Robertson and Berger 1986, Robertson 1987, Fatton 1988).

The emerging historical analyses portray the

heterogeneity of capitalism and patriarchy and the peculiarities which define their interaction in specific social formations. They show that traditional patriarchy was not only transformed with colonialism, but it impacted on capitalist penetration into the pre-colonial societies, changing the forms and patterns of its expansion.

The conceptualization of African women's social status in terms of their access to and control of critical resources is a critical reference point for analyzing the common basis of their oppression. Class divisions among women reflect the differential expressions of a fundamentally unequal relationship between men and women. This conceptualization also portrays women in the various classes as both victims and perpetrators of this oppressive relationship. Where women's mobility is largely linked to their relationship with men and the male ruling class, privileged female elites tend to cling to vested interests. Such vested interests are likely to reinforce, if not exacerbate, the class divisions among women (Okeke 1993).

This line of thinking has certainly helped to shape more recent assessments of elite women's status in Africa. The burden of oppression carried by rural African women and the urban petty traders, has never been in question. The case of elite women is another matter. In addition to Bujra's work, other previous studies have concentrated on projecting their privileged status (Lloyd 1974, Robertson 1974). More recent

studies clearly show that the term "elite women" conflates the experiences of different groups of women and that Bujra's "petty bourgeois wives" if they existed in history, do not fit into present economic realities.

Parpart's (1990) historical review of Nigerian women's involvement in domestic and wage work indicates that although many elite women of the 19th century were not formally employed "they certainly worked hard managing their households" (p.162). She goes on to show that by the beginning of the twentieth century many elite men were no longer (fully) supporting their wives. Parpart cites, among other reasons for this development, the decline in economic opportunities available to men in Southern Nigeria at the close of the nineteenth century.

Iweriabor (1985) argues that Nigerian women's absorption into formal employment served primarily the colonial interest, an interest that was well served with women carrying the dual burden:

> Being short of human power, and essentially exploitative in nature, the Colonial Government could not afford the luxury of the sort of rabid discrimination against women that it operated within domestic borders... The Nigerian family in practice retained its productive role in the sense that urbanization did not necessarily confine women to the home. Women's contribution to the national economy has ranged from labouring on construction sites (where they are paid less than men), nursing, teaching... they are also dominant in trading and catering services, and of course, remain the prop of Nigerian agriculture... (p.150).

If some elite women enjoyed domestic bliss in the past,

present economic realities have certainly altered their situation. The expansion of education and formal employment opportunities following Nigeria's political independence and the oil boom, increased women's wage labour participation. The economic prosperity of this era may have kept some elite women outside the labour market. But with the increasing economic crises from the late 1970s, the female wage earner's income is becoming increasingly crucial to family upkeep. (Fapohunda 1988:205, Okeke 1989:56,60).

As in the case of other African societies, domestic work has always been seen as women's work. This cultural ideology conveniently does not contrdict the Victorian ideal, which elite African women were encouraged to embrace. However, unlike African women's traditional economic activities, wage labour does not easily accommodate women's primary obligations in the family. Various studies have also shown that despite the availability of housemaids, African female wage earners have to combine a good portion of domestic work with wage employment.

Stichter (1988) makes the point that elite women's domestic responsibilities differ from that of rural women and should be evaluated on the basis of two crucial factors: the relationship of the domestic unit to the larger economy and the domestic technology available to women. Stichter stresses that even in the case of industrialised countries, the "separation of work and the family under capitalism, and the

family as a unit solely of consumption, has been overdrawn" (p.195). What often goes unnoticed, she notes, is the amount and quality of labour homemakers must put into transforming commodities into household consumables.

Parpart (1990) argues in a similar vein that the "double burden" is no longer a phenomenon associated with women in Western countries. In her study of Lagos female wage earners, she observes that:

> Most of these women have to perform both productive and reproductive work, albeit in a uniquely Nigerian manner... As in the West, this double burden has affected career patterns, limiting many women's access to positions of power in the political and economic arenas and consequently their ability to influence the state and to effect change (p.162).

Fapohunda (1982) draws attention to the daycare crisis faced by Nigerian female wage earners. She remarks that "women are offered better educational opportunities, greater wage employment and higher wages, while traditional sex role expectations and the desire for large families remain relatively static" (p.279). She points to the crumbling of traditional support networks for childcare as a result of the "physical separation of conjugal units" [from the extended family] which has restricted "the duties and responsibilities of childrearing... to the nuclear family" (p.279). The cramped accommodation and "strange" dynamics of city life discourage aged parents from offering childcare services for lengthy periods of time.

Fapohunda (1982) also comments on the expansion of cheap

but available schooling through the UPE and other public educational programs, which has sharply reduced the pool of younger, less privileged relatives to be fostered by city dwellers.[20] The problem of childcare is further complicated by rigid work schedules (no part-time professional employment) and poor transportation facilities. Without the option of part-time employment, she observes, many working mothers tend to forego leisure and rest. Where childcare is not readily available, they may leave their children unsupervised for long periods of time. In the end, domestic demands on their time culminate in reduced productivity and consequently, slower professional mobility compared to men (p.279-284).

Meanwhile, women's increasing financial contribution to family upkeep may not necessarily strengthen their bargaining position in the family. Unlike women's traditional economic activities, wage labour offers them an economic base outside the direct control of men. However, the conflicting expectations attached to women's subordinate role and the new economic realities they have to contend with, severely limit the degree of economic security wage employment offers them (Fapohunda 1983, Afonja 1986, Okeke 1993).

These recent studies further reinforce the conclusions reached in the previous section. The particular case of wage

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[20]It has been the practice in the past for poorer parents in the rural areas to send their children to be fostered by relatives working in the cities, the assumption being that they will be exposed to better opportunities beyond the village setting.

earning elite African women buttresses the fact that women's oppression is not exclusively a question of economic dependence on men or domestication. We must investigate both the material and ideological base which undermines their access to status as individuals. In this case, the experiences of specific groups of women should speak for themselves. Wide generalizations cannot be made using the existing porous data base.

Perhaps, the most important limitation of existing literature is the dearth of such in-depth analyses. In the midst of the debates surrounding the origins and perpetuation of African women's oppression, many writers are facing up to the sheer thinness of a data base on which all these arguments hinge. Very little is known of the diversity of African women's experiences from which a coherent analysis can be developed (Taiwo 1988, Zeleza 1993). The post modern emphasis on qualitative and in-depth analysis certainly raises the issue of who researches African women. Robertson (1987) in her review of Women's Studies in Africa, acknowledges that the existing literature, especially in the area of "ideology and psychology", remains incomplete without the contributions of African female scholars:

> Culturally specific knowledge is essential, and findings often cannot be generalized cross-culturally or across classes. Subjective consciousness is very difficult for outsiders (no matter how well-intentioned) to explore effectively. With more African women scholars becoming interested in studying African women, we may gain more knowledge in these areas (p.127).

Many African female scholars may agree with Robertson up to a point, but would argue that "culturally specific knowledge" is not merely essential, but should remain the major defining element of this scholarship. For instance, both Amadiume (1987) and Zeleza (1993) argue that African women's status has already been defined in relation to that of Western women as the norm. They argue that the problem is not merely a question of changing the tools of analysis, but also that of restructuring unequal relations in the creation of feminist knowledge. With the increasing emphasis on the role of culture and ideology, feminist scholarship cannot afford to ignore the voices of specific groups of women.

2.3.2. Filling the Gaps in Existing Literature: Implications of Review For This Study

The discussions in subsequent chapters will exploit many of the useful insights emerging from this review. The concept "patriarchal continuities and contradictions" employed in this study, reflects a departure from previous studies that present a simplistic view of the relations of gender in contemporary Nigerian society. Patriarchy is used here as the central element which defines the relations of gender. It embraces a broad view of the latter, which is that while women's subordinate status is a universal reality, patriarchal relations differ in time and space and in their insertion into the capitalist economy. Many of the studies reviewed here and

in Chapter One, have certainly revealed a series of patriarchal continuities from the pre-colonial to the contemporary society. Similarly, their analysis of the latter points to serious contradictions in the transition process, contradictions that continue to structure the relations of gender.

In focusing on the experiences of the so-called "elite" women, this study moves away from uncritical conceptions of Nigerian women's education and wage employment. In wading through the complexities of the participants' experiences, this study does not lose sight of the central defining element: women's subordinate status. It explores the relations of domination and subordination that structure their privileged status. These relations do not exist in a vacuum. They reveal not only the situation of a particular a group of women, but also the nature of the malestream social order they live in. Privileged they may be, but elite Nigerian women are not immune to the pressures other women have to deal with. In fact, the forces that impinge on elite women's lives are likely to reflect the most potent form of patriarchy. Given that they should be at the forefront of the struggle for women's emancipation, the extent to which they can successfully handle these pressures is indicative of the prospects of the larger female majority.

The study moves beyond the existing Marxist literature's preoccupation with women's work. It also represents a

departure from other studies that merely review specific aspects of women's lives such as schooling, labour force participation or familial status. This study not only integrates the participants' experiences in three crucial sites, but offers extensive in-depth analysis of these experiences. Chapter 6, in particular, deals with current trends in the labour market that existing literature has not properly addressed - women's labour market experiences in an era of declining employment opportunities. The analysis attempts to capture some elements of family/labour market relations, the ideological construction of formal employment positions and gender politics in work settings. Although information on some of the issues discussed is limited to the respondents' perceptions and observations, they are meant to invite further investigation.

This study also avoids the pitfalls of previous analytical approaches which conflate all women into a single category. The intention here is to provide a lucid analysis of a group of women in their individual circumstances as university graduates, mothers, wives, single women, professional women and sisters-in- law. The analysis focuses on both the material and ideological relations that define these various positions. Their experiences will reveal obvious peculiarities as well as broad patterns typical of those associated with "elite" women. As their stories unfold, we do not see a homogenous group of women, but we certainly observe

some homogenous patterns in their varying circumstances.

Perhaps the main strength of this thesis - its major response to the limitations of existing literature - lies in the critical, qualitative and in-depth analysis of women's voices, viewpoints and perceptions of their situation. Such an approach to the issues discussed also responds to the emerging trends in feminist scholarship. The latter has essentially moved through three stages. We started with asking the question - how can we make theory fit reality? We eventually broke loose from the rigidity of traditional frameworks and began the quest for a universal theory that would respond to every woman's reality. The emerging trends seem to signal a new beginning. Feminist scholarship is now asking the formidable question - how we can build theory from a myriad of realities?

One cannot even begin to imagine the enormity of this challenge. However, it seems the beginnings of an attempt must start somewhere. I have chosen to start with university educated wage earning Igbo women, a group of women with whom I share many similar experiences. These are women whose views of the world and their positions in it are by no means foreign to me. Hopefully, this vantage point will yield some new knowledge about a world that remains largely unexplored.

The next chapter discusses in more detail, the methodological implications of the approach I have adopted in exploring this world.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0. METHODOLOGY

Chapter One established the main argument of this thesis, which is that restricted access to formal education and wage employment offers Nigerian women limited prospect for social mobility. The chapter highlighted the patriarchal continuities and contradictions that have shaped Nigerian women's education and formal employment. Against this background, the study set out to examine in detail the lived experiences of currently employed university trained Igbo women. Their experiences in three important sites: the family (natal and marital), educational system and in wage employment, provide the primary information base for assessing their socio-economic status. The importance of such an in-depth analysis for purposes of theory building and policy formulation has already been emphasized in Chapters One and Two.

This chapter presents both the research methods employed in this study and the methodological assumptions underlying the analysis. It begins by identifying the basic features of feminist research and critical ethnography, aligning them to the issues and problems of studying Nigerian and African women. The second section offers a personal reflection on the researcher's unique position as a female scholar studying

women from her culture with social background and experiences similar to hers. Finally, the research design is presented along with a biographical sketch of each participant.

The reader's attention is drawn to the rather less formal presentation (compared to the rest of the chapters) in the second section. As one trained in the strait-jacket of formal writing, conversion to any other writing style has not been easy. However, in this chapter I experienced something of an opposite reaction. I found that, try as I might, I could not properly tell "my" story in the second or even third person. I have tried to capture as much as possible my experience of researching and writing this thesis. If in some places I appear to be "going back and forth" from one writing style to another, I crave the reader's indulgence.

3.1. The Feminist Perspective in Social Research

In a broad sense, this study embraces a feminist perspective. Feminist research as a mode of inquiry clearly distances itself from the traditional analytical frameworks, so that what may be debated upon at present is not so much the rationale for feminist inquiry as the validity of research that calls itself feminist. Shields and Dervin (1993) draw attention to Duelli's (1983) comments that:

> Although until recently the idea of investigating a feminist methodology for its own sake was relatively unheard of, feminist scholarship had reached the point where serious consideration needed to be paid to how feminist research is to differ from "patriarchal research". In the time

> since, feminist scholars across disciplines have begun to seriously discuss the methods appropriate for the study of feminist concerns (p.65).

Feminist scholarship recognizes the fact of women's subordinate status in society and the low priority it has commanded in the mainstream traditional disciplines. The main objective of feminist research is to uncover the specificities of women's oppression as a basis for exploring possible avenues of bringing fundamental improvements to their lives. The appropriate methods of achieving this main objective may be debated, but most feminist researchers would agree that women's voices and viewpoints constitute the primary data base (Shields and Dervin 1993:66).

Feminist scholarship attempts to identify and analyze the relations of power embedded in women's lives. As Smith (1986a) argues, women's everyday experiences tell the stories of their oppression. According to her, it is from the basic aspects of their lives that one can begin to trace the impacts of larger oppressive social forces. Smith points out that beginning from the experiences of women does not imply a myopic view of social reality, but serves as "a port of entry, the locus of an experiencing subject or subjects, into a larger social and economic process" (p.7-9). In other words, a feminist perspective does not imply a narrow focus on women's lives, but allows the researcher to begin a systematic inquiry into where women are located socially, economically and politically.

In placing women's experiences within a broad social context, feminist scholarship confronts not only the relations of gender, but those of class, race, ethnicity and other social categorisations, which define women's conditions of existence. As Morgan (1981:91) notes, gender "is not something unchanging that is brought into every encounter, but is often shaped and patterned in different interactional contexts." Thus, gender relations "must also be seen holistically and in context, and as socially and culturally complex" (Shields and Dervin 1993:66)

Given its major goal of empowering women through the process and results of social inquiry, feminist scholarship aims to understand the dynamic forces in women's lives. By virtue of their gender, female scholars are at least one step closer than their male counterparts to the oppressive relations structuring women's lives. It is therefore not surprising that feminist scholarship is highly sensitive to research on women by male scholars and even in general, those outside its framework. Bhavnani (1993) articulates the view of many feminist scholars on this issue:

> Research is not necessarily feminist if it is conducted by a woman, nor that the subjects of the inquiry be only women, but surely it is valid to state that the main agent of any research which claims to be feminist must be a woman (p.97).

As in the case of other social researchers, feminist scholars also bring their experiences into the field. The interaction with subjects has implications for what eventually

yes as the final outcome of the investigation. Given its emancipatory stance, feminist research cannot ignore "the relations of domination and subordination, which the researcher has negotiated" and how they may have affected the process and findings of research (Bhavnani 1993:98). Similarly, Shields and Dervin (1993) emphasize the need for feminist researchers to be critically aware of their own background and position, in relation to those whose lives they are investigating. They argue that women should be brought into the process of inquiry as participants; actors and contributors whose input remains a valid component of the results of the inquiry.

These are the basic features and objectives of feminist scholarship that this study has tried to portray. While the particular method of data collection and analysis, in this case critical ethnography, may differ, the important factor is the degree of adherence to feminist goals. Obviously, feminist researchers are well aware that most of the available research methods originated from the traditional Social Sciences. In other words, the main consideration is not about the best analytical approach, but about the degree of clarity that an approach may possibly bring to the issues being investigated.

3.1.1. Making a Case For Critical Ethnography

Critical ethnography, the research method adopted for this study, shares some common interests with feminist

research (Mies 1986, Reinharz 1983, Smith 1986a, Shields and Dervin 1993), such as the emphases on the internal dynamics of society, the relations of power within, and the goal of fundamental social change (Wilson 1977, Owen 1982). Aligning a feminist perspective with critical ethnography, Smith (1986a) claims that:

> The ethnographic process of inquiry is one of exploring further into those... processes which organize and determine the actual bases of experience of those whose side we have taken... We must start somewhere... The specification of that somewhere and the explication of the relations to which it is articulated including the ideological discourse, is the aim of our inquiry (p.12).

Beside the commonalities shared with feminist research, it appears that the less rigid stance of critical ethnography also appears to hold considerable potential for the study of African women. In general, ethnographies can be used to harness women's experiences as a political resource in pressing for radical change. The need for such a data base in developing social policies that are truly sensitive to women has been previously emphasized. This data base is also crucial to the development of theoretical and methodological approaches. Commenting on the state of feminist scholarship in Nigeria, Taiwo (1988) aptly states:

> In the first place, it is frustrating to talk about methodology [simplistically] for a reality which... is extremely complex. In the second place, it is even more frustrating to talk about alternative methodologies in a situation in which there is prevalent poverty of theory. How can one begin to talk of alternatives where one laments the painful absence, in some cases, of a theory and, in others, the inappropriateness, inadequacy of a theory

(p.26).

Critical ethnography assumes a tentative stance in its approach to the use of theory. This does not imply starting out in the process of inquiry without any theoretical basis. Wilson (1977) explains that:

> Seeking theory grounded in the reality of the participants does not mean a disregard of previous work. The researcher must become thoroughly acquainted with related research and theory so that he[/she] can use it whenever it is helpful for explaining events... He[/she] contributes to the development of knowledge [by] pointing out corroborations and contradictions of his [her] findings with the findings of other researchers, [and], he[/she] uses previous research to select the setting he[/she] is studying and to inform the initial focus of his information gathering (p.260).

The plurality of alytical approaches in feminist scholarship has its own advantages, but it does not remove the major obstacle in the study of African women; the dearth of theories and methodologies that are historically oriented, geographically specific and grounded in their lived experiences. Thus, the tentative approach to the use of theory in qualitative research therefore, strongly recommends itself in the Nigerian situation.

3.2. The Person of the Researcher as Scholar and Subject

The dearth of in-depth qualitative studies on Nigerian women has been a major force spurring my interest in feminist research. The bulk of existing literature on the latter tends

to focus on the general conditions of their existence. These studies provide useful background data, but say very little about the circumstances of women in specific social groups. In adopting a feminist perspective, I focused on a specific group of Nigerian women; currently employed, university educated Igbo women.

I believe that the time has passed for studies that merely give us an overview of how Nigerian women are faring at present, with a dash of statistics on schooling and formal employment thrown in for good measure. The available statistical data is not only sparse, but also in many cases, outdated. Besides, much of the existing data is hardly sensitive to gender issues. Overall, it does not tell us much that we do not already know. Aligning this situation to the main goals of feminist analysis, one can safely say that the existing literature has not even scratched the surface. Given the diversity of women's experiences in various classes and ethnic groups in Nigeria, feminist research faces an enormous challenge. The analytical base for a coherent analysis of Nigerian women's lives can only emerge with grassroots studies, which capture the specificities of individual groups. These specificities are crucial if social policy is to respond to women in different circumstances.

Obviously, the respondents in this study stand out in existing feminist literature as part of the privileged (female) class. This is also a group highly understudied.

Zeleza (1993:108) remarks that "research on African women has privileged rural over urban women." In terms of focus, I think this imbalance in scholarship on African women is a healthy one. What I do not agree with is the analyses of issues presented and the knowledge about African women they leave us with. In the Nigerian case, there is a tendency to project contrasts: urban and rural women, petty traders and elite women. Contrasts are important, but they may blur the interrelations among women. Such divisions are obviously important, but a narrow focus on them takes us away from the larger structures of female oppression. Contrast may also give an erroneous impression of a simple relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed.

As the literature review in Chapter Two showed, the position of elite African women has generated much controversy in the literature. Some writers see them as a class who are far removed from the harsh realities faced by their less privileged sisters (Lloyd 1974, Bujra 1983, 1986). Others point to the peculiarities of their oppression, which cannot and should not command any direct comparison with that of female majority (Fapohunda 1982, 1983; Stichter 1988, Parpart 1990). The sharp contrast with rural women leaves one with the impression of monolithic groups. But, as some of the studies reviewed in Chapters One and Two suggest, economic and political realities have mediated the "elite" experiences of different historical eras. The discussion in the subsequent

chapters will also show that the experiences of each group of elite women differ in some important respects, and also that social, economic and political trends mediate these experiences over time.

With regard to my study, I want to portray foremost, a fundamental reality; the fact that as women, the participants are subordinated in a male dominated society. The female disadvantage can be seen in what they can do, where they can go, how the society and its institutions judge and reward them relative to their male counterparts. More importantly, I wanted to make visible the pervasive nature of women's oppression - the contradictions evident in the relations of gender and the various ways in which women can strategize to empower themselves. The experiences of the participants clearly show that they are not complete victims. While operating from a weaker power base compared to men in general, the women in this study struggle to make the most of any influence they can exert as wives, mothers, highly educated women and wage earners. They exploit various loopholes in the system either as coping strategies or avenues for improving their situation.

The stories of these women also go to show that their lives are not unconnected with the lives of women in the other social classes. Extended family ties mean that, in many cases, the respondents must share their earnings with less privileged women (and men). In other cases, their (respondents') actions

tend to be detrimental to the latter. In analyzing this contradiction, we must not forget that even the cultural relations of gender embody a female hierarchy, which often pits women against each other. The structure of gender relations outlined in Chapter Four clearly shows that Igbo women wield power as mothers, mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, and lastly as wives. In many instances, culturally mediated loyalties, more than economic status, take precedence. In the end, the possibilities for mobilizing resistance do not easily suggest themselves.

While focusing on the implications of Igbo women's subordinate status as the respondents experience it, I do not lose sight of the fact these women help to make their history. I have emphasized this in Chapter One. Thus, despite the challenges they face in a male dominated society, they are actively using their initiative, wits and sheer resilience to work as they struggle to improve their situation. That the strategies employed may in more instances than not reinforce their oppression eventually is another matter. In assessing the potentials of higher education and formal employment for my respondents, I have tried as much as possible to portray what is clearly a struggle to improve their lives and that of their children.

It is important to me that this study captures the limitations of power and status that formal education and wage employment can confer on Nigerian women. If these assets are

seen as the gateways to freedom, then we must critically assess the status of Nigerian women who possess them. We must pose the questions: how do these women fare relative to their male counterparts and how their position affect the balance of power in the relations of gender. These questions must be asked if we are to assess the prospects of the larger female majority. It cannot be denied that those who are less privileged are inclined to view the respondents' position as the ultimate ambition, if not for themselves, certainly for their female children. This assessment is crucial if we aim to restructure the relations of gender in the family and society, and thus, justify these dreams.

With these questions in mind, I set out to analyze in detail the lives of the participants, placing their experiences in the context of the relations of gender in Igboland and the larger Nigerian society. While recognizing the common basis of oppression which they share with other female groups, my study draws particular attention to the circumstances of their oppression as elite women.

My study embraces the emancipatory objective of feminist scholarship. The in-depth analysis of the women's lives should provide useful insights to both theory building and policy making. I have tried to capture as much as possible the reality of my respondents' situation, without diminishing their status or that of any other social group. Their viewpoints and perceptions form the primary data base and my

main task is to place this raw data in the context of the larger society.

As a feminist researcher, I am mindful of what I bring to my research. Besides the conventional norms of social research, my interest in this study, (as many feminist researchers are quick to admit) is borne out of my own experiences. In this case, my own status as a university educated Igbo woman has placed me in the position of both researcher and subject. Given the objectives of feminist scholarship and the current controversy pervading the study of African women, I can say with more confidence than most scholars in this field, that "I know where these women are coming from". In many respects, my position, despite a few caveats, was mostly an advantage.

First, I am familiar with the cultural milieu in which the respondents operate. I understand this culture, its nuances and taboos. In the field, I was mindful of what is deemed acceptable social behaviour for someone of my gender, age and status. For instance, I knew no one would take me seriously if I showed up for official appointments in trousers. Instead, I either tied my wrappers or wore the "proper" Western outfits. I was also aware that a simple "hi" was not acceptable, especially to older people. I said my "good morning", "good afternoon" or "good evening" loud and clear.

Given the time limitations I was working under, it was

important to get my interviews done with as few problems as possible. I was well aware that the concept of time in my culture is quite fluid. I did not bother with the official channels; rather, I went through the usual person who knows somebody, who knows someone else, who knows.... A sister-in-law who is a school teacher, an old family friend who is a bank manager and "that woman who lives in Papa Okeys' building"; these familiar starting points provided most of my interviews.

The interviews, although quite interesting, presented many challenges. The venue, time interval and audience largely depended on factors outside my control. With many unpredictable factors such as transport, duty calls, family emergencies and rain, I had to re-schedule appointments on occasion. Although I met the participants in person either at their workplace or at a friend's house, most of my respondents preferred to be interviewed at home. I knew that for women in their position, their husbands would not be a problem if I avoided meal times. Otherwise, a "true" Igbo man should not be hanging around his wife and her friends except on invitation.

Interviews with the married women meant having the children as an "active" audience. I had to continually wrestle my tape recorder from the tiny hands of the younger ones who found my small radio a very fascinating toy. Many of them insisted I record their own speeches so they could hear the play-back before I left the house. Moreover, the respondents

in many cases, had to stop in mid sentence, either to call the children to order or comfort a crying child. In between questions, some of them shouted instructions to the maid in the kitchen. Knowing the culture as I do, such interruptions were simply part of the normal course of everyday life.

Language was important, especially the associated nuances. For instance, facial expressions were in many instances an indication as to the appropriateness of my timing. If the timing was bad, I quickly beat a retreat in a manner that would not offend. If good, I went with the flow of the dialogue. As in the case of most urban dwellers at Enugu, especially the elite, our discussions were woven in a mixture of English Language, Igbo and pidgin English. My familiarity with these amalgam of languages made the interviews much easier. I remember, in particular, the taken-for-granted manner with which the participants bandied about local acronyms such as NEPA (National Electric Power Authority) and SAP (Structural Adjustment Program); local slang such as IM (Ima Mmadu)[21], pidgin expressions such as "which one you dey?."[22]

Moreover, I could figure out what the respondents meant

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[21]Im stands for "ima mmadu", a popular Igbo expression which can be literarily translated to mean "to know somebody," evidently, someone in a position of authority. The term has been made popular in more recent times with the ever increasing corruptive channels of influence in the formal labour market (see Chapter Six).

[22]Meaning either where do you stand (e.g. in an argument) or what is wrong with you?

when they used the term "sibling" to mean a sister, brother, cousin, aunt etc. There is also the loose usage of "he" and "she", a direct transliteration from its non gender specific Igbo equivalent "O." I also felt at home with the inevitable mutual constant interruptions. The sentences were usually open-ended sentences, ending with "you know....". I knew it is not considered rude under the circumstance to interrupt. I just had to recognize the moment to barge in. I was also prepared to spend time discussing seemingly unrelated topics, anything from their views of the 1967-1970 civil war to Miriam Babangida's (the president's wife) wardrobe. Since I wanted to understand the design of the patch work, I had to be patient if they insisted on spreading out the entire quilt.

Perhaps, the greatest advantage of my position as subject and scholar was that I could relate to the experiences of the participants. I could easily identify with the women as mothers, aunts, sisters, cousins, friends and sisters-in-law. The important cultural elements shaping their lives such as marriage, son preference, polygyny and extended kin relations were familiar territory. For instance, I understood the knowing looks exchanged when word came that one of the participants, Onyeka, had put to bed "another" baby girl. I could relate to Ngozi's irritation with her relatives who acknowledge her "high education", but do not understand why she is still single. I could feel Mma's pain as she recounted the story of her childlessness and rejection by her husband

and in-laws. In some instances, I found myself shedding a few tears. Yet on many occasions, we laughed about the ironies of life with "Nigerian" men and their excesses mothers-in-law at-arms, and the ridiculous inflation rates. In some of those moments, our experiential paths actually crossed, imprinting them deeper in my memory. I was also aware of the participants' privileged position compared to the majority of Nigerian women. As professionals, many of them are in positions of power with both male and female staff under their supervision. They earn relatively high incomes by Nigerian standards and therefore are much more financially independent than most Nigerian women. Moreover, their financial contribution is important to the family upkeep. Yet, the reality of their being "women" in a malestream order comes out in their stories. Their experiences are not completely separated from that of the female majority. Both the common themes of women's oppression and the special circumstances of their privileged position are visible in the women's stories.

My presence appeared quite unobtrusive as we sat in their living rooms. In general, all the women were quite comfortable sharing their personal experiences. I could retreat with the single women, most of whom live in the family residence, to their private space, the bedroom. I shared conspiratorial nods (and the quick lowering of voices) with the married women as their husbands walked in on "sensitive topics" such as personal investments and relations with in-laws, especially

mothers-in law. There were many such constant reminders of "we" and "them." They spoke volumes not only about our common experiential bond as women, but also about the pervasive nature of female subjugation in my culture. As I said earlier on, it is not a simple relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed. Women are also implicated in both their oppression and that of other women, although to a much lesser degree than men.

I had amassed a wealth of information about African women, Nigerian and Igbo women, before proceeding for field work, but my own perspective as an insider into this culture was the main starting point of this inquiry. Yet, even as highly equipped as I would dare to say I was, I must confess that nothing could have fully prepared me for my experiences in the field. It is one thing to live a culture; it is another thing to critically analyze the dynamics of such intricate parts of one's life. The relations of domination and subordination that the women are enmeshed in are a part of everyday life, which I had taken for granted until I waded into the arena of feminist scholarship. Until this time, I never really gave much thought to the possibility that my life was in any way gendered, disadvantageously; or that my life was in any way linked to that of the market women and female peasant farmers.

As I probed into my respondents' lives, I came close on many occasions to my own lived experiences. I had to be

careful about my position as scholar. Given my research agenda, I had to maintain a "critical" distance from my "data." To me, the commonalities of our experiences were a source of strength, an encouragement that these are stories that need to be told. I do not think that I can ever forget the experience of writing this thesis, most of all, the times I spent with the respondents, their children, maids and many of the relatives I met during the course of my field work. I have listened to these voices over and over, on tape, in my mind and in my dreams. For the past one year that I spent analyzing the ethnographic data, I have practically lived and breathed the lives of these women. I have also become very good friends with a few of them with whom I have maintained contact. Recently, I received a letter from one of them, Uzoamaka, thirty-five, an Economics teacher who was about to get married before I left for Canada. She has since joined her husband in Lagos. Pregnant and expecting to give to give birth in the next few months, she has put her career on hold at the moment.

Perhaps coming to this study from "two cultures" made a difference. I do not know how this may be seen, but I consider it an advantage. On the one hand, doing graduate work in North America afforded me the opportunity to "distance" myself from my own culture and critically examine a way of life I was born into and raised in. This quest exposed me to useful insights by both insiders and outsiders to this culture and thus,

provided a base for an informed critique. On the other hand, I was well aware that I was addressing a wider readership of scholars. In other words, my presentation was to a "mixed" audience. I have to be careful about my interpretations of social relations in my culture, knowing full well that the conception of oppression differs in time and space. The prevailing controversy surrounding the study of African women was a constant reminder of my ethical responsibilities as a scholar.

3.3. Research Design

3.3.1. The Research Problem

This study argues primarily that higher education and wage employment confer less social status on Nigerian women than is commonly assumed, because the present social arrangement constrains their options in the formal sector.

Formal education and wage employment are perceived as crucial assets in the struggle for women's emancipation, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. The statistical measures of women's representation in the formal sector are regarded as major indices of a nation's well being. Accordingly, post-independent African governments are often pressured both locally and internationally to improve women's education and representation in wage labour. But any measures aimed at improving Nigerian women's socio-economic status

should consider at the fore the social relations of power which shape their lives and their boundaries of operation.

This thesis argues that regardless of the potential formal education and wage employment hold for social mobility, their viability as crucial assets for women's social emancipation depends on the conditions under which women acquire and utilize them. Nigerian women's lives and the social opportunities open to them are mediated by both cultural inequalities as well as new forms of subjugation that emerged with colonialism and capitalist expansion. The patriarchal continuities and contradictions in contemporary social relations strongly impact on women's participation in formal education and wage employment, especially at the higher levels.

This thesis examines the link between Igbo women's higher education, wage employment and socio-economic status. It focuses on the patriarchal continuities and contradictions that shape the experiences of a particular group of women in these three crucial sites of oppression. Patriarchal continuities and contradictions are used as the entry points into the analysis. They do not diminish the impact of other factors such as class, ethnicity and religion. Although they are not the major focus of attention, these categories necessarily come into the analyses because they mediate the impact of patriarchal relations on the specific circumstances of the women under study.

As pointed out earlier, this study hopes to contribute the much needed data base from which a more coherent analysis of Nigerian women's lives can emerge. Such a data base is important not only for theory building, but also for formulating policies that are sensitive to the diverse circumstances of Nigeria women.

3.3.2. Field Work Site and Participant Selection

Enugu, where the research was carried out, was originally the capital of Eastern Nigeria, presently divided up into nine states. It remains one of the few promising spots for job seekers in Igboland and, given its historical importance, has attracted workers from various parts of former Eastern Nigeria and beyond. The participants consist of eighteen university educated female wage earners who were interviewed during the field work that lasted between August 1991 and March 1992. This sample is purposive in a number of ways.

First, I chose highly educated women, perhaps the most privileged among Nigerian women, because in the society's eyes, they have been able to tap the full potential of higher education. I am aware of the disfunctionalities associated with low level and poor quality female education in African countries such as Nigeria, which Robertson (1986) extensively reviewed (see Chapter One). In the light of the declining employment opportunities in the formal sector, university graduates are in the best situation to reap whatever is left

of benefits associated with formal education. Most importantly, I wanted to make visible the conditions under which Nigerian women are allowed to gain and maintain a status in the male stream social order. This is important because, given the class divisions among women, their present status points to the prospects for emancipation of the large female majority.

Of the three major ethnic groups, I chose Igbo women simply because, as I stated earlier, my interest in this area grew partly out of my own personal experiences, which is not far removed from that of my respondents. It was convenient for me to gain access and easily relate to women of similar social origins. I met my respondents through friends, family relatives and, in a few cases, chance meetings.

The composition of the sample reflects Nigerian women's representation in specific categories according to available statistics. Of the eighteen respondents, twelve are public sector employees, eight of whom teach in the secondary schools. The latter are drawn from both the Science and non Science fields. The six private sector employees consist of two accountants, three lawyers, and an economist. Their present employment does not, in all the cases, reflect their qualifications. At the time of the interview, twelve of the women were married (all of them with children) while six of them were single.

To reflect the proper historical and economic contexts,

I selected respondents from two major groups: women with more than ten years working experience whose education and employment status may have been shaped by the "oil boom"[23]; and those with less than ten years working experience who joined the labour market after the oil boom.

3.3.3. Data Collection

The information collected from my respondents form the primary data base for this study. However official records and background information were needed for the analysis and these were collected from various institutions including Federal and State Government Ministries, The Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC) at the University of Ibadan, The Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research Library at Ojoo, Ibadan; The Nigerian Law School, Offices of Professional Organizations for accountants, lawyers, medical doctors, architects and teachers. Interviews were also held with relevant individuals both within and outside these institutions. The interviews with the respondents form the core of the analysis. Interviews were semi-

[23]The oil boom in Nigeria refers to the period from 1973 to about 1980 when the high price of petroleum in the world market yielded unprecedented foreign exchange to the country. This period was also characterized by increased public funding of education which boosted school enrolment. In addition, the opening of the small wage labour sector to indigenous and foreign investors created more lucrative employment opportunities, particularly for those with higher education. Since the 1980s, however, the persistent oil glut in the world market has worsened economic conditions in Nigeria, reducing government funding of social services, especially education. Equally, the private sector has witnessed a dampening in economic activities and opportunities for wage employment, in particular, have considerably decreased.

structured. That is, they did not follow a rigid procedure. Instead, an interview guide (see appendix B) was used in order to ensure that the same issues were covered during interviews with each respondent. The duration of each interview session depended on each respondent's schedule. For instance, I spent a whole day with Onyeka, a civil servant, who was on maternity leave and nearing delivery. We had to take breaks between sessions. In contrast, Alice, a private practitioner, could not spare any time at home and preferred an evening scheduled at her chambers.

The interviews explored in considerable detail each woman's educational background, work history and family life. The intent was to identify significant factors in their lived experience, which affect the translation of their educational training into socio-economic status. The interviews centred around three specific themes:

1. Their educational background: This includes the level and type of training received, the factors which shaped their schooling, and how these may have contributed to their present status.

2. Their present labour force status: This includes their position in the labour market and features of the job itself; how they fit into the authority hierarchy, their access to economic benefits such as salary and fringe benefits; their chances of advancement in terms of opportunities for training, upgrading, promotion, etc.

3. The relationship between their labour market and familial status: This entails first looking at how their domestic responsibilities such as house work, care of children, relatives and others catered for in the household, affect their job. Second, how the women's socio-economic status reflects on their position in the family in terms of their participation in decision making and share of domestic tasks is examined.

3.3.4. Ethical Considerations

For a study such as this, the ethical considerations are twofold. First, I had to deal with the fundamental questions every ethnography must face as one delves into the personal lives of other people. Second, as a Nigerian and an Igbo woman, I was aware that there are peculiar aspects of our customs and heritage that must be captured in a study of this nature, in order to reflect the proper context in which social interaction occurs. For the field work, I followed specific guidelines (see Appendix C for a statement of ethical considerations)

First, I explained to each potential respondent the purpose of the study, why the interviews need to be recorded and how the information provided would be used. Although some of the women did not mind their identities revealed, each woman was assured of the discretion in which their identity would be treated and why the treatment had to be uniform.

Further, information about the study and potential respondent's rights to give or withhold consent from participating was clearly spelt out before hand and each woman's decision was respected. (See Appendix A for letter of consent). The taping of the interviews proceeded upon the consent of each respondent.

On bringing the recorded tapes to Canada, I have kept to these initial guidelines. I transcribed the tapes into English. I used the respondents' real names until the last stages of the thesis when all the names and personal references were changed. Overall, I can safely say that in both the collection and processing of information, this thesis has closely adhered to the Social Science guidelines on ethics (See Appendix for "ethical consideration" and letter of consent).

However, when it comes to the analysis itself, I can only say that I have tried as much as possible to present what I felt was a fairly accurate picture of my culture and the respondents' stories. I am aware that this is a subjective judgement. My own experience shared earlier in the chapter clearly portrays the reality that one can divorce self and research only so far. I see this as both a strength and a weakness. As a strength, I have probably captured in writing some important moments, issues and reactions, which bring us closer to the lives of those that I am researching. As a weakness, I cannot say that in the months of listening to

these tapes, analyzing and re-analyzing the data, that the end product represents nothing but the entire reality that has eluded Social Science. All that I can say is that with all the advantages I had as an Igbo female scholar, and with the formidable team of research advisers who have guided me through this journey, I have done my best.

3.4. The Respondents: A Biographical Sketch

This short introduction is meant to give the reader a sketchy picture about the women in my study. For some of them, I have included a quote on something they talked about, which stayed with me.

3.4.1. Teachers

1. **Chidimma** is thirty-one and married to a successful medical doctor. She has five children all under ten. A graduate of Dietetics, she went for a qualifying degree in Education shortly after getting married and is currently teaching Home Economics. She has just completed a part time program for a masters degree in Education and intends to go into the doctoral program.

2. **Erimma**, thirty-five, is a Chemistry graduate. She took up

teaching in 1981 as an interim measure because she could not get a job in the chemical industries. For a long time, she felt unsatisfied with her job, but was reluctant to further her education because, according to her family, she would be pricing herself out of the marriage market. She eventually registered for a part time higher degree program in Chemistry, but tells me:

> ...In Igbo culture, every woman "must" marry. Must in quotes because as the Igbos say, initially people ask, "Who is the father of this girl?", but after sometime, they begin to ask "Who is the husband?" If you allow them to keep asking who your father is, then you have not arrived.

3. **Iruka** is thirty-two and is married to a civil servant. She has a masters degree in Science Education and teaches Biology. She has a three year old daughter. She plans to pursue either a master degree in Business or a doctoral program in Education.

4. **Uzoamaka**, thirty-five, has taught English for about ten years. She was about to get married when I spoke to her. She recently completed a part-time diploma in Business. She got married in 1992 and joined her husband in Lagos. From her last letter in April 1993, she is pregnant, and not employed presently, having suspended all career plans until the baby is born.

5. **Uju** is thirty-eight, a vice-principal and mother of five

young children. Her husband is a broadcaster. A French graduate, Uju recently obtained a masters degree in Education. She is currently enroled in a part time doctoral program.

6. **Chika** is thirty-eight, married to a business man and they have three children. She has been a Biology teacher for years and recently transferred to the Teachers' Commission because it gave her more time to study for a part-time law program she is currently enroled in.

7. **Ogechi** is the vice-principal and guidance counsellor in her school. Thirty-six and single, she has a masters degree in Education. She is not planning to pursue further studies.

8. **Veronica**, fifty-six, has been a school principal since 1978. Her husband is a retired civil servant and they have three grown children.

3.4.2. Civil Servants

9. **Onyeka**, an economist, is thirty-two and works in the Ministry of Finance. She is married with two young children and her husband is a protocol officer. As she went on to describe all the things she has to do on weekends in order to ensure a hitch-free work week, I asked her where the husband

comes in. Her reply:

> [Laughter] He is a Nigerian man. He wakes up in the morning, shaves, has his bath and asks for his breakfast.

10. **Ifeyinwa**, thirty-eight, has been with the Commission since 1988 after teaching for eight years. She is married to a business man and they has five children.

11. **Christie**, forty-nine, has been with the civil service since 1968. She is a deputy director of a department in one of the ministries. She has a masters degree in Public Administration and is presently pursuing a Law degree. She married rather late and has two young children. On women being left with home work, she comments:

> Of course, when you push too far, they say you're a feminist, that you want to turn the man into a maid. But, I can tell you that many women are not happy about it. We are complaining, but haven't been able to take some concerted action. We don't want to be branded feminists.

12. **Rose**, fifty-seven, is a deputy director at the Commission. She is married to an architect and they have three grow children.

3.4.3. Private Sector Employees

13. **Chinelo**, thirty, is the mother of two young children. She is an accountant and works with one of the established

national banks in Nigeria. She is married to a wealthy business man. I asked about her female colleagues in the office - the single ones:

> Well, they are there...doing their job and working hard at getting someone to marry them. You know that marriage means a lot in Igboland. It is like if they....are getting to their late thirties, people will start wondering what is wrong with them...., something that prevents men from coming for their hand. ....You see them ....trying to be nice and hoping that someday, somebody will come their way"

14. **Ngozi**, thirty, an economist, works with an eastern bank. She is single. She hopes to register for a Business degree in the near future.

15. **Uchenna**, thirty-four, is also single and works in the same bank as Ngozi. Her first degree is in accounting. She also has a master degree in Business Administration.

16. **Nnenna** thirty-four, is a legal manager in Chinelo's bank. She is married to a Micro-Biology professor and they have two young children.

17. **Mma**, forty, is the company secretary and legal adviser in one of the new high profile banks. She is separated from her husband and has an adopted 3 year old daughter. To be admitted into a man's world, she had to convince the management that she would neither remarry nor have children. On assuming duty,

she was going through the minutes books and came across a discussion on her appointment:

> There it was clearly written, that "even though I was a woman, they could not pass up my excellent credentials, because happily, I didn't have encumbrances"....But they all have wives and children at home, and because they are men, those are not "encumbrances" on their part.

18. **Alice**, forty-eight, worked with a legal firm for nine years before starting her own practice in 1986. She is forty- and married to a business man. They have five grown up children.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0. ELITE IGBO WOMEN AND THE STRUCTURE OF GENDER RELATIONS IN THE FAMILY AND SOCIETY.

The review of Nigerian women's participation in formal education and wage employment in Chapter One showed how patriarchal continuities and contradictions have shaped the opportunities available to them, as well as the outcomes of their training. The analysis of related literature in Chapter Two revealed some of the peculiarities of gender relations that continue to affect women's lives in the family, school system and the labour market.

This chapter reiterates the basic thesis of the study, which is that the power and status conferred on women by education and formal employment are mediated by social boundaries and expectations they have to adhere to. In the case of Igbo women, the structure of gender relations in the family and society constrains their sphere of operation and weakens their bargaining position. Depending on their social position and personal circumstances, individual women grapple with many exigencies this structure presents.

Using the accounts of the participants' lives, this chapter presents the structure of gender relations typical of the elite Igbo society. A critical analysis of the relations

of gender in the latter is crucial to this study for two main reasons. First, it provides the institutional backdrop against which one can begin to assess the potential of the respondents' training and socio-economic status. Second, it draws attention to the specificities of the respondents' experiences as elite women and thus, their social location relative to other women.

The first section of the chapter attempts to locate the class (for want of a better word) of Nigerian female elite and the ingredients of their status in the contemporary society. The second section focuses on the structure of gender relations in the elite Igbo circle as they are reflected in the lives of the participants. The voices and points of view reported are those of the women in this study and they speak to their personal experiences and in some cases, to that of female relatives and acquaintances.

4.1. The Nigerian Female Elite Class

Mann (1985) notes that Nigerian women were thrust into a new subordinate role in the emerging elite society by forces outside their control. She points to the social, economic and political changes sweeping across West Africa at the turn of the twentieth century:

> Colonial rule and the growth of international trade adversely affected [women's]... status... The expansion of trade created new opportunities for women in commerce, but in most places men took the lead in the import-export business and women engaged in petty retailing or local commerce.

> Colonial governments ignored or failed to see women's political roles and undermined their political influence... Christianity and Western education spread ideologies that undermined women's autonomy and economic independence (1985:78).

Mann notes further that elite women's vulnerable status as full-time housewives in the new marital arrangement was a major motivating factor behind their quest for vocational education:

> ... Elite women embraced Christian marriage for two reasons: because upholding civilized values had become part of their special responsibility as women, and because making a good Christian marriage to an elite man provided their only means of sustaining membership in the elite... And yet Christian marriage confronted elite women with a dilemma... [They]... had become dependent on elite men, but elite men failed to fulfil their expectations. After years of disappointment and marital strife, influential women began to rethink aspects of Christian marriage (p.91).

Elite women's options have certainly improved since colonial times, but the social status of individual women is still inextricably linked to their relationships with men and the male ruling class (Fatton 1989:48). As individuals in their own right, Nigerian women's position in the family and society is still, in many respects, one of subordinates to men. Undoubtedly, elite women's position gives them the impetus to assert some of the formal rights accorded to other women only in principle. Nevertheless, they have to grapple with the conflicting expectations of the old and new social order. What the stories of the respondents vividly portray are the dialectics of patriarchal continuities and contradictions in which women's lives are enmeshed, especially in the elite

circle.

4.2. The Structure of Gender Relations

This section will analyze the important elements of the structure of gender relations which the respondent's experiences are embedded in. They are: marriage and family, polygynous ties, procreation and son preference, and extended family ties.

4.2.1. Marriage and Family

As in most African societies, marriage in Igboland is considered the natural and proper status that both women and men should attain. Women, however, are encouraged to marry sooner than men. They are seen as subordinates to men in marriage, their roles being that of mothers, housewives and companions. For women who plan to pursue a career outside the domestic setting, their aspirations are expected to remain secondary or complementary to their primary role. Achebe (1981:7) explains:

> Nigerian society has prescribed to the woman the narrow role of helpmate and mother... Note that this restriction is for all women, whether educated or not. I say this because even for the educated woman, whose aspirations and awareness have been raised (whatever demands her newly-acquired status make on her), society persists in the expectation that she give her traditional role primary focus. In fact, where she plays a role outside the family, the double message is "go ahead, provided that you do all the cooking, look after the children and carry out all your traditional duties creditably."

Intimate relationships outside marriage are socially

frowned upon, especially on the part of women. Being single, in itself, raises enough eyebrows. For the ambitious Nigerian woman, marriage is crucial to both social acceptance and mobility. Achebe points out that:

> ... For those women who would prefer to adopt other models, the psychological freedom of not marrying does not exist. Thus being single or divorced as a chosen way of life for the Nigerian woman becomes a serious moral and social deviation bordering on anathema (1981:7).

Muhammed (1985:30) argues in the same vein that:

> The Nigerian society sees to it that marriage is much more of a commitment for women than it is for men. Our society does not only tell a woman that she is a failure if she fails to lure a male into marriage, it also cuts off most lines of escape from that inevitable path by barring her from other forms of social success.

Of course, the case of elite women is different from that of less privileged women. Many of the respondents are voicing their perceptions as enlightened, professional women. Nevertheless, the impact of social expectations on their lives is remarkable. The personal circumstances of each woman reflect the differing impacts of social pressure on their lives.

The reactions of the participants clearly portray their sensitivity to social expectations and boundaries. Their responses speak not so much to their personal convictions as to what society wants from them. The pressure to marry, in particular, is a commonly shared predicament. Erimma, thirty-five and single, a chemistry teacher, quotes an Igbo adage:

In Igbo culture every woman "must" marry. Must in

> quotes because as the Igbos say, initially people ask, "Who is the father of this girl?", but after sometime they begin to ask, "Who is the husband?". If you allow them to keep asking who your father is, then you have not arrived.

Ogechi, thirty-six and single, a vice-principal in a mixed school, puts it quite succinctly:

> The ultimate ambition for every [Nigerian] woman is to get married at some point in her life..., no matter how hard you work, no matter how forward looking, how upwardly mobile, if you're not married, [people] still look down on you. Even if it is your choice to remain single, they will think there is something very bad about you, that prevents men from coming for your hand. That is the Nigerian reality. I don't think any Nigerian woman can escape that except if she decides to live abroad or join a religious order.

In Ngozi's case, she has been spared much of the usual prodding that comes from "well meaning" parents. Thirty and single, Ngozi is a senior accountant with a commercial bank. Her father, now deceased, was a Permanent Secretary in the civil service. Her mother, a successful business woman, was one of the few Nigerian female university graduates of the 1950s. Ngozi's parents, according to her, never tried to run her life. She, along with two brothers and a sister, studied in Britain. She graduated two years ago and returned to Nigeria, leaving her siblings behind. Having to deal with these social perceptions is a new experience for Ngozi:

> The problem... is that your life is not yours. Here, people have not learnt to mind their own business. I might not be personally worried about being single when many of my friends have settled down, but people around here will make sure that they continually remind you about the passage of time. I try not to worry because it is better to wait for the right person than to rush into a

> marriage that won't last... My mum is not particularly worried, maybe because she herself, didn't get married early..., but my relatives in the village are... Even though I do help some of them out financially, that does not stop them from urging me to get married. In a way, I can see their point. Even in their squalor, their thinking, especially the women, is that you're nothing without a husband and kids...,[but] once you're exposed, you realise that there is a better world out there and you want it for yourself.

The social stigma attached to being single is, to some extent, shared by relatives depending on how close the link. Often, they try in various ways to register their concerns. Their interference heightens the pressure experienced by the unmarried woman.

Unlike Ngozi, whose link with the extended family is a little more distanced, Uzoamaka has to deal with these concerns on a more regular basis. She is thirty-five, a school teacher and lives with her parents. Her father retired a few years ago from the civil service. Her mother is a housewife and barely literate. The family maintains very close links with many relatives, some of whom have been voicing their concerns about Uzoamaka's single status. Against her initial convictions, Uzoamaka finally gave in to the pressure:

> I never really wanted to marry. In fact, I used to think that I can remain single if I choose to. After all, it is not every woman that is cut out for marriage. I felt that there is so much hassle with marriage. Besides, the examples around me were hardly encouraging. However, in the past three years I came to realise that if you really want to be a part of this society you have to consider marriage. I mean, your life is not yours. In family circles you used to move freely, people will now draw you aside and ask what the problem is. They are so much bothered about your single state that

> you wonder if it is really your business or theirs. [For example], my aunties would visit and stay overnight so as to have a heart-to-heart talk with me and to find out whether there is something wrong with me or it's a problem of suitors not coming at all. After some time, I realised that, like the Igbo man would say, there is actually an age you get to in this society and you have to get married, at least, to live among them. Otherwise, they will think that you're wasting yourself. As the pressures mounted, I realised that it was not just my problem. Other people have to be considered. So I started to feel the way they are feeling. At least, I had to do something at least, to assure them that I'm normal.

Single women like Uzoamaka and Ogechi, who are well over thirty, often experience enormous pressure. Their families are well aware that as they advance in years, society becomes increasingly doubtful of their procreative ability, perhaps the most important element in marriage. In addition, both women are also the first daughters in their respective families and in a sense, are blocking the way for their younger sisters.[24] Those from more enlightened social backgrounds like Ngozi are sheltered by their immediate family. However, regardless of the degree of support enjoyed, the fact remains that being single is considered a temporary situation.

Marriage, as the Igbo adage tersely expressed, marks the coming of age, an indication that one has become socially responsible. The implication for those who have not "arrived"

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[24]All girls can be called "daughter" (Ada), but the first girl in the family is referred to as the "Ada". The importance of procreation and thus, the sensitivity of the society to women's age at marriage, often compels the Ada to marry first. Many parents would prefer that their female children marry in age succession so as to avoid "putting the elder daughter on the shelf."

is that there must be something wrong with them or their social background. Normally, beauty and mutual attraction play an important part in choosing a bride. Unlike in the past, young people now have a freer reign in making such decisions. Nonetheless, marriage in Nigeria and Igboland is still a family affair and parental consent is a crucial green light.

A single woman could be identified with any one or more of these labels: wrong social background, morally irresponsible or simply unlucky.[25] Ifeyinwa, thirty-eight, a civil servant married with five young children takes issue with the social logic:

> The society sees the unmarried adults, especially the females as being irresponsible. Even if you're married and for one reason or the other you opt out of that marriage, leaving your children behind, you're also considered an irresponsible person...I don't really believe that marriage makes one responsible. There are many married men who are very irresponsible just as there are some married women who are equally irresponsible.

Elite women such as Ifeyinwa could voice their disapproval, but no woman would want to make herself a target for social disapproval or ridicule. In this context, the married woman is to some extent safe because her marital status automatically confers on her the much needed respect from society. Nnenna, thirty-four, a legal manager in a

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[25]Historically, certain families and clans bore social stigmas which could make them highly unacceptable as possible marriage partners. The significance of such cultural "mutations" has diminished substantially with social change. Women, in addition, are expected to comport themselves in a socially acceptable manner. See Ekiyor (1989).

commercial bank and married with two young children, draws from a friend's experience:

> [She] is about thirty-five years old and not married. When she tells you about her experiences you will pity her. Wherever we go, people would like to attend to me first as a "madam" before listening to her, a "Miss." Of course, I can only qualify as a madam if I'm tying two wrappers[26]...The office is also a problem. The men are pound to make sexual advances. Our people do not have respect for women who are single and past their prime regardless of their educational attainments....

The views and experiences of the respondents are indicative of the strong impact of social forces on their lives. The discussion in the following sections will show how their subordinate status is constructed on a number of levels; how the relations of gender is structured in such a manner as to compel most women to accept an unequal bargain.

4.2.2. Polygynous Ties

Polygyny is widely accepted in contemporary Nigeria as a traditionally legitimate practice. It has been argued that the incidence and rate of polygyny in Nigeria defies modernization theorists, who predict a departure from polygynous relationships into more conjugal unions with social transformation. Ekong (1986) cites several research findings which point to socio-economic factors such as communal land

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[26] Customarily married women in Igboland and many parts of Eastern Nigeria, tie two wrappers over a blouse. Single women are identified with one wrapper. Among the elites such customs are no longer strictly adhered to. Nevertheless, two wrappers still bear the connotation of being married and older single women may tie them to command respect.

holdings, institutionalized sex, and the need to legitimate child paternity, that continue to encourage polygyny. She refers, in particular, to Uchennna's (1965) survey of Nigerian households which indicates that "even 60.6% of those who are polygamous, acknowledge christianity as their faith" (1986:63). However, it is also important to note that the economic crisis is increasingly becoming a strong deterrent against polygyny.

Polygyny is mostly seen as an institution that privileges men. It is certainly not a practice that women, given a choice, would accept. Buchi Emecheta (1979:123-124), in her novel The Joys of Motherhood, set in Eastern Nigeria, relates the silent agony endured by young Nnu Ego, whose husband took a second wife:

> She... busied herself entertaining people who came throughout the evening to see the new wife. Nnu Ego fought back tears as she prepared her own bed for Nnaife and Adaku [his new wife]. It was a good thing she was determined to play the role of the mature senior wife; she was not going to give herself any heartache when the time came for Adaku to sleep on that bed. She must stuff her ears with cloth and make sure she also stuffed her nipple into the mouth of her young son Adim, when they all lay down to sleep.

There have been a number of legal ordinances introduced to regulate polygyny since the colonial period (Ekong 1986:55-57). The 1884 marriage ordinance, in particular, "specif[ied] that persons already married according to... custom could not marry someone else in church, and that those married in church could not wed again according to... custom". This ordinance

was meant to firmly establish monogamy and enhance the security of women in such unions (Mann 1985:44).

However, as Mann shows in her study, many elite men evaded monogamous commitments, finding sufficient loopholes in the double standard of customary and Victorian attitudes to marriage. Both systems affirmed women's subordinate status in marriage and their moral responsibility to society. In the elite circle, both systems "reinforced one another... leaving the group more tolerant of extra-marital [liaisons] for men than for women" (1985:80).

In the contemporary society, polygyny has introduced patriarchal contradictions and contradictions in elite marital and familial arrangements, especially for women. What has emerged is a continuum of models with both traditional and modern features. In the Islamic North, both culture and religion continue to reinforce polygyny. The Christian South, with a longer history of Western influence, has proved a little more receptive to the monogamous union, at least as the model in elite circles. Ekong (1986:63) makes the point that "while marriages contracted under the ordinance imply monogamous union, in actual fact, certain adaptations have been made in accordance with retained beliefs and predispositions." It seems that for the most part, monogamy appears to be accepted only to the extent that it remains compatible with certain traditional requirements, many of which legitimize men's privileges to women's detriment.

The continuum of models has also left what may be considered loopholes for many elite women. The latter are also seeking out options that may give them more security than monogamy as it is presently practised. Karanja (1987) describes, for instance, the case of "inside" and "outside" wives, a marital arrangement which some elite women exploit to safeguard their own independence. He found that some of these women prefer to marry well established men who already have one or more wives rather than remaining single or in an undesirable monogamous union. The highly educated Nigerian woman who accepts this arrangement guarantees herself a respectable social status and the freedom to pursue a career, even if she chooses (as most of them would) to live apart from her husband's main residence.

None of the respondents in this study is involved in a polygynous relationship, that is, in its previous cultural form. Among the Igbo elite, monogamy seems to be the predominant form of marriage. The respondents accept the fact that polygyny is legitimized by tradition, but emphasize, like Emecheta (1979), that it is certainly not a woman's preference. Rose, fifty-eight, an assistant director in a civil service department, reacts to the notion that the African woman is inherently receptive to polygyny:

> The [romantic] love we read about in the literature, which should be ideal is unknown to the Nigerian and African man. I will say this many times over. The white woman does not love any more than we do. It is not that we do not know how to love. The problem is that the Nigerian man does not

> appreciate your giving your whole self to him. He can fling it at any given point...You can break down mentally ...such a pain can kill...So you restrict the relationship to material things. We are not polygynous by nature. Just as the white woman, we are also jealous...Some of the men have experienced the evils of polygyny...it breeds suspicion...It is each woman to her children... I think that ideally, marriage should be monogamous.

Of course, the threat of polygynous incursions for the married women in the study is lessened by their soci-economic statu, especially in the light of the worsening economic situation in the country. Nonetheless, the persistence of the practice in various forms affects Nigerian women's lives whether they are involved in such a relationship or not. All the respondents admit that many elite men are apt to find ways of exploiting this cultural prerogative. In a society where monogamy is only one among a number of options open to men, even elite women are not in a strong bargaining position to question some of their spouses' extra-marital privileges.

Not only is marital infidelity by women strongly discouraged, their spousal rights are hardly guaranteed. For instance, the present legal system stipulates that husbands provide for their wives upon divorce. But this aspect of family law has little cultural backing where women formally engage in economic activities, contribute to family upkeep, and cease to be their husband's direct responsibility outside the marital home (Mann 1985:82-86).

Legal provisions for widows are equally at the discretion of men. The latter decide who benefits from their will and to

what extent. The 1884 ordinance grants to the widow of a statutory (officially monogamous) marriage a third of her husband's estate and the rest to her children, only if he dies intestate. More recent changes in the family law, while safeguarding a women's right to be provided for, may not particularly strengthen their property rights in marriage as wives. The 1965 Estate Law especially stipulates that:

> If the court on an application by or on behalf of a dependant is of the opinion that the disposition of the deceased's estate affected by his will or the law relating to intestacy is not such as to make reasonable provision for the maintenance of that dependent, the court may order that such reasonable provisions as the court thinks fit be paid out of the deceased's estate (Kasunmu and Salacuse 1966:290).[27]

This provision certainly lends more weight to the cultural view of family property ownership and widens the range of dependents who can claim "family" membership. Research shows that even when the will is in her favour, a widow may lose most of her inheritance to her husband's relatives. Often, the ordeal of going through the courts compels the less resilient women to seek settlement through the usual extended family channels (Mann 1985:83-84, Nwabara 1985:12-13, Akande 1988:4).

Most of the respondents acknowledge women's vulnerable marital status. They agree that the best option is to accept the situation and make the best of it. Chika, thirty-eight, a civil servant and mother of three young girls comments:

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[27]In Ekong (1986:55).

> What can you do? You don't have a choice in matters such as this. The way I look at it is that as long as I am getting what I think is my fair share from the man, and as long as he does not overdo it, then...By overdoing it I mean, for instance, either bringing his girlfriend home or if we are going to a party, the girl comes too; if I ask him for money, a set of hand bag and shoes, he tells me that he can't afford it when I know his girlfriend and she dresses well, yet he wants me to look like a house girl. That is where the trouble will start from.
> ...But whether he has a girlfriend at all is not in question because most men, even the ones you think are very poor, do it. That some [married] men are not well off does not stop them from keeping a lover. They must have a girl outside. It is like one of the norms in the society, something you have to live with. Normally, a woman would not frown at it as long as the man doesn't overdo it...As long as I don't find out, I would like to convince myself that he does not have any other woman ...As long as he keeps his tracks covered the burden is much lighter to bear.

Nnenna, the legal manager, agrees. Elite women in monogamous marriages, she concedes, should not be overly concerned about their husbands' illicit liaisons. The elite woman knows that there are many less privileged women out there who would be only too glad to step into her marital shoes. There is a lot at stake in renouncing one's marital status and well meaning relatives and friends will point this out on occasion. For instance, Nnenna poses a dilemma that perhaps only one familiar with the culture can appreciate:

> Can you imagine divorcing your husband because he is seeing another woman? You go to your mother and she says, "Eh?, go back to him. Go and stay with him! [Even] if... my husband is sleeping with the maid she'll likely ask me to send the maid away and forget it. Your own mother!

According to most of the respondents, in such a

situation, most Igbo women will be more inclined to persevere than to seek a divorce. Even the highly placed Nigerian woman is well aware of the fact that she is not automatically guaranteed child custody if she chooses to leave her husband. Although the responsibility for children's welfare is primarily borne by women, most Igbo cultures are patrilineal so that customarily, children belong to their father. Statutory law grants custody to the spouse deemed to be in a better position to protect the interest of the child. In principle, this provision gives women an edge over their spouses, but in many cases, men ignore the statutory law and the traditional overrides (Pittin 1986:59-50). Divorce, on this score, may therefore not be a wise decision.

Polygynous incursions into the monogamous union are not uncommon and, in some cases, may be traditionally warranted. The need for a male heir, for instance, is seen as a justifiable reason to take another wife. The older respondents appear to be more tolerant of this cultural requirement than the younger women. The former are mainly concerned about how men handle the issue. Mary, fifty-five, is a principal in a mixed school and has four grown children:

> It depends on the confidence you repose in your husband. If you're really close, ...he should be able to convince you about the need for a male child. You wouldn't want to make him a laughing stock among his mates, especially in the company of their own sons. You would feel that it is unfair not to give him another chance even though there is no guarantee of getting a son...Some men would even ask their wives to select a woman of their choice. When he is very gentle about it, you cannot but

give in.

Men experience some pressures as well. Their male pride is also in question and they can go to great lengths to prove the society wrong. At the base of the problem, however, is the superior social status ascribed to maleness. The need to satisfy cultural requirements strengthens polygyny as a weapon to subjugate women. Christie, forty-nine, an assistant director in a government department makes the point that:

> Naturally, it is unAfrican for a woman to leave her husband because he took another wife. It's not proper. The problem, however, is that usually, when the second wife arrives, she is labelled "the one that will have a male child" and the first wife, "the one that didn't have a male child". There is, therefore, the tendency for the man to discriminate in favour of the second wife...Ordinarily, the fact that your husband wants to marry a second wife should not cause trouble. If he is a good husband, he would seek your consent... The problem is that many [elite] men don't approach it this way. [Nevertheless], if the [woman] leaves merely because her husband is getting a second wife, people will blame her. So for that reason alone, she might stay whether she likes it or not.

The younger women in the study do not totally accept this view. They categorically reject that part of tradition which reinforces polygyny through son preference. But they do not lose sight of their vulnerable position and the threat polygynous incursions could pose to their marriage. Their reactions vary, however, and this may be a reflection of their relative bargaining power in marriage. Nnenna, the legal manager and mother of two young girls, is married to a university lecturer. Her stand in this matter is unequivocal:

I wouldn't stand in his way because I have my own

> personal pride...There is nothing I can do if I am unfortunate not to have a son...I'm not God, but the day he decides to go ahead, that is the day I will move out of this house. I wouldn't stay to get the crumbs. In any case, I would've gotten the best of him.

Chika, the school teacher with three female children, is married to an architect. She admits that it would not be easy making it on her own. Her reaction is a little different:

> ...[Provided] he is able to take good care of us. I would move to a part of the house with my children and give them [husband and mate] space to enjoy themselves...[laughter]...or try their luck at producing a male child. The problem will start when he says he doesn't have money to pay my children's school fees. Of course, he has to have money because training the child is his responsibility...As long as they don't step on my toes, he is free to do what he wants (p.16).

Unlike Nnenna, Chika has to place the welfare of her children above her own misgivings regarding polygyny. This does not mean that she accepts the treatment women receive. Rather, she has faced the reality that economically, she is not in a good position to question her husband's prerogatives in this case.

The single women totally reject polygyny both in its traditional and modified forms. Nevertheless, the attractions of semi-polygyny relationships in the elite circle no doubt present conflicting tensions for them. On the one hand, the larger society wants them to fulfil their expectations for marriage. On the other hand, many elite women, for both religious and social reasons, may not accept polygyny, whatever form it takes. Those who participated in this study

gave various reasons as to why they would not accept such an option. Ogechi, the vice principal, maintains that:

> I know that if it's just getting married the suitors are readily available..., [but] I think there are a few things you must feel comfortable with. Nobody wants the perfect man, [but marriage] is not something that can be forced on somebody...I might consider marrying a widower,... but if marriage means having a co-wife, I will never agree to that...I think women should learn from the experience of others. There is no need walking into a ditch someone has fallen into previously....

Ngozi, the bank accountant, equally states:

> ...With my present job, I can give myself more materially than most men can give me. Why settle for less? Besides, Mr Right is going to come. Until then, I can't allow myself to be pushed into what I don't want...I know there are more women than men and some girls will tell you, "I don't mind being number seven or ten as long as the man has money." Of course, you get the money, but not the individual attention.

Uchenna and Erimma voiced similar convictions, but on religious grounds. As practising Christians, they stated they would rather remain single than get into a polygynous relationship.

Even when single women shun polygyny, the inherent potential for polygynous incursions into the monogamous marriage could pave the way for mutual suspicion, distancing them from their married female friends. Chika, now married, recalls her days as a spinster:

> You find that at the end of each working day there is no one to visit because all the girls were married and busy with their family, some with one or two children already. Even in the case of those without children, it is not even advisable to visit immediately after work. You know how it is... If you visit too often, the man might begin to wonder

> what kind of influence you're having on his wife...or the woman might feel that you're becoming too friendly with her husband and begin to suspect your motives....

Ngozi, the accountant, refers to her relationship with the married women in her bank:

> I think any single girl poses a threat to them because we tend to look trimmer and dress better, maybe because we don't have to deal with family problems. They feel that getting closer to us single girls may jeopardise their marriage... You'd be surprised how many women think like that. Of course, we do get on very well in the office. We crack jokes and all..., but these pleasantries never extend beyond the office...I'm not interested whoever their husbands may be, but I can understand their predicament. We all know just how far the Nigerian man can go. Even if married women trust their single female friends, they may worry about their husbands making a fool of himself and humiliating them. Where some men end up marrying their maids or their sisters-in-law, what won't they do?

Mma, forty, is the legal adviser and company secretary in a merchant bank. She has been separated from her husband for nine years and her circle of friends is well chosen:

> ... I have discovered that most of my friends are either separated or divorced, you know...; single mothers... Many of them are people I used to know..., some in my university days. It so happens that we have found ourselves in the same boat. At least, I can think of five of such friends. Any way, it's just as well. You know what happens in Nigeria. At least in this circle there won't be any talk about stealing somebody's husband or misguiding somebody's wife. And you can bet we are under no illusion as to what marriage, itself, can offer to us. So we can relax and be ourselves.

These responses reveal the difference in perception between the older and the younger women. The former endorse the practice under certain conditions. The latter either

reject it outright or will accept it only reluctantly if that turns out to be their fate. It is, however, clear from their responses that none of the women see polygyny as something desirable for women. What is interesting is that beyond this common stance, each woman responds to the problem depending on her own personal circumstances.

4.2.3. Procreation and Son Preference[28]

The discussion in the preceding section has already pointed to the importance of procreation in Nigerian and Igbo marriage. Procreation, son preference and polygyny are inextricably linked. A childless marriage is doomed from the start. Sons are valued more than daughters. Therefore, the woman without a male child leaves the door open for a future co-wife. In fact, the pressure exerted on single women as they get older is one way the society tries to get her started on time to deal with the string of requirements awaiting her upon tying the nuptial knot.

The importance attached to procreation is reflected in social attitudes toward modern contraceptive methods. Traditionally, women practised abstinence or prolonged breast feeding in between births. Modern contraception enhances women's sexuality and could be seen as a threat to women's chastity. For instance, sex education is not provided in schools. Abortion is illegal in Nigeria except in cases where

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[28] The term son preference is borrowed from Obikeze (1987).

the life of the mother is threatened. Family planning organizations such as the Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria (PPFN) provide contraceptive information and services, but are more likely to reach city dwellers than those in the rural areas. Besides, their services are normally available only to married women, who must obtain the permission of their husbands (Pittin 1986:40-49). Given the importance attached to procreation, husbands are likely to be the ones to makes decisions concerning contraception. In his study on patterns of conjugal decision making in Nigerian families, Karanja (1983:237) notes that even among the elites, "substantial support was reported for the husband deciding alone such issues as those pertaining to children (family size, birth control use...)."

Often, the extended family helps to stem the pressure. The intensity of the "prodding" depends on the couple's social background and the degree of attachment to immediate and extended family relatives. For instance, first generation elite couples are likely to be more attached to extra-nuclear family members than couples from long standing elite families. The latter are also likely to lend more support than non-elite families to the nuclear union. Regardless of one's social background, however, procreation is still central to the stability of the Igbo marriage.

Mma, the company secretary, shares a painful experience which is still fresh in her memory. She and her husband, a

medical doctor, were married in 1978, a year after they graduated from university. They left the next year for further studies in Britain. When the marriage failed to produce any offspring by the end of the second year, her husband's family became impatient:

> You know what they do to us [women] in Igboland. Without children they don't think there is any hope for the marriage. I went to various hospitals and the medical report showed that there was nothing wrong with me. Of course, it is often assumed that the fault is with the woman. I can't remember my husband going for any medical tests. I was the one who was worried. He didn't appear disturbed. In fact, we didn't plan to return to Nigeria at the time we did, but the pressure from his family was relentless. The letters kept coming as well as phone calls from his sisters. My husband just woke up one morning and told me we were leaving. He did not even complete his specialist course. Luckily, I had finished mine....We came home ... and the mother, sisters and brothers continued to harass us... With time he changed sides and ... eventually, I had to leave him....

The marriage lasted for about three years. After the separation, Mma stayed with her parents for a few years before she could pull herself together to step into the professional world again. She considers herself a staunch Catholic and will not even consider remarrying. Instead, she opted for adoption. Currently, she lives with her adopted daughter, four year old Amanda.

Son preference introduces another dimension to the problem. Achebe (1981:5) remarks that "what often compounds this unfair preference for the male child is the totally erroneous view [of society] that the woman is responsible for the sex of the offspring." On their part, the respondents

clearly recognize that the fault is technically not theirs, but they also know that the man has an option which might change everything for them. Chika notes that:

> Even the men know that it is not the woman's fault. The Igbo man would push all that behind to enable him to shift the blame... So if the children are all girls, it is naturally the woman's fault... The woman is the one mostly derided and the man just sits back and watches her take the blame. My husband is educated. He knows the score too... That, however, does not rule out the fact that he, like most Igbo men, believes that it is my fault... If not, why look for a second or third wife?

Achebe further draws attention to the discriminatory value attached male and female children. She refers, for example, to the practice in many parts of Igboland of slaughtering a goat to celebrate the consecutive birtns of three boys (ewu mmuito). In the case of girls, she notes, "the society's attitude changes quite dramatically" (p.5). Similarly, Obikeze (1988) points to the differentially affective impressions conveyed by names given to Igbo children at birth. He compares boys' names such as "Obiora (the wish of everyone) or Obiajulu (the mind is pacified) or Amaechina (may the lineage never go extinct);" to that of girls such as "Ndidi (Patience) or Okechinyere (what God has given)" He argues that the strong preference for boys often compels women who have no male children to continue with child birth, "irrespective of the number of surviving daughters." Couples who desire a small family may, therefore, end up having more children than originally intended (1988:60-61).

It is interesting that although formal education can

significantly narrow the economic value attached to male and female children, son preference still exerts a remarkable influence on elite marriages The basis for such an influence can be seen in the ideological construction of femininity and masculinity in the Igbo society. Children, especially male heirs, are important to men, not only for the continuation of their lineage, but also as proof of their manhood. In order words, the man who has no children cannot really lay claim to a male status in society, and the man who produces only female children is simply not man enough. Even in the elite circles where education has dispelled such myths, the perception prevails.

Generally, procreation is not only crucial to women's marital stability; children represent an insurance for the future. With the conflicting loyalties which exist in Igbo marriage, women cling more to their natural allies, their children. Maintaining close ties with her children is especially crucial since the woman is not guaranteed child custody upon divorce. But the case for economic security cannot be made for the professional woman who can take care of herself. Nnenna, the legal manager with two female children, is not worried in that respect:

> Anyway, even if he decides to take another wife... I wouldn't care... because I can fend for myself and my children.

Chika, thirty-eight and a school teacher married with three young female children, agrees with Nnenna:

> I know that as long as I give these girls the best I can afford, a good education, they would grow up to assume all those [financial] responsibilities that are normally expected of men. If my husband decides at any time that the marriage has to end simply because I could not give him a male child,.. that is fine by me.

But the sad reality is that even for such women, their marriage is seriously threatened if they do not have male heirs.

The highly educated Igbo woman may not feel much compulsion to keep trying for a male child, but she also has to contend with her husband's feelings. Nnenna is well aware of the dilemma she faces:

> If I were to have my way I'll stop at two because these girls give me so much joy...they are very intelligent...but this Nigerian male thing...the man would like to have a male heir even if he [the son] is a thief or a tout...I am going to try ...for my husband's sake...You see, because I care for him, I will like to have a male child for him since I know that he would prefer to stay married to one woman... At the moment, they [husband's family] probably think that the marriage is still too young to start pestering us...I know my husband and I are very close, but ...this is Nigeria. There is always a brother or sister or parent [in-laws] to do the prodding...

Equally, Chika knows only too well that the situation is not within her control. It is more than just having a male child. There are important traditional roles men play and they have not been overtaken by social transformation:

> You cannot begin to think outside the village context. You have to consider what happens in the place where your roots are... in the village there are certain issues women are not allowed to handle or discuss...If there is no male child in the family, who protects the [widowed] woman when such issues arise? For instance, if I end up without a

> male child, when the girls are getting married and their father is not there, who would handle the issues involved?. When there is a son he naturally takes charge and decides who would have the last say. Without him the uncles will take control. You know how some of them would pretend to be on your side only to go behind and plot against you...before you know it, the girls have all married and the uncles are fighting over their father's estate and there will be no one to stop them.

The threat of polygyny distorts the picture by shifting most of the responsibility onto the woman. The fear of sharing her man could drive some women into a lifetime of childbearing. Ifeyinwa, the civil servant with five children, a boy and four girls, remarks:

> ... It is common to see a woman in the attempt to have a male child, bear as many as ten children, and some even die in the process.

The fact is that son preference has helped to legitimize polygyny and men can "try" their luck as many times as they can afford to. In this context, not having a male child becomes a woman's personal failure. The society may feel sorry for the barren woman or one who failed to produce a male child. For the man, it is his fundamental claim to manhood, the title which confers on him a host of privileges, that is in question. Polygyny provides a possible avenue for redeeming his name.

While men can turn to polygyny to enhance their chances, society does not really provide any alternative for women. Adoption is still a thorny issue because of the emphasis on bloodlines. Mma, for instance, explained that she decided to

adopt a girl to avoid any problems about her family tree or inheritance rights in the future. Her daughter, she reasons, will eventually marry and be absorbed into another family. The society is still very wary of accepting children, especially sons, from "unknown lineages". Besides, an adopted son would not restore the needed affirmation of manhood.

4.2.4. Extended Family Ties

Elite Nigerian families maintain very strong ties with extended family relatives and the experiences of the respondents are not particularly unique. Ekong (1986:54) notes that contrary to theoretical expectations, empirical evidence confirms "the continued existence of attachment to wide kin-groups among Africans generally and Nigerians in particular." The strength of established links may weaken in the younger generations, but often remain unsevered. For the elites, such ties are at one level complementary in terms of the various support networks they provide. At another level, they tend to introduce conflicts which could weaken the nuclear tie.

On marriage, the Nigerian woman is absorbed into her husband's family and is considered a wife to all the members. In many respects, her husband's relatives are considered an extension of the conjugal family. Men tend to direct their loyalty first to the women in their lineage and second, to their wives. On their part, women maintain very strong links with their natal family after marriage. Igbo women, in

particular, are noted for the status as "umuada" (daughter of the family).[29] In effect, they can exercise some influence over wives in their natal family, but they remain subordinates in their husbands' family. Ogundipe-Leslie (1985:124) notes that:

> This situation gives emotional power to women [over other women]. Thus women "take consolation from this fact and help oppress other women" who come into their own lineages as wives. It is generally known that women in their own lineages form the emotional support of the men to the extent that the men cannot function without them. Yet such men will express in words the most blatant of male dominance. Such emotional power often satisfies women to the point of preventing them from wanting to take more public actions or resist the subordination they suffer within their own marriages.

The extent to which a wife is subjected to kin subordination depends on her own bargaining power. For the women in this study, their educational qualifications and economic status are very useful assets. Moreover, they live in the city, away from the close scrutiny of most of their husband's relatives. However, these women also realise that in the end they have to count on their husband's loyalty. Chidimma is thirty-one, a teacher and mother of five children, married to a medical doctor with strong extended family ties:

> Once you go into the village, you have to shed your education and any airs you have because they will

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[29] The Ada (first daughter) is highly regarded in her own father's compound and will often be consulted by her brothers for certain decisions. Normally, the prestige associated with Ada is reinforced by marriage. Beyond their immediate natal families, the larger circle of daughters of the lineage are given some privileges and responsibilities, especially over lineage wives (Amadiume 1987: 51-56).

> be quick to say "Eh, the acada[30] woman is here". You may have to play and dance [socialize] with women you have little in common with. In fact, some of the relations including the women would insist that I kneel to greet them and call them "my husband"[31]. You try your best to avoid incurring their wrath in any way.

Chika notes further that these conflicts may be heightened where the husband has to cater to a number of less privileged relatives. In this case, his attitude to domestic matters gives his relatives an indication of how far they can assert their rights:

> A lot depends on the man you married because most of his relatives will come with the impression that the house belongs to their brother or uncle. In fact, as far as they are concerned, the wife is a visitor in the house. So they are free to do as they please. I will not give them the free hand to behave any way they like in my house. If you want to eat, you can't just go to my pot and help yourself. If you want anything in this house, you must seek my permission, otherwise, you're in trouble. You can't do whatever you like because it is your uncle's house. The house actually belongs to both of us.

Besides education, age is also an important factor. Over the years, a wife gains more acceptance within her husband's immediate and extended family. Alice, for instance, was a teacher when she met her husband in the 1960s. Later, she went back and read law. The transition in the relationship with her in-laws is remarkable:

> [As a new sister-in-law], when I first met my husband's family, they saw me as a "mere" teacher.

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[30] For a definition see p.24

[31] As noted earlier, an Igbo wife customarily "belongs" to all the members of her husband's extended family.

> Having gone to the university and gotten to this stage in my career afterwards, I have seen their respect for me grow over the years. And quite often, they come to me with their little problems like police matters...As a young wife, they expected me to join the rest of the wives in joint village chores like cooking during Christmas and when I didn't, it was seen as pride on my part as an "acada woman". Now, they wouldn't expect me to be there. I'm not a young wife any more and they can't impose sanctions on me.

Ogundipe's (1985) earlier remarks about female in-laws are confirmed by the respondents. They agree that one's parents-in-law are top priority. The relationship with sisters and especially mothers-in-law can also be tricky. A mother-in-law's wrath is a dreaded nightmare. Of the twelve married respondents, two reported their mother-in-law deceased, four had very little contact with theirs, and five of the women were having problems. Only one woman reported that she is closely attached to her mother-in-law. Chika points to the inherent conflict in the wife/mother-in-law relationship:

> The average Igbo woman sees her daughter-in-law as a threat, somebody who has come to take her son away from her...Being human, she would be hostile, to some extent, to her son's wife. That tendency will always be there.

In their case, most of the married respondents have been spared much of this friction which could actually escalate with close association. Rose shares an experience in the early years of her marriage:

> During the [Nigerian civil] war when my husband was away in the army, I had to stay with his family in the village. I was accused of all sorts of crimes like not fetching water, firewood or pounding yam for his mother. I had never done any of these before. My mother-in-law was not happy about my

> having a kitchen separate from hers and wanted us instead, to share as was traditionally done. I stood my ground and her reaction was "Are you more beautiful than my own daughter?" The daughter was illiterate and married to a senior civil servant. To my mother-in-law, there was no equal to her daughter. So when I told her that I'm better than her daughter, she lodged a report with her as the "Ada" and heaven was let loose. Luckily, they sent for their son and son-in-law who was also a [university] graduate. In their view, they felt that my response was justified and so, their intervention saved my neck. Their son-in-law also told them that I was not supposed to do all those chores for their mother and that their daughter had not been subjected to the same treatment in his own family.

Chidimma, though an Igbo, is from another part of Igboland (Imo State) and her marriage did not initially receive her mother-in-law's blessings. She had wanted her son to marry someone she would be more familiar with:

> After her visits, she would go back and make all kinds of complaints against me to her younger children, who, in turn, pass them on to my husband and he, would eventually confront me. She would not even give me the slightest impression that I wronged her...In any case, I was not their choice for a daughter-in-law. [She] says often that I don't understand their culture...It is not easy to change a mother's mind in such matters. Once she decides she does not like you, she sticks to her opinion...however hard you try to please her.

It is evident that the support, emotional or material, given to or demanded of the man, is a crucial factor in the wife/in law relationship. In the end, the strength of each side's bargaining position depends on which direction his loyalty swings to.

4.3. Grappling with the Relations of Gender

The experiences and view points of the women examined in the study clearly reveal many of the patriarchal continuities and contradictions embedded in the structure of gender relations in contemporary Nigeria. As in the case of the female majority, elite Igbo women's subordinate position is ideologically constructed on a number of levels. The important elements of the structure of gender relations are inextricably interrelated and they tend to reinforce one another. Therefore, one cannot really separate and analyze on its own any particular requirement or expectation of this status, be it marriage and responsibility for domestic work or procreation and son preference. In order to understand the impact of these elements on women's lives, we have to go back to ideological underpinnings of the structure of gender relations.

It is also interesting to find both the cultural and Victorian ideal of womanhood (with their embedded contradictions) have been woven into current expectations of Nigerian women's roles. The respondents are caught between fulfilling traditional and modern expectations. The modern society has offered them educational and formal employment opportunities, but it has not quite recognized them as individuals in their own right. The demands of their primary role has not really changed. For the most part, the dilemma women have to deal with only reinforces the malestream social

arrangement. That such a contradiction should exist points to an underlying patriarchal base, pervasive in its co-optation of other power bases.

The respondents clearly recognize the double standards reinforced by this structure, but do not lose sight of the limited options they are left with. Evidently, marriage and family are important to most of the respondents and their conception of marriage, itself, deviates significantly from what the society offers. In fact, the respondents' continual reference to "what they are expected to do" points to a clear distinction between social expectations and their own personal convictions. Their economic status gives them a leverage as can be perceived in the more radical stance of the younger professionals such as Nnenna and Ngozi. Nevertheless, each woman must contend with the compromises she has to make in her personal circumstances.

Certainly, economic dependence is an important consideration here, but it is not a convincing explanation for the treatment the women in the study have to put up with. What one sees is a double standard which is legitimized by prevailing social ideologies. The strength of culture and ideology can be seen in the hold social expectations have on the respondents. In supporting son preference (and consequently, polygyny), most of the older respondents have actually accepted some of the ideologies which reinforce women's oppression, in general. These women are concerned

about their men not measuring up to the status quo. They do not question the basis of such a standard and why women should have to pay most of its cost.

The younger women, at least, do not accept the situation as it is. However, they seem to recognize, like the older women, their vulnerable position. Despite their professional status, many of the factors which determine the participants' acceptance and survival in society are outside their control. It is therefore not just a question of what society expects from them, but the costs attached to non performance.

The married respondents are already grappling with an inequitable bargain. Their labour market status provides an economic power base outside the family, but their domestic status is fundamentally subordinate. A strong patriarchal base within the family is necessary in order to ensure women's acceptance of their oppression, regardless of their position outside the family. Women's total commitment is expected in a union that does not guarantee them enough emotional or economic security. Even what might be seen as outmoded values tend to find currency in the present society, compelling women to tow the line. Allusions to women's moral comportment or cultural "disobedience", for instance, obviously invite undesirable perceptions about women. As acada women, the respondents are already a target group prone to social disapproval.

In many respects, women's oppression is inevitably

reinforced by their own actions. For instance, they feel a need to have children, especially sons, in order to protect their marriage and also secure some form of insurance for the future. This concern, in turn, reinforces the emphasis on procreation and son preference and could very well affect their professional advancement. Similarly, the fear of polygynous threats to the monogamous union instills a feeling of mutual suspicion among women; these potential conflicts could undermine attempts at mobilizing resistance to a large scale.

However, despite these limitations, higher education and wage labour continue to provide crucial resources, with which women can equip themselves in the struggle to improve their situation. As their stories in the next chapters will show, the respondents manage to find ways to assert some level of personal autonomy. They fight the system with the limited means available to them. Strategizing has taken on a new meaning with their acquired status.

Igbo women are increasingly encouraged to pursue higher education, but the impact of social boundaries on women's capacity to acquire and utilise it needs to be addressed. In keeping with the main theme of this thesis, therefore, the next chapter draws on the experiences of four respondents as an entry point into a critical analysis of the opportunities and prospects of higher education for Igbo women.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 GENDERED LIVES, GENDERED ASPIRATIONS: IGBO WOMEN, HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE MARRIAGE/CAREER CONFLICT.

Marriage/career conflict has been widely researched in the industrialised countries. The studies of Horner (1970), Gaskell (1981), Dowling (1981) Kelly and Nihlen (1982), Gaskell and McLaren (1987) and Machung (I989), among others reviewed in Chapter Two, highlight the impact of social expectations and practices on women's decisions about schooling and work in North America. Similarly, other studies reviewed such as Achebe (1981), Biraimah (1987), Peters (1988), Okeke (1989) reflect some common experiences Nigerian women share with their counterparts in Western societies.

Chapters One and Two also draw attention to the impact of economic and political changes on Nigerian women's training and employment opportunities over the course of three decades. However, unlike the case in more developed countries, the experiences of specific groups of Nigerian women in time and space have remained largely unexplored.

This chapter examines the impact of larger societal forces on the respondents' aspirations and decisions about schooling and work. It begins with what can be seen as the

basic conflict that Nigerian and Igbo women who pursue higher education might face. As noted in Chapter Four, women in the traditional society can secure a measure of personal autonomy through their economic activities. However, men have ultimate control over women's access to the means of production, the proceeds largely directed toward family subsistence.

In contrast, higher education gives Nigerian women access to wage labour, through which they can (theoretically) achieve a high status outside the domestic sphere and also secure a strong economic base that is not within the direct control of men. In this regard, women's pursuit of higher education represents a fundamental threat to men's dominant position in the family and society.

However, this threat to the malestream social order is counteracted significantly by the social emphasis on women's primary role. The structure of gender relations in contemporary Igbo society outlined in Chapter Four, reveals the importance of marriage and children to women as the primary criteria for social acceptability. Women's education in Nigeria, it has also been noted, has tended to emphasize their domestic roles. In more recent times, Nigerian women's career options have widened with increased access to formal education, but the demands of their primary role remain largely unchanged.

Nigerian women who pursue higher education may not be aware of all the social boundaries that may limit their life

chances at any stage, but they are undoubtedly sensitive to what they perceive to be acceptable social standards. These standards tend to translate into real constraints for women who plan to achieve outside the domestic setting.

This chapter looks at how Nigerian women are grappling with the family/career conflict from the eyes of four respondents: Alice, Chika, Uzoamaka and Uchenna. Chapter Three outlines the criteria for selecting the women in this study. First, I wanted their experiences to span across several historical and economic periods such as the pre-independence period (ie, before 1960), the post civil war oil boom years (1973-1978) and the post oil boom SAP era (from the early 1980s upwards). Second, I wanted to reflect as much as possible the range of professional occupations in which Nigerian women are represented, both in the public and private sectors of formal employment. I also wanted to include both married and single women.

In this chapter, I will focus on four of the participants, whose experiences reflect these criteria. I must emphasize at the on-set, that I am not making any general claims from the account of these four women. Instead, what I hope will become evident in the analysis of their experiences are the broad patterns typical of the lives of professional Igbo women, which their experiences vividly illustrate.

As their stories unfold in the next pages, I will attempt to trace recurring themes and contradictions evident

in Igbo women's struggle to improve their status through educational training and formal employment. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents the personal profiles of the respondents. The second section analyzes the career choices these women have made in the light of social boundaries which define their options, as well as social changes which may be redrawing the lines.

5.1 Personal Profiles.

5.1.1. Alice

Alice forty-eight, is a lawyer married with five grown children. Over the past fifteen years, she has managed to establish a small, but reputable private practice in a profession that, in Nigeria, is dominated by men. In fact, unlike most of her female professional colleagues who embrace the public service, Alice is one of the few Igbo women in private practice.

Her father was a primary school teacher. Her mother, a housewife, was illiterate. Initially, Alice had set out to be a teacher at the junior secondary school level. She was the youngest girl in the family and her father wanted things to be different for her:

> In those days, we didn't have boyfriends. Your parents would tell you the man they approve of among your suitors...I was the sixth in the family. My two elder sisters got married without even completing secondary school. They had to depend on their husbands...You know what that means...I think my father encouraged

me in a way. He did not want me to be like them.

Marriage and family interrupted her sisters' education and ended any career aspirations they might have had. Without an alternative source of income, they became fully dependent on their husbands. The latter used their economic advantage to dictate the terms of the union. For Alice, her father decided on an uninterrupted secondary education before any prospective suitors would be considered. She graduated at the young age of sixteen, starting her teaching career in 1960, the year Nigeria gained political independence[32].

Alice, with her father's approval, concentrated on her initial ambition. As she points out, she knew marriage would come eventually, but she wanted to finish her training first. In 1963, three years into her teaching career, Alice gained entrance into the University of Ibadan, her first contact with women from Western Nigeria[33]:

> Maybe this has to do with my nature, but I was not interested in getting married at that time...When

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[32] Due to the shortage of teaching staff, some secondary school graduates were placed in both secondary and primary schools, often on temporary appointment. The expansion of teacher training institutions in more recent times has drastically reduced, if not eliminated, the shortage.

[33] Nigeria's political independence in 1960 precipitated a massive expansion of higher education after a long period of colonial suppression. As pointed out in Chapter One, admission was open to women only in principle. From the primary school, they had to stagger through the fog of both cultural and colonial sexism in the family, school system and society, to make it to higher education. Yoruba women have a longer history of formal education compared to Igbo women. The site of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria's premier university, was also a crucial advantage to the former. In contrast to Ibadan, which was established in 1948, the first university in Eastern Nigeria, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, was founded in 1960. In Okoye's time, Nsukka offered mainly Bachelors degree programs, while Ibadan, more established, offered short-term Diploma courses in education, as well. The latter served as a stepping stone for less qualified teachers, such as Okoye, to enter the bachelor degree programs. See Ikejiani and Anowi (1964).

> one got married in those days, the doors to further training were practically shut. I was bent on improving myself and believe you me, when I got to the University of Ibadan, I found that I was behind time...I saw so many women ...who had advanced even further. It was then I decided that [after graduation] I could read for my GCE Advanced Levels at home so I can go for a full degree course...possibly in Education.

Alice was about twenty two when she qualified for a degree course. She was planning to return to the university when she met her husband. He was a good choice, she remarks, and she felt it was time to settle down. She accepted the constraints marriage posed to her educational plans:

> It's not the Igbo way...you know...getting married and not starting to have children immediately. It's not our custom.

While staying abroad with her husband, Alice had hoped she would commence further training as soon as her domestic responsibilities eased up. Her husband agreed. As she points out, unlike many elite men of his time, he actively encouraged her to pursue a career. In fact, she had wanted to continue with teaching, but her husband suggested that she read Law, an opportunity he missed himself, because he had no one to sponsor him. He had graduated from the Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, with a degree in Economics and was working abroad as a diplomat.

In the wake of the 1967-1970 civil war, Alice's husband was recalled and they returned to Nigeria. Once again, she had to put her educational plans on hold. In 1972, after six years of marriage, Alice gained admission into the Law School of the

University of Nigeria (Enugu Campus). The campus was a short distance away from their residence. She was therefore able to attend classes from home. Studying Law has turned out to be a wonderful opportunity for Alice, even though it was not a decision she initiated herself. However, with three children to look after, the youngest only six weeks at the time she began, making it through Law School was a very trying experience:

> If I was to do it all over again, I would first of all go to the University...no disturbance from marriage and all, finish my education and then find a job before getting married. I would not be studying and rearing children at the same time. I really found it very difficult.

On graduating from the Law School, Alice planned to either join the public service or establish a small private practice, options she felt might enable her to attend to her domestic responsibilities. Instead, her husband arranged for her to work with an established legal firm where she spent nine years. During this period, she had her last two children. Finally in 1986, she started her own practice with his financial support. Since then she has maintained a moderate practice, not wanting to expand despite very tempting opportunities. She admits that:

> I can't combine all that work with a family to look after...It's easier for a man. He comes home and everything is ready for him. He is attended to by his wife, the maid and the children. After relaxing, he goes back to the chamber to work. For me, I have to combine legal practice and family chores.

5.1.2. Chika

Chika, thirty-eight, is a mother of three little girls. She taught Biology in a secondary school for eleven years, but left the field almost a year ago to join the State Education Commission. Chika finished secondary school in 1973 amid the unsettling atmosphere of post civil war Nigeria. She had wanted to study Medicine, but as she claimed, "Nobody was there to advise us so we just picked subjects at random." Her parents were barely literate. According to her, all they wanted was for her to get some education before marriage. The female teachers in the single sex school she attended did not help much. The Science teachers, in particular, were very impatient with students. There was very little encouragement for students to embrace these subjects. Chika resents the fact that no one counselled them about subject choices and some of the irreversible future consequences. She regrets, in particular, her decision to drop physics:

> I wanted to be a doctor...That I did not read medicine was not because I could not have made it but because I was not properly advised. If I were to go back in time I would definitely select the relevant subjects....

Stressing the importance of "getting it right the first time", Chika points out that women like her from humble origins cannot easily change such career decisions. Such women may not only face early marriage pressures as in the case of Alice and her sisters, but also an economic disadvantage compared to their male siblings. As Chika puts it:

> You will have a man to support you [financially] since a lot of us did not come from well-to-do families. My parents had to work very hard to keep us in school. With marriage, that responsibility shifts to the husband.

Chika settled for a bachelor degree in Zoology and planned to work with either the Ministry of Agriculture or the Forestry Department. She graduated in 1978 but could not secure employment in either of these establishments. Like many university graduates entering the shrinking job market at the close of the oil boom era, Chika's only alternative was teaching in the secondary school. She never considered teaching as a career choice and, as she remarked, was not swayed even by the government's financial incentives.[34] Besides, her job options were further constrained because she had to live within protective distance from her parents:

> You know how the family is here. My parents had so much control over us...If I had suggested moving to Lagos to look for work, they would have asked who I was going to stay with. Until I started working, I can't remember ever going out of town on my own. My parents planned my movement, when to visit this auntie or that uncle and how long. They just would not trust that I could take care of myself if left without some kind of supervision. One ends up not getting the kind of exposure required in order to

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[34] As Mann (1985) and Awe (1989) note in Chapter One, Nigerian women from the early beginnings of formal education, went for the "feminine" occupations, notably teaching. In Nigerian intellectual circles today, teaching at the primary and secondary school levels is considered a profession for poor achievers, but one suitable for women. University graduates had many career options during the oil boom era. In order to attract qualified personnel to the field, especially with the unprecedented rise in enrolment following the introduction of the Universal Primary Education Program (UPE) in 1976, the Federal Government offered automatic bursaries to students in the faculties of Education. With the worsening economic situation from the 1980s, public funding for education has declined. There are fewer jobs available and teaching has become a last resort even for men. Enugu, in particular, has very few employment opportunities outside the civil service.

> strike out successfully into life. I still regret not striking out on my own, not moving to Lagos....

For two years Chika taught in the secondary school and by the third year, she began to feel the pressure:

> I saw marriage primarily as a restriction to the usual carefree life one lived as a spinster. The moment one gets into marriage there are things you must not do and things you must do. But on getting into my third year of teaching, I realised it was time because most of my friends were getting married. You find that at the end of each working day, there was no one to visit because all the girls were married and busy with their family, some with one or two children....

With marriage in 1982 and a set of twins two years later, Chika resumed efforts to change her career. As noted in Chapter One, the 1980s started the trend of declining wage employment opportunities. For university graduates who neither aspired to be teachers nor studied Education in the first place, it has been doubly frustrating. Unlike other affected teachers, married women are likely to have far fewer options in terms of retraining or transfer.

According to Chika, she felt stuck in a job she did not like, yet with the worsening economic situation, she could not leave her job. Her income was needed to help support the family. She decided to work out her exit in stages. In 1991, after several attempts, Chika was transferred to a desk job at the Teachers Commission. With a more flexible schedule, she was able to enrol for an evening Law program at Enugu Campus. Like Alice was in her day, Chika appears quite excited about her program, but loathes the increased responsibilities

involved:

> You know that in this environment, the man does not want to know how you cope or what you are going through in order to ensure that things are running smoothly. All he cares is that he gets his meals on time. He is not interested in the fact that you have to wake up at 2 a.m. to see to all these....

Chika is in her second year in the Law Program and remains with the Commission.

5.1.3. Uzoamaka

Uzoamaka is thirty-five years old and has been teaching Economics in various secondary schools over the past ten years. She was recently engaged to a young man working in Lagos, but lives with her parents at the moment.

While in the secondary school, Uzoamaka had wanted to study anything "professional" like Pharmacy or Medicine. Her father was a junior civil servant. Her mother, who is an illiterate, did some petty trading. Uzoamaka considers herself quite brilliant among her peers. According to her, she did well in both the arts and the sciences, but knew very little about subject combinations. Again, as in the case of Chika, Uzoamaka claims that she did not receive any counselling from her teachers. By the time she got to her senior year, she realised she had made a grievous mistake:

> I selected the subjects of the teachers I liked. I hated the Physics teacher and so I dropped it. I skipped Literature because the teacher scolded students at the least opportunity. In the end, I collected a random assortment of Arts and Science subjects... the present generation of students are

> much luckier. They have all the facilities. The also receive career advice in good time from both the school counsellor and experienced teachers like me. What they do with that awareness is another matter.

She could not meet the admission requirements for Pharmacy, but was offered Education as a ready option. Although getting admitted into the university was quite an achievement then, Uzoamaka was very hesitant about studying to be a teacher. She thought she should try for other career fields like Business and Accountancy. But her father insisted that Education was a good choice for her:

> Even at the time I got the admission letter, I knew I had missed it and was intent on effecting a change once I got in.... My elder brother was already in the same university studying Medicine. At my level of exposure and position in the family, I had to listen a lot to my father. It's not a time to stand up to your parents and make your own decisions. I did complain however, mid way in my first year opting for, at least, Economics single honours rather than Economics/Education, but my father said: No, teaching is good for women. Continue with it. That is the best thing for you. Because his words were law, I had to....

Like Chika, Uzoamaka accepted a teaching position after graduation and lived with her parents. She also did not consider looking for jobs outside Enugu:

> I didn't even know I had other options. As you know, teaching was a job you could get any day just by applying and attending the interview, at least, as of then...Looking back now I realise that if I had bolted out and refused to read Education I wouldn't have been a teacher today...If I had not listened to him [my father] and just left for Lagos after my youth service, I would have advanced further, possible branched away from Education, and actually gone for something that would give me more satisfaction than my present job.

After a few years, the general dissatisfaction pervading the teaching profession began to get to Uzoamaka. She started to explore the possibilities for career change. She wanted to make a complete break with the profession, but knew she would not be eligible for study leave in a different field. She would not only have to pay her way through, but would also be taking a great risk leaving her job with the economic situation and without her parents' support. She also had to contend with the latter's feelings about her marital status. In the end, she decided to go for a higher degree in Education:

> This was something I did out of a feeling of redundancy. I was not getting anywhere in this job and many of my colleagues were getting their Masters [degree] through the Sandwich Program[35]...I didn't have the courage to bolt away from my job and pursue a full time professional course. I would've gone for an MBA rather than the Sandwich. I just did it to tell myself that I'm not decaying in this place.

Predictably, the Sandwich degree did not make any difference to her quest and Uzoamaka knew she had to resume her efforts to leave teaching. As she began to give the latter serious consideration, the pressure to get married built up, especially from extended family, relatives and friends.

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[35] The Sandwich Program is designed for teachers who want to pursue a part-time degree in Education as far as the Masters level. It is usually offered during the holiday period to suit the convenience of its students. This program tends to attract mainly women, especially the married ones. Beyond the first degree level, higher qualifications of any kind do not really have any appreciable impact on teachers' promotion. However, many married female teachers view the Sandwich as the only avenue left for them to, at least, prove themselves in the academic arena.

Fortunately, this period, 1990, coincided with the inception of a part-time business degree program at the nearby Enugu Campus. She promptly enroled.

By the end of the first year of the program, Uzoamaka was tired of fending off comments about marriage and began to give it serious thought. As we see in Chapter Four, marriage was not something she wanted. She had expected her feelings to be respected especially by her family, but eventually she found that she had to come to terms with their concerns.

At the time of this research, Uzoamaka was preparing for her wedding and hoped to continue with her program when she is married.

Postcript: Uzoamaka left her teaching job last year to joined her husband in Lagos. At the time of her last correspondence in April, 1993, she was pregnant and had put all career plans on hold until the baby is born.

5.1.4. Uchenna

Uchenna is thirty-four, single and an accountant in a commercial bank. She holds a bachelor degree in Accountancy and a master degree in Business Administration, both from the United States. The opportunity to study overseas was, for Uchenna, the fulfilment of a childhood dream. From the time she was little, she had often dreamt that she was abroad studying. Her father, a primary school teacher, died during the Nigerian civil war and this initially stalled Uchenna's

plans:

> As the oldest child, the only option was to finish secondary school and assist our mother in raising my five younger brothers. The suitors came, but I had made up my mind to work to support my family. I refused in order to ensure my brothers' education. I know the Igbo culture expects the husband to shoulder some of the wife's responsibilities, but mine were a lot!... I had to take up the challenge, to become the father when our father died. To the extended family it seemed all hope was gone for our progress. I went through a lot to help my brothers....

Uchenna was employed as a bank clerk and for the next few years, concentrated on training her brothers. Together with her mother, a petty trader, she was able to see two of her brothers through secondary school. In her five years with the bank many female university graduates were recruited into the senior positions, and this made her even more determined to acquire a degree. Besides, Uchenna reiterates, her mother's experience taught her a real lesson. Widowed, with six children and illiterate, the poor woman was in no way equipped to provide for the family. Her own life, Uchenna resolved, was going to be different:

> It is possible that the men who wanted to marry me after my school certificate could have provided for my brothers as well. However, I knew it would be very difficult to go back to school after having kids. Most Igbo men would tell you, "You have all these kids, why are you bothering yourself? Sit down and look after them". I wanted to be well educated....

By the time two of her brothers graduated from secondary school and started work, Uchenna was already making plans for further studies in the States. Her mother was greatly

disturbed. Her boss, a father figure in her life, and her female colleagues in the office also tried to discourage her. She was taking a risk, they reminded her, leaving the country at twenty-four and single. Uchenna's dilemma was heightened even more when a few months before her departure to the States, she was promoted to the rank of a supervisor. In the end, however, she made up her mind and left the country in 1982.

She finished her studies in 1987 and rejoined the bank as a senior accountant. Her success, she argues, has made up for all her efforts. Those female colleagues who tried to discourage her, she notes, have not done so well themselves:

> Some of them might be around my age or older, but they're still single. They were scared of furthering their education because, you know...they thought they'll be branded "acada".[36] If you're acada, nobody would want to marry you. Well, most of them are still not married and without the education too!

With her education and job taken care of, Uchenna now wants to settle down. As she puts it, she has not quite "arrived". She wants to get married as soon as possible, but finds that she is too "qualified" for the few prospective suitors. She has made a conscious decision to stay at Enugu for now. She would not consider moving to Lagos where there

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[36] See foot note on p.24

are more opportunities in the banking sector[37]. Among other reasons, Uchenna remarks, she has to consider her status as a single woman:

> It is not easy to just move to Lagos or up North as a single girl. It is like you don't have anybody to look after you. You can easily be drawn into city life. You won't have to comport yourself as properly as you would be made to around here... Of course, some of those women who work in Enugu do whatever they like, but then, you can't ignore tradition, can you? Going to Lagos to look for a job is ruled out. Who will I stay with and what will people think of me? If, for instance, I get a job in a merchant bank, I could move, but I would have to deal with being branded "one of the girls." You know, some will even say, "How come she has been in Lagos all this time and no man has talked to her?" I would like to marry someone I want, not someone people feel I deserve because they think I'm loose... You know, it is like my going abroad and coming back still unmarried. The general feeling is often "hm... after all, she has been abroad, she flew in the air, she went underground, yet... nobody showed any interest in her. Are you the one to be saddled with this reject?"

5.2. Gendered Lives, Gendered Aspirations:

These profiles clearly show how, in many ways, Nigerian women's training and career pursuits, despite the gains, are gendered to their detriment. Although facing a common problem, each woman's experience is mediated by her own personal circumstances as well as by the prevailing social conditions of her time. The analysis will start with Alice.

When we look at Alice's story, we do not see a young

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[37] Chapter One reports the explosion of new banks in Nigeria, especially the merchant banks (see Dada 1991). Uchendu belongs to the new crop of professional women who are making inroads into this sector. The newer banks offer very attractive employment packages and most of them are located in Lagos.

girl whose driving ambition was to become a lawyer. We also do not see a young bride intent on pursuing further training at any cost. Yet it was not that she was not ambitious. In fact, the opposite was the case. Considering the situation in those days, and Chapter One gives us a good idea, she was highly ambitious. The fact is that Alice accepted her place in the malestream social order and the limitations this imposed on her. Her educational ambitions, though well beyond the reach of many Igbo women of her time, nevertheless developed within the confines of the opportunities made available to her. She was well aware of her good fortune in terms of the two men in her life who had the prerogative to decide which way her life was to go: her father and her husband.

Alice's father must have been concerned about his young daughter's economic security, especially with what had happened to her elders sisters. As Mann (1985) explains, colonialism and Christian education created the myth of blissful domesticity for women in monogamous unions. In reality, the latter provided few legal rights for women, so that even when they were catered for, such women remained vulnerable to both their spouses' goodwill and the attendant hazards of monogamy, many of which were addressed in Chapter Four. The review of literature in Chapter Two also reiterates the fact that the ideology behind domestication runs contrary to the traditional gender division of labour, in which women are expected to contribute to family subsistence. According to

Mann, elite women's vulnerable status as full-time housewives was one of the major factors that fuelled their motivation for formal education. Mba (1982) notes that many elite parents from the turn of the twentieth century began to respond favourably to women's education merely out of concern for their daughters' economic survival in the new society.

It is important to understand Alice and her father's actions in the context of the prevailing social conditions of their time. He wanted his daughter to attend school, not as a goal in itself, but for the security it would give her in marriage. Marriage was the main goal and nothing must threaten this ultimate end that should crown her achievements. On Alice's part, post secondary training, apart from satisfying a burning personal ambition, would improve her social status as well as her economic security in marriage. However, her intellectual ambitions not withstanding, marriage was nonetheless the ultimate goal and she was mindful of the constraints time presented for her. She also knew that it was not just a question of beating an age deadline. There were a string of requirements to be met, starting with child bearing.

As we see in Chapter Four, meeting all the necessary requirements is not something she had within her control, but it would help to have time on one's side. In an era when most women married early, few making it to the university, she could not afford to wait too long. The myths surrounding

"acada" women's morals, doubts about their submissiveness in marriage and procreative ability (Okeke 1989:50, Ekiyor 1989:9-17), must have held more import in her day than in more recent times.

Although she hoped to complete her education someday, Alice was aware that furthering her education depended on her husband's co-operation. Finance may not have been a problem for two main reasons. First, in the oil boom years, education was heavily subsidized by the government. Second, an elite family with a breadwinner in her husband's position could conveniently shoulder the added financial burden. On her husband's part, two incentives (perhaps not too strong in this case, but an important long term consideration) would be that Alice's future status as a lawyer would bring economic rewards to the family as well as social prestige to him.

Despite these considerations, there are a number of concerns that a wife's further training may pose to her husband. First, many elite men of this period could comfortably provide financially for their family. They may therefore have had reservations about "upsetting" the household routine, the children's schedule and especially the precious care given them by their wives. Most importantly, further training, especially in "sensitive" fields, may threaten the man's dominant position at home. It is one thing to send a woman to school; to "brush her up" so that she can properly play the role of an elite wife. It is another thing

to allow her to get into the position where she can begin to see herself as a partner in the union.

In Alice's case, the fact that acquiring a Law degree would raise her intellectual awareness, social prestige and economic status, does not seem to have posed a reasonable threat to her husband. She is quick to point out that her husband is not a typical male elite of his time. He has been exposed to different cultures as a diplomat and has also risen quite high in the socio-economic ladder so has little to fear from competition by his wife. Alice also seems to understand the underlying condition that, except with her husband's approval, her career must not impinge on the performance of her domestic roles. The ready access to a nearby university may also have helped her case. Alice's daily presence at home was crucial to easing as much as possible, any inconveniences her studies may have imposed on family members, especially her husband. In keeping with her own part of the bargain, she maintains a small practice in order to give proper attention to her responsibilities at home.

Chika, Uzoamaka and Uchenna's stories point to an era different from Alice's when women's higher education was no longer "a new thing." As pointed out earlier, in the 1970s the public bore a good part of the financial burden for education. The implication at least theoretically, was that any one could aspire to any height and course of study. Hence, given their families' approval, financial and otherwise, attending

university seemed to be a foregone conclusion for Chika and Uzoamaka. The translation of their personal ambitions into concrete academic achievements was another matter. As in Alice's case, their own stories should be understood in the context of the prevailing broad patterns in Nigerian women's education.

Both Uzoamaka and Alice draw attention to the occupational gender segregation already embedded in the Nigerian school system. The lack of facilities did not mean the teachers and school authorities were not working with some underlying assumptions and guidelines. That the teachers did not seem overly concerned about students' subject combinations suggests that, if anything, they did not question the prevailing social expectations about women's formal training. In other words, their non-interference said enough to Chika and Uzoamaka. It said enough because the family, from where their educational aspirations took root, had already affirmed the guidelines with which the schools were working.

A majority of Nigerian parents are still illiterate although fathers are more likely to have received some years of schooling than mothers.[38] In addition to their traditional prerogative, the former are also seen as being in the best position to make decisions about the children's schooling.

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[38] Alo and Adjebeng-Asem (1988:218) refer to a 1977 report which puts female adult literacy at 6% and male, 25%. More recent studies clearly indicate that even with the considerable progress in women's education and public schooling in general, both the gender imbalance and adult literacy is still very low (Otu 1989, Okeke 1989).

Thus, as in Alice's case, we see in both Chika and Uzoamaka's instances, their fathers playing a very important role in their education. Uzoamaka mentions that she went to a university where her brother was already studying to be a medical doctor. To her father, it made perfect sense for Uzoamaka to study Education, and her brother, Medicine. Similar to Alice, her going to university may have been taken for granted, but not its ultimate purpose as a means, not an end in itself. In general, the primary emphasis on Chika and Uzoamaka's training did not seem to deviate very much from the economic imperative of equipping them for their status in the elite society.

On their part, Chika and Uzoamaka, despite their personal ambitions, had a good idea of what careers were socially acceptable for women. Uzoamaka, in particular, appeared to accept the fact she and her brother were in non-competing groups. The rationale for their training was not the same. Again, marriage was the overriding concern. Both women set out with their own personal ambitions, which over time were moulded by social expectations and boundaries, and the time constraints attached to them.

Chika came to terms first with the economic constraints facing Igbo women of her social background. She could not afford to repeat a class or pursue another university degree at her family's expense. She also accepted the constraints marriage posed. As Chika points out, marriage may actually

improve Igbo women's chances of furthering their education. If a woman is lucky, like Alice, to be sponsored by her husband, she neither has to constitute an "unnecessary burden" nor a social embarrassment to her natal family. Moreover, as individuals who must assume the position of subordinates to men, it is crucial that women's training be shaped according to their husband's taste and restrictions.

This view of women's education continues to reinforce the myth of blissful monogamy because it carries the impression that the married woman is always taken care of. The result is that even with increased social awareness and representation in the educational system, women's training is still considered a mere precaution that should not be exercised beyond its main purpose.

In her case, Uzoamaka knew that despite her career ambitions and personal reservations about marriage, she had to consider the implications to both her immediate and extended family. Predictably, the pressure only exacerbated with the passing of time. Apart from raising doubts about her suitability for marriage, Uzoamaka's age also places a constraint on the number of prospective suitors. It is not very common, even among the younger elites, for men to marry women of the same age, let alone older women.

Uzoamaka's recourse to the Sandwich, and subsequently the Business programs, could be considered prudent decisions. For one thing, she was mindful of the growing unemployment and

could not afford to leave the job she had at the moment. Although the Sandwich did not improve her career options, Uzoamaka did not have to leave home for a regular program and she earned a higher degree without seeming over-educated for potential suitors. Equally, the Business degree option, at the time it presented itself, met most of these considerations. Now that she is engaged, she is, in principle, "free" to pursue her studies under the shelter of a man. But then, she has to deal with a string of requirements awaiting her marriage. Amidst the striving to fulfil these requirements, now pressing demands in her life, she has to squeeze in her career ambitions. Apparently, she is on her way to start performing the balancing act in which Chika and Alice have long engaged.

Of the four women, Uchenna is the one whose life and career path has taken the most radical turn. She is well past thirty and still single. Unlike Chika and Uzoamaka, she did not pursue a particularly feminine career. Not only is she academically much more qualified than a good number of her male colleagues, she is also competing with them on their own turf.

The comments of Uchenna's female peers clearly reveal the intensity of the pressures that counteract Igbo women's efforts to move up the economic ladder as individuals in their own right. From the details of her profile, it is evident that Uchenna demonstrated exceptional strength of character and

determination in a social setting, where she was not supposed to overly achieve. Of course, she was mindful of her place in the natal family as a woman, knowing that her brothers' progress was crucial to establishing her father's lineage within the extended family. However, even as she toiled to uplift their status, she managed to keep her own dreams alive.

Uchenna may well have achieved beyond her female peers. But, as she clearly emphasizes, she gained her status at a great personal cost. Her comments regarding the negative impact of family responsibilities on her career and marriage plans, point to the unequal opportunities Igbo men and women are presented with from birth. A man could shoulder the same responsibilities and have his own training delayed, but he will never be too old or too successful to find a life partner. He certainly will not be branded loose at a later stage in his life simply because he has not "tied the knot." In contrast, Uchenna's present status intimidates many potential suitors, who count on their higher economic and social status to reinforce their dominant position in marriage.

Uchenna has to be careful about pushing her ambitions to the limit. She obviously wants to marry and is taking great pains to create a conducive environment for potential suitors. She may further her career by moving to Lagos, but in her view, that would seriously endanger her chances of getting married. Given her religious background, polygyny, in whatever

form, is out of the question. Yet working in Lagos might mean moving further away from a more concentrated pool of young and eligible Igbo men. Marriage with an Igbo man would more readily receive parental blessings on either side than a "mixed" union. Her efforts to fit into a relatively "submissive" mould would enhance her chances of marriage, but may cost her some steps in the occupational ladder. For a single woman, Uchenna is already too "independent" both by virtue of her economic status and the fact that she lives alone in the city away from her family. Outside the free reign provided by a spouse, such independence also casts aspersions on Uchenna's morals.

5.3. Women's Education and Employment in Nigeria: Recurring themes.

These profiles offer vivid insights into the gendered nature of Igbo women's lives and how it shapes their educational aspirations and career paths. As the profiles show, schooling and wage labour are social processes and they mirror, to a large extent, the structure of gender relations which reinforce the prevailing social order. Their stories point to some recurring themes in the broad trends of Nigerian women's education reviewed in Chapter One.

In the years following Nigeria's political independence and well into the 1960s, the policy of educational expansion, especially at the higher levels, assumed an anti-racist stance, in response to years of colonial suppression. This

policy also integrated an ethnic perspective as governments of the three regions rallied to establish free education programs at the primary school level. The expansion of formal education meant more educated people, but access to higher educational levels was still restricted to a privileged few.

The rise in federal funding for education in the 1970s, apart from its emphasis on the regional imbalance, also took the concerns of class and unequal privilege into consideration. The result was that formal education until the downturn in the nation's economic fortunes, was provided as a public good, not in terms of gender equity, but mainly from the point of view of class and ethnicity. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed sharp declines in public funding for education, so that mere availability is no longer a strong motivation for further training (Ikejiani and Anowi 1964, Okeke 1990, Mammudu 1992).

Public concern for gender equity was not the main driving force behind Nigerian women's participation in formal education. Rather, women took advantage of and rode on the crest of widespread periodical expansions of the school system such as the UPE and public subsidies for higher education. They have had to accept the gendered educational opportunities available to them. This was more so the case where education, as a public good, was not carefully programmed to reflect labour market realities. For women it meant that, regardless of their personal ambitions, the labour market outcome of

their training is mostly determined by what happens at home and in the school. Harsh economic realities have prompted women such as Chika to reconsider further academic pursuits. In more recent times, further training, especially for married women, has in part been a response to harsh labour market realities. Okeke (1989:56,60) remarks that:

> Paid work has become increasingly important to Nigerian women. Work for a wage, even if the work is not at a status equal to that of men's work, enhances a woman's prestige and provides her with economic independence from both her parents and her husband. Today men prefer marrying women who are in the paid labour force. Women's income supplements the men's income and enhances male prestige. It is now common in Nigeria to find married women returning to school after years of absence. They do so at the urging of their husbands so that they can have a better chance of obtaining higher status and a greater income.

Like Chika and Uzoamaka, many female wage earners at Enugu are taking advantage of the part-time professional programs currently offered in nearby higher institutions of learning. But the rationale for and emphasis on women's education have not changed much from Alice's days. As Uzoamaka noted, there has been an improvement in counselling facilities. In effect, women are receiving mixed messages. They are encouraged to widen their career options and at the same time fulfil the demands of their primary role. But the sad reality that widening one's options has a great personal cost, does not escape many ambitious women. While they are not, in principle, barred from any field of endeavour, the underlying compromises required to maintain a balance between

career and domestic life clearly draw some boundaries. For those like Uchenna, who pursue personal ambitions as individuals in their own right, their success comes at a great pe onal cost. For married women, it means a stressful combination of domestic and career obligations. Beyond mere perceptions, these women face real limitations in terms of what they can actually do.

Undoubtedly higher education has increased the level of awareness and economic well being of these four women as well as that of the other participants in this study. In a country where few women make it to higher education, Alice, Chika, Uzoamaka and Uchenna can be considered very fortunate. Moreover, with the worsening economic situation in Nigeria, a university degree is becoming a crucial asset for women, whether married or single.

However, the labour market potential of this education must also be assessed. From the stories of these four women, it is clear that the struggle for social and economic independence does not end at the door of higher education. The very factors which have gendered their schooling experiences are also at work in the labour market, where they must find and establish a niche. The next chapter looks at how these women, along with the other respondents, are faring in their respective work settings, amidst the class and gender politics that have become even more pronounced in a shrinking labour market.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 MAKING IT IN THE LABOUR MARKET: FORMAL AND INFORMAL BARRIERS, NEW ECONOMIC REALITIES, AND COPING STRATEGIES.

The labour market experiences of women in this study will be analyzed in the context of the critiques raised in Chapter Two, as well as the background information provided in Chapters One and Four. Before delving into the ethnographic data, it is pertinent to recapture some of the relevant points highlighted in these chapters.

First, critics of Marxist based analyses reviewed in Chapter Two emphasize that existing feminist analytical categories cannot adequately explain the nature and conditions of women's work, especially women in developing countries. More recent studies therefore stress the need to capture the work situations of individual groups of women as they relate to the structure of gender relations; their material and ideological underpinnings, features of capitalist expansion and family/capitalist relations. These studies recognize that the experiences of women in a specific social setting differ and should not be conflated within the single category of married women (Beechey 1987, Robertson and Berger 1986, Robertson 1987, Redclift 1988). The chapter further notes that

·ost of the literature on Nigerian women in the formal sector do not reflect present economic and political trends. These trends call for a reassessment of the prospects of formal training for women and the position of elite women in the family and society (Stichter 1988, 1990; Parpart 1990, Okeke 1993).

Chapter Four outlines the structure of gender relations in Igbo society, especially the elite circle. It highlights elite women's weak bargaining position in this structure, specifically the cultural requirements which, in many ways conflict with their career pursuits. Chapter One traces the origins of the present social arrangement to patriarchal continuities and contradictions deriving from both the pre-colonial social stratification and colonialism/capitalist expansion. The chapter went on to present statistical evidence of the gendered outcomes of Nigerian women's education, which are reinforced in formal employment. Further, the personal profiles of four of the respondents analyzed in Chapter Five reveals, among other things, that social expectations and requirements of women's primary role have not changed remarkably, despite widening career choices. In other words, those who pursue higher education do so at the risk of exacerbating the marriage/career conflict.

This chapter examines the labour market experiences of the respondents, this time in the light of recent trends mentioned in Chapter One. The latter has drawn attention to

the declining prospects of formal employment with the worsening economic situation. It also notes the existence of corruptive, but viable networks, which job seekers are increasingly resorting to in the race for the few available positions. The review of present labour market trends points to a widening economic gap between public and private sector remunerations, and women's increasing representation in the former.

The experiences and observations of the women in this study will be analyzed with respect to the emerging gap. The analysis that follows highlights the barriers these women face and the coping strategies (short term and long term) they adopt to stabilize and improve their labour market status. The first section outlines the general organization of wage work in Nigeria and women's location in formal working settings. This outline is useful because it provides the proper context within which the respondents' experiences and perceptions can be understood.

The second section focuses primarily on the problems identified by the respondents in their respective work settings, and coping strategies they adopt. The analysis also draws from officially reported evidences. The final section examines the implications of the issues raised to the women's career pursuits.

6.1. Structure and Organization of Wage Work

The formal employment ladder in Nigeria can be collapsed into three major ranks. First, the junior staff from unskilled labourers to the clerical staff. Second, the middle level staff from supervisors to junior professionals. Third and finally, the management and board of directors. As noted in Chapter One, the formal education system supplies most of the workers in this sector. Unlike before when most workers rose through the ranks, the expansion of public schooling in the past three decades has catapulted many higher education graduates into the middle level and senior positions. The next few paragraphs briefly present the organization of formal employment with respect to recruitment, job structures, work policies and practices, and the associated formal and informal gender barriers.

The organization of wage work in Nigeria reflects many of the features found in similar formal work settings. The recruitment of middle level workers follows a formal assessment procedure including oral and/or written interviews. Usually, the civil service (including school boards) conducts mass recruitment exercises once every few years. In contrast, workers are continuously recruited into the private sector, depending on existing vacancies in particular establishments. Predictably, the assessment process in this sector is more rigorous than in the public service, reflecting the stiffer competition among candidates. Promotions follow a similar

format Under normal conditions, civil servants should be promoted at least every three years. Advancement in the private sector involves a stricter evaluation process directed at individual workers.[39]

Job structures in the public and private sectors do not differ remarkably, both deriving essentially from the colonial model. Expectedly, the private sector offers a more attractive remuneration package. What is highly noticeable in both sectors is the pronounced differences in remuneration between the lower and higher job ranks. This pattern is traceable, in part, to racial inequalities embedded in the colonial civil service. Women's segregation at the bottom rung and in sex-typed jobs means that men, for the most part, benefit from this initial segregation pattern. Bujra (1983:33) points out that:

> The perpetuation, in many areas of Africa, of colonial salary scales based originally on racial privilege, has meant that inequalities of reward between workers at various levels in the occupational hierarchy are more marked than in developed capitalist societies. These patterns of inequality have been reinforced in the post colonial period by a[n initial] general shortage of personnel with even minimal educational qualifications - and especially [of qualified] women.

Work routines have equally not departed very much from the colonial arrangement. Most positions are full time, with

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[39] See the Anambra State Civil Service Handbook (1989), and the Collective Agreement between Nigerian Employers' Association of Banks, Insurance and Allied Institutions and the Association of Senior Staff of Banks, Insurance and Financial Institutions (1990).

daily working schedules, except in the case of essential services. Public school teachers work between 7.30am and 2.30pm, while other civil servants end their working day an hour later. Private sector employees have a longer work day than their public sector counterparts. The working day begins anywhere from 7.30 and ends (officially) around 5pm.

6.1.1. Work Policies and Practices

What is reported here are the general conditions of wage work today in Nigeria. The only details provided here are limited to the internal structures of the respondents' places of work. A number of policy changes in the post independence era have remedied to some extent the gross discriminatory pattern of women's employment. For instance, the salary differentials between male and female workers of similar ranks referred to by Denzer (1987), have long been harmonized. Expectant mothers are entitled to a three month maternity leave, although in some private establishments the maternity leave replaces the annual leave in any such year. Moreover, unlike their colleagues in the public service, expectant mothers in many private firms receive only half their basic salary. However, all other allowances are paid in full. Nursing mothers in the civil service are entitled to a one hour break up till a six months post natal period. This policy extends only in principle to female workers in the private sector since individual establishments may not endorse it.

6.1.2. Overt Inequalities

These provisions notwithstanding, overt gender discrimination in the conditions of service still exist. Married women, especially working mothers, seem to bear most of the brunt of this. They pay proportionally more tax than their male counterparts because children's allowance is payed only to men. Until 1992, male civil servants also received a "wife" allowance.[40] The respondents also report that female civil servants whose husbands occupy government residential quarters automatically forfeit their rent subsidy.

These conditions of service point to vestiges of the colonial administration's policy, which was built around the male breadwinner and his dependant wife. This is so, despite the fact that the myth of Nigerian women's domesticity has long been shattered. This colonial legacy persists despite the inherent contradiction of both the cultural norm, and the prevailing situation in Western capitalist societies. For a number of reasons pointed out in Chapter Two, Nigerian women have always been primarily responsible for their children's welfare. Women's access to and control of financial resources are therefore crucial to their fulfilling this responsibility. Chapter Two also notes that present economic realities place Nigerian female wage earners in a similar position, their financial status closely linked to their children's welfare (Fapohunda 1982, 1988; Parpart 1990).

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[40] Announced during the 1992 budget statement by the president.

The payment of child allowance to men does not reflect this reality. In Western industrial societies, women (both working or non working mothers) are the direct recipients of child allowance. Of course, one can argue that the Western policy is more an incentive measure rather than a recognition of women's primary responsibility for children's welfare. Whatever the case may be, the fact remains that equivalent policies in Nigerian policy can no longer hide behind the excuse of the colonial legacy. That such a discriminatory reward structure remains resistant to change points to the pervasiveness of patriarchal relations. Women's traditional responsibilities and entitlements are overlooked in those areas where they have created new privileges for men.

6.1.3. Covert Inequalities

Indeed, a good deal of the discrimination Nigerian women face in formal employment remains hidden and intricately woven into the labour market structure from colonial times. Chapter One traces the history of this discrimination; the reluctant admittance of women into the colonial civil service and their segregation into sex-typed jobs with less attractive conditions of service than their male colleagues. More recent statistics presented in the same chapter clearly show that the originally gendered pattern has not altered significantly.

Studies such as Bujra (1983) attribute this development to the nature of capitalist expansion, notably, men's early

start in formal education. But as noted in Chapter One, Denzer (1987) indicates that in matters of women's employment the colonial administration were careful to maintain, as much as possible, what they perceived to be the cultural gender hierarchy. It was important to them, at least to the extent that it helped to keep in place the capitalist machinery of exploitation. Nevertheless, it legitimized and reinforced, albeit inconsistently, the cultural pattern of women's subordination in the formal employment sector.

The implications of this historical pattern to Nigerian women today are more far reaching than often assumed. The problem is not merely one of under-representation. Job descriptions and wage scales, especially beyond the lower ranks have to some extent been structured to suit male candidates. Such systemic barriers tend to resist attempts to close the gap (Ukachukwu 1991:32). For instance, Shettima (1989:85) sites a 1979 study which traces Nigerian women's systematic marginalization up the civil service ladder. Women's representation in grade levels 10-15 "shows a downward trend and by the time the graph is traced to levels 16 and 17, it simply vanishes to 1". It seems that women start out with their male colleagues at the lower or middle employment cadres, but for some reason drop out of the picture as they near the upper echelons. Shettima also notes that salary grades tend to reflect a marked segregation between "masculine" and "feminine" occupations.

Similarly, Dennis' (1984) study of a Nigerian textile company also reveals a pattern of gender discrimination where female employees are systematically placed in less lucrative positions with fewer advancement prospects than male colleagues with similar educational experience.

Covert gender inequalities may also be found in the authority structure, policies and practices of labour unions. Generally, trade unionism has always been men's affair, even in female dominated occupations such as nursing (Okoronkwo 1985:81). Working mothers' dual burden of domestic and wage labour is often cited as the major obstacle. But it seems that these organizations are run in such a manner that does not even elicit women's interest (Shettima 1989). Shettima claims, for example, that the parent union body itself, the Nigerian Labour Congress, "has not been making specific recommendations on women in its policy demands" (p.89-90). In her study of a Nigerian private company, Pittin (1984:71) also observes that the "female workers often find themselves alienated from their male co-workers, while the men fail altogether to understand women's reluctance to become involved in or participate actively in what women see as organizations catering to male interests."

The women in this study also cited various instances of covert discrimination in their respective work places. Onyeka, a thirty-one year old civil servant married to a protocol officer, claims that:

> Protocol jobs are reserved for men. It's very demanding. A lot of travelling is involved and you must get used to late nights. Married women may not be able to handle all that, but some women, single women want just that. Even if they can do the job, they are not likely to be hired. The men at the top will not be convinced. They'd still prefer their fellow men.

The competition is stiffer in the private than the public sector. Nnenna, thirty-four and legal manager married with two children, comments:

> The men will prefer to work with their fellow men at any time if they can get away with that. For instance, the men in this place[bank] dread working in departments where there are many women.

Uchenna, thirty-five and single, shares her experience in the foreign exchange department of a commercial bank. According to her, the bank tends to transfer the female officers in this section to other departments once they become eligible for the "sensitive" positions:

> As for the men... they think that there are jobs made for men and jobs made for us. It's okay if we are clerks, messengers and secretaries and at best supervisors. Once you get into the officer cadre, it is no longer a woman's job, especially in foreign exchange. It is tolerable for women to be administrative and personnel officers..., but foreign exchange? The men think that you'd block their plans of striking highly lucrative business deals with business men. Of course, they would often insinuate that your relationship with these customers cannot be strictly official.

These women's perceptions regarding the nature and organization of work in their respective establishments says something about the ideological construction of specific jobs and occupations. Of course, as Onyeka rightly acknowledges, the demands of some jobs may not easily lend themselves to the

flexibility married women need in order to combine domestic and wage work. However, the consideration here appears to go beyond domestics concerns, since single women are also discriminated against. Both Onyeka and Uchenna's statements suggest that the middle and senior level ranks in the protocol and foreign departments have acquired the structure and image of a "men's club."[41]

These departments have evolved over time as a men's preserve so that beyond the basic qualifications for entry, other attributes have come to define the nature of job requirements. Thus, officers in the foreign department and bank customers (mostly men) appear to have some kind of informal relationship which may be mutually beneficial in economic terms. Similarly, the protocol department is mostly staffed by men and the camaraderie among employees may be threatened by admitting a woman into the circle. As Nnenna put it, men would like to work with other men if that is possible. Of course, Uchenna makes the point that male employees are not likely to have a problem with female employees as their subordinates. However, it becomes another matter when women

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[41]In Anambra State where the research was carried out, the public statistics do not show any record of women working in the Cabinet Office and the Government House (the main jurisdictions of protocol) in 1984. Only one female employee was recorded for 1936 and 1987. By 1990, there were five women and fifty-one men on staff. In the foreign exchange departments of the two banks from which some of the respondents were selected, it was found that men still dominate the higher levels. There are a few female officers including two of the respondents. These respondents claim that this male preserve is opening up to women simply because men no longer find it very lucrative. Unlike in past years, there are far fewer business deals coming through in an era of declining economic resources for the bank and its customers.

"invade" their working space as competitors.

6.1.4. The Domestic Angle

Evidently, the discrimination faced by the respondents cannot be wholly attributable to the workings of the labour market. The four personal profiles analyzed in Chapter Five show that, in some ways, the demands of women's primary role filter into their decisions about schooling and work. On getting married, the two married women, Alice and Chika, had to delay or scale down their career ambitions in response to domestic obligations. Their actions reflect the broad patterns typical of women in their social position. For instance, one finds that a higher proportion of female wage earners are civil servants (Agheyisi 1985:146-147). In a bid to balance career pursuits with domestic demands, women may, themselves, reinforce existing patterns of gender segregation.

The juggling of domestic and wage work, discussed in the next chapter, will give a better picture of the range of responsibilities the respondents have to deal with. Most of the working mothers in the public sector cite domestic demands as a major constraint keeping them from seeking more lucrative employment. The three working mothers in private establishments admitted having to scale down their career ambitions because of domestic obligations. Alice, forty-eight, a lawyer and mother of five children, maintains a small practice, not wanting to expand despite the attractive

prospects. Similarly, Nnenna, thirty-four, also a lawyer, married with two young children, has settled for a managerial position in the legal department. With a masters degree in business management as well, she would have preferred the more challenging position of legal adviser. Chinelo, thirty-one and an accountant, is a mother of two young children. She has opted for an administrative position in a commercial bank instead of becoming an auditor in a private accounting firm

As is evident in Chapter Seven, women's daily presence (if only during off duty hours) is crucial to coordinating domestic responsibilities and wage work. Most of the working mothers in the study point out that they seldom attend seminars, workshops or short-term training programs outside Enugu. It is not easy to schedule these extra-career requirements into their already chaotic work lives.

These women's stories are not peculiar. Career adjustment is a reality working mothers in formal employment are likely to face. In the Nigerian case, however, it is important to recognize that the poor response of the work environment to domestic concerns adds to the problem of adjustment. The rigid organization of work does not allow married women other options such as part-time work, keeping a home office or even job sharing. Given the already existing pattern of gender segregation legitimized by the colonial past and the ideological construction of particular job requirements, employers may not be prepared to take chances with women. They

know that women are mainly responsible for domestic work and they have a good idea what this responsibility entails. For instance, Christie, forty-nine and an assistant director in a government department, observes that many male senior civil servants would specify in memos for vacancies that they do not want female assistants, especially married women. Nnenna, the legal manager remarks that:

> The management... hesitates to employ married women because they can't be transferred at random and the bank would like to rotate its staff as evenly as possible over the years.

Working mothers are juggling responsibilities in two work settings, both of which are not mutually responsive. The danger here is that with this work arrangement, women's primary role becomes a major deciding factor even for their entry into certain positions. Mma's case sums up the point. Forty, divorced with no children of her own, her status was a critical factor in deciding her fate as the legal adviser and company secretary of a new merchant bank:

> They asked about my husband and I told them that we're separated. Then they asked, "Is there any chance of your getting back together?" I said, "No." You can see how selfish men can be. They said, "What about children?", and I said, "I have none." Then they asked me, "Suppose you decide to start having children?" I told them that I came from a strict Christian family; that such a situation will not arise... Eventually, I got the job and was later handed the minutes of the meetings where they discussed my appointment. There it was clearly written that "even though I am a woman, they could not pass up my excellent credentials, but that happily enough I didn't have any encumbrances"... But they all have wives and children at home, and because they are men, those are not encumbrances on their part... So, I

> wouldn't have been given the job if I was still married or had children at the time.

Mma's story sums up the problem. With the gender division of labour in the family, wives and children do not constitute encumbrances for men. Both employers and working mothers know this. The discrimination all women suffer is further reinforced through this fundamental hindrance. It helps to legitimize the ideological sex-typing of jobs even where the domestic angle has very little relevance.

This brief investigation into the nature and conditions of formal employment in Nigeria, particularly the respondents' experiences and perceptions, provides the context for the discussion in the following sections. Two main points highlighted here will be especially useful in understanding the women's response to labour market trends - the ideological construction of jobs and the unresponsiveness of the labour market to domestic concerns. With these factors in mind, the next two sections present the problems faced by the respondents and the coping strategies they adopt.

6.2. The "Pink Collar" Ghetto

The term "pink collar" has been used in a number of studies to denote African women's segregation into female stereotypical professions and positions in formal employment (Afonja 1981, Robertson 1984, 1987). The historical review of formal education and wage employment showed that men originally dominated all positions. Women's entrance into the

civil service initiated a differentiation of "feminine" and "masculine jobs." For instance, women became associated with clerical work and primary school teaching, while men moved in to more lucrative occupations. In fact, the transition from male domestic servants to maids is something that took place only in the past two decades (Bujra 1983:31).

The present economic trends seem to be reinforcing this historical pattern. Chapter One reports the mass exodus of male civil servants, especially professionals. Interestingly, women are only stepping into abandoned positions in teaching, rather than into the more lucrative and prestigious male preserves. In fact, according to the respondents, the ranking order of jobs for university graduates has become quite distinct. Employment in the commercial private banks, especially the new merchant banks, is at the top of the ratings, followed by other financial institutions and private firms. Public sector jobs are the least attractive, with public school employment at the bottom of the ladder. Going by the general organization of wage work and women's location reviewed in the previous section, this ranking order can only strengthen an already marked gender segregation. For instance, the employment boost in the banking sector referred to by Dada (1991:6) in Chapter One, is likely to benefit far more men than women. Of the three banks represented in the study, women make up no more than 20% of middle and senior level personnel.

As a result of the growing economic gap between the public and the private sector, the experiences of the respondents who are widely represented in middle to high level positions, have therefore differed remarkably. Those employed in private firms decry the shrinking of fringe benefits which had attracted them to this sector, but consider themselves more fortunate compared to their colleagues in the public sector. For instance, among this group even the bank employees with less than five years working experience earned as much as those who had put in more than twenty years in the public service.

The public service has often attracted workers more for the job security it provides than the remuneration package it offers. But even the job stability is neither guaranteed nor even attractive any longer. Rose, fifty-seven, an assistant director in a government department and mother of three grown children remarks:

> It starts from the top. The university staff are poorly paid. Their students graduate and within a year [of working in the banks] become car owners while their professors can barely afford to pay taxi fares.

It seems that in the stiff competition for the few available positions women, especially working mothers, are in most cases left with the unattractive options, which are mainly public service jobs. The teaching profession, particularly at the primary and secondary levels, appears to be the most affected and these are the areas in which women

are increasingly channelled. The gradual feminization of teaching is more noticeable in the cities than in the rural areas. Each of the seven schools in Enugu represented in the study have a staff strength of at least ninety, with less than six male teachers. Married women constitute an overwhelming majority of at least 80% while single women trail behind with no more than 10%. Feminization, the respondents claim, is creeping into the civil service. Women tend to work their way first into teaching. From teaching, they move to a desk job. Ifeyinwa, thirty-eight and mother of five young children, transferred from teaching to the Commission, comments:

> The rate at which [Nigerian] women are rushing into teaching and government work [desk jobs] is alarming. At this rate, you will hardly find a single man in the civil service in the next ten years. You rarely find men these days in the Federal teachers' colleges. They are more interested in making quick money.

In contrast, female workers in the private sector remain the minority. In fact, a clear distinction is now made between teachers and "civil servants", a distinction maintained in this analysis.[42] Teaching seems to be turning into a distinct public "ghetto" for those with no options, especially working mothers. The respondents who are teachers noted, for example, that unlike other civil servants, teachers are no longer

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[42] The analysis is based on the general trend in the country, but with specific reference to the situation in Anambra State where the study was carried out. Note also the emphasis on public schools which are in the majority.

promoted every three years.[43] As Erimma, single and thirty-four, a Chemistry teacher, comments, "We are so many that even one naira [Nigeria's currency] for each teacher runs into thousands". There is also the constant battle with the authorities for entitlements owed to teachers. As Veronica, a fifty-five year old school principal with four grown children bitterly comments:

> We are not adequately rewarded. On top of that we have to struggle for arrears of salaries and allowances when even the [manual] labourer in the lowest wrung of the service has gotten all that.

The list of grievances added to constant harassments by school principals, students and Education authorities, is turning public school teaching into a camp for disgruntled workers. The teachers in the study also draw attention to the fact that the profession rarely attracts certain fringe benefits that may help to cushion the effects of the economic crunch. Chika notes, for instance, that:

> Those in the poultry department of the Ministry of Agriculture are given some concessions like buying chicken or fertilizer at cheaper rates. Banks equally give loans to their workers at lower interest rates. You never get such benefits in teaching.

Chika's statement also points to the ideological constructions of jobs and positions, which render some more lucrative and prestigious than others. Normally civil servants

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[43] Official sources claim that between 1980 and 1992, the education authorities conducted two major en masse promotion exercises for teachers in an attempt to catch up with their counterparts in the civil services, who have gone one or more notches higher.

in similar grade levels are entitled to the same basic salary and benefits. It is, in part, the potential for "extras" in some ministries, departments, cadres, occupations and positions that may distinguish the "masculine" from the "feminine" jobs. It seems that as the labour market shrinks, this demarcation is constantly redefined, with women being squeezed into the least favoured positions.

6.3. Survival Strategies: In the Short and Long Terms

The dismal labour market situation has created two problems for working mothers in the public sector. First, they have to deal with declining financial resources at a time when their contribution is crucial to the family's subsistence. Second, they are expected to put tremendous effort into low paying jobs with unattractive prospects, which originally have not been particularly responsive to domestic demands. The respondents pointed to three major strategies that female employees in the public sector have adopted.

6.3.1. Taking it out on the System

First, there seems to be emerging a growing tendency for those trapped in the public sector to "take it out on the system." The latter works out as a coping strategy against the loss of economic incentives, which has dampened their commitment. More importantly, it creates for them a less rigid organization of work much more responsive to their domestic

obligations than before. More than their colleagues in the private sector, the working mother in the less supervised public sector can now afford to exploit the cracks within the system in order to fulfil domestic obligations and/or improve their economic situation.

Working mothers face the major constraint of coordinating home and wage work and as shown in Chapter Six, this usually means keeping to a tight schedule. However, this tight schedule cannot be maintained when domestic responsibilities get in the way and such cases may require less than "official" means of coping. Uju can relate to this problem:

> Naturally, the married [women] often have to deal with emergencies like sick children or husbands having to leave in a hurry for unscheduled trips. You really have to work closely with them [the working mothers] and earn their trust otherwise they will just sneak out of school only to return later with a doctor's permit. Of course, you know that at the right price, some Nigerian doctors would easily do such favours. However if these [women] know that informing you will not cost them their job or attract a rebuke they will be frank with you. But some of them will prefer to deal with the domestic emergency first and later look for any false excuse which they feel they can get away with.

Another typical example is the maternity leave issue. The main problem is that there are hardly any day care facilities for children under two years of age. Infants can be left with maids for intervals of only two or three hours between breast feedings. In order to gain more time, therefore, expectant mothers aim at pushing the effective date of leave as close as

possible to the delivery date. After delivery, most mothers in the public sector would resume duty, but simply end their work day at twelve noon. Many of them have no personal means of transportation. As Onyeka, a thirty-one year old civil servant married with one child, said:

> Although the policy says one hour for six months, some nursing mothers would not change their schedule after six months and most would leave the office at 12 noon. It is just not convenient to work within such a tight schedule.

As pointed out in Chapter Four, child bearing for the Igbo woman is a primary responsibility. The period devoted to it, therefore, may not easily fall in line with the demands of wage work. One has to take into consideration the cultural requirements involved and women's limited authority in making such decisions. With the economic crunch, many working mothers cannot afford to quit their jobs or even take a leave of absence. They have to rely on the cracks within the system as well as on the indulgence of those in authority. Chidimma, thirty-one and a Home Economics teacher, had all her five children without any breaks in service:

> They [school principals] know it[daily absences] is official when you get a letter from a doctor. However, for people like me who tend to encounter many health problems in early pregnancy, a non-sympathetic principal would not condone long absences from school. In my former school, the principal could not tolerate that and she had me transferred to another school. You know how ladies treat one another. She said, "What kind of baby do you have in your stomach? Pregnancy is not an illness". She insisted that I report for work, but I was not fit enough. So she submitted my name for transfer. The principal in my present school is very understanding.

Working mothers in the public sector know that their immediate bosses cannot go very far in the tedious bureaucratic process to effect a termination of their appointment. Most school principals would simply ask for uncooperative staff to be transferred. Besides, as most of the teachers in the study point out, performance is hardly rewarded so their motivation for working hard in the present situation is hardly material. Working mothers like Chidimma admit that tedious as the schedule might be, public sector employment is perhaps the most convenient work for them, at least in their child bearing years:

> You have to have a properly organized schedule. A lot of the time I could not rest. For instance, I had to personally wash the children's sterilizing units in the morning and I had to be at school on time unless I was on maternity leave. Anyway, I was mostly on maternity leave in those days because, once I resumed duty after leave, I could leave the school after 12 noon until my baby is six months old. But by the end of the six months, I would be expecting another baby.

Working mothers in the private sector can only use such escape routes up to a point. They are well aware that their non-performance will register in the rigorous evaluation process. They cannot afford to endanger their envied positions. Moreover, in the stiff competition with male colleagues, the working mothers in the banks, for instance, realise that they have already lost a lot of ground in terms of the less challenging positions they have settled for. Like their colleagues in the public sector, they also need to establish very cordial relations with their bosses. They would

also exploit unofficial cracks as long as their jobs are not threatened.

6.3.2. Moonlighting

The second strategy employed by wage earners is aimed at widening their economic base. Indeed, trading "on the side" is not a new economic venture for Nigerian women. It is a throw back from tradition that many of them, especially those in low income brackets or full-time housewives would easily embrace. However, many elite women have become involved with the worsening economic situation. Although most of the respondents are not presently engaged in such ventures, they confirmed the rising trend of "moonlighting." According to them, the practice is not limited to women. However, working mothers, especially those in the public sector, find part-time petty trading a convenient way to augment the family income. Ngozi, the accountant, makes the point that for married women:

> The allowance from their husbands rarely goes half way into the month. They use very ingenious ways to augment like selling jewellery, dresses and wrappers in the office...

Often, these businesses are advertised by word of mouth. The actual display of wares (during during offic hours) is usually frowned upon and may invite a serious reprimand, especially for workers in the private sector. Wares may be viewed on request, usually at home after working hours. According to Ifeyinwa, many female public sector workers frustrated with the growing economic gap are turning these

"side kicks" into elaborate commercial ventures:

> Lagos is too near for the more daring women. I know a woman who works in a [public] research institute. Between July and now[December] she has travelled overseas twice to buy the things she sells in her shop... Many women operate on a smaller scale like retailing trinkets. Some men are in this too. It is not only women and/or school teachers that engage in these side ventures.

6.3.3. Who You Know: "IM" and "Bottom Power"

The respondents' observations of what happens in their respective work settings confirm the trend (reported in Chapter One) towards using unofficial corruptive channels and the gender politics involved. Nepotism in its more recent manifestation, IM (ima mmadu), has very deep historical roots in Nigeria.[44] In the early post independent years, Hanson (1964:25) decried the persistence of culturally re nforced nepotism, calling for drastic policy measures to nip it in the bud:

> There is needed a whole series of new functional attitudes towards efficiency, hiring and promotion. Functional competence, not family or town or clan loyalties, must become the criterion used when filling niches in a modern industrial society. The task of changing such attitudes is formidable...

At a time when formal employment was virtually the exclusive preserve of men, Hanson was speaking to a male audience. Agbese's (1992:14) comments in Chapter One indicate

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[44] IM stands for "ima mmadu", a popular Igbo expression which can be literarily translated to mean "to know or knowing someone", evidently someone in authority. In relation to formal employment, IM points to one's proximity to those who are highly placed in specific establishments or others who have significant influence over what happens there.

that the nation's economic decline has exacerbated an age old problem. With Nigerian women's increased representation in this sector over the past two decades, the term "bottom power" has extended to the informal influence they can exert in this sector as women.[45] Nwabara (1985:11-12) remarks that:

> "Long legs" and Nepotism are very common in Nigeria and the majority of people, men and women, suffer from these practices, because the[y]... come from the "wrong" class...; they are not rich, they do not have rich and influential friends. However, it should be mentioned that... women's [appointment] in senior positions are due to these practices, unfortunately. But then, it is almost impossible [for them] to get senior appointments in any other way.

The respondents' statements suggest that the deterioration in the conditions of formal employment has reinforced the endemic politics of ethnicity and class ("who you Know"). Uju, a thirty-eight year old French teacher married with five children, explains:

> IM is very important because too many people than required are qualified. So if you have a Godfather, an uncle, brother or guardian who is highly placed or you if you know any such person... that may help push your case.

Rose, the assistant director, refers to a recruitment exercise for teachers carried out in 1988:

> We had vacancies in specific disciplines like Igbo and Yoruba languages, maths and physics. There was a long list from the government house and her excellency [wife of the military governor] filled the vacancies. The members of the [Education] Commission were mad, but what can they do? The list

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[45] "Bottom power" refers to any influence women can exert in authority circles as women. Such influence will derive from the use of their "natural sexual advantage."

> came from the powers that be. They dared not question the decision.

Chika, thirty-eight and mother of three children, recently transferred from teaching to the Education Commission. She shares her personal observations:

> Somebody just shows up with a letter from the government house with the instruction "recruit this person". The person is automatically hired. Getting into teaching now depends on IM, who you know. They give you a piece of paper and you start work while those who graduated years before are still hanging around. In fact, the letter may even stipulate that the new teacher be posted to a school of his or her choice.

Those without IM may resort to bribes. As Erimma the chemistry teacher remarks, "You know Nigeria. No vacancy, but vacancy may exist if you grease a few palms." Ifeyinwa who also works at the Commission admits that:

> Among the board of directors, each person has his price. There are some that would say "for you to be employed give us #500". But there are some that may want something more than that. The directors share the vacancies among themselves.

Christie, forty-nine, the other assistant director in the sample also confirms that:

> IM comes in at some point... If we're hiring and our director is interested, there is no way we can stop him from sending his candidate... Of course they [directors] do sponsor candidates. Some may even write to the chairman of the panel or give the candidate a note the day before the interview saying "I'm interested in this candidate"...that is where the lowering of standards comes in. You have to oblige the director.

A similar situation exists in the private sector although the stakes are obviously much higher. Ijeoama, thirty and single, a bank accountant concedes that her father's influence

helped in landing her present job:

> He was a former director of the bank... So even though I went through th nterview... and all, I think I had an edge over the other candidates.

Nnenna, a legal manager in a commercial bank and mother of two young children explained that:

> Since the employment embargo from the mid 1980s, most of those who got employed had relations or godfathers here. Officially, they will advertise the positions, but it is those who know people that will be considered. The result is that merit rarely comes in. You find that a lot of mediocre... Of course, there are basic qualifications beyond which IM takes over.

Mma, forty and divorced, is the legal adviser and company secretary of her bank:

> Members of the board or the management sometimes indicate their interest in certain candidates. Such candidates will definitely be considered as long as they scale through the written tests. The oral interview is where the big wigs have the chance to use their position.

IM is also crucial for worker's advancement especially in the private sector. The en masse promotion of teachers rules out the need for IM. In their own case, civil servants expect to be promoted every three years except in situations where a gross dereliction of duty is reported. In the latter case, IM would be required to reverse the verdict. The competition is stiffer in the private sector with a more rigorous evaluation process. Chinelo, thirty, a bank accountant and mother of two young children admits that IM is also a factor:

> You can't rule out the Nigerian factor. If you have a godfather - brother, uncle, father or friend, he will give you special attention, ensure you get the breaks and help push you up the ladder... It

happens everywhere. Our bank is no exception.

What happens to those without IM or the financial means? That is where the "politics" of gender comes in. According to the respondents, many women are compelled to give sexual favours in return for a job or promotion. As Ngozi, the accountant, points out:

> Things are no doubt rough for men who have no IM, but when it comes to numbers, they are at an advantage. Who are the military officers, directors, commissioners and managers? Men of course. That evens things out to some extent.

Although most of the respondents argue in defence of women who resort to this option, none of the respondents admitted to ever falling victim personally. They are, of course, used to the normal cases of harassment from men. According to them, such harassment is not something any of them worry about. It is part of what happens in the working environment. Women's resort to sexual favours is perceived as a weapon in a world where they are greatly disadvantaged. For women who have no "godfathers", Ifeyinwa argues that:

> By getting "acquainted" with the boss, the girl will now get to know somebody and he will in turn influence things in their favour. She will now be coming in through somebody. But she will be dreaming if she relies on just the interview hoping that someone will pick out her name.

Uju, the vice principal, notes in addition that:

> Things are very hard in Nigeria today...and most [university graduates] would want a job at all cost. The girl can go to the boss's office... You know... They can just do it in there in the office and then the girl is hired. The problem is that if you subject yourself to that kind of treatment, he may continue to pester you for more sexual favours

simply because he helped you to get the job.

With regard to the civil service, Onyeka points out that:

> In borderline cases...women who are not well qualified and who ordinarily will not be promoted, but who have over-established relations with the boss will definitely be promoted along with others.

The respondents agree that single women are more prone to "bottom power' than married women, but that the latter are certainly not excluded. Nnenna, the legal manager remarks:

> We have had incidents when you go to the office in the evenings only to find the boss with a girl sitting on his lap. It happens. If he can't attend to you then you can come back later. Eh, some married women do this too!, not just the single ones. It's fairly rampant in both groups...Yes, they do it because they need the job or they want promotion. You find however that most of the time the women involved are not serious with the job, or are not even interested enough to try...but at the end of the day, merit becomes underrated to the detriment of the hard working staff.

Christie believes that organizational lapses in the less policed public sector helps to encourage bottom power. She claims that:

> [IM] breeds indiscipline in the [civil] service because the person that came into the ministry through the director may flout rules as long as that man is still at the helm of affairs. You know that bureaucracy is based on rules and regulations, but they may not for instance come to work early most of the time. There are people here who are regarded as sacred cows. These people have either godfathers or some big shots behind them. When they flout rules nothing happens, but when you do the same, you're in trouble. These days many young are getting away with such behaviour.

6.3.4. Exit strategies

The respondents look upon further training as the most viable strategy for exiting from the public ghetto. For instance, more than half of the public sector respondents, including a few married women, are enroled in part-time courses such as Business, Law and Education. Public school teachers such as Chika, whose profile was presented in Chapter Five, plan for further studies or for transfer to a desk job in the public service. Those with longer years of service have resigned themselves to the option of early retirement. Normally, men and single women are more inclined to leave than working mothers. Often, the latter stay behind not only because of their domestic responsibilities, but also to stabilize the fluctuations in the family income as men move into the more lucrative, but less predictable private sector.

6.4. Facing Labour Market Realities: Implications for Women's Career Pursuits

The experiences and observations of the respondents suggest that their work lives (and that of their female colleagues) have been affected by present labour market trends. In relation to the economic gap between public and private sector employment, it seems that short term coping strategies end up doubly oppressing working mothers. They are already saddled with more domestic chores than men, even with assistance of house maids. Employers knowing that these

responsibilities are bound to encroach into the formal work settings ensure that women are kept away from the more lucrative positions with crucial responsibilities. For women in this situation, their actions tend to reinforce, if not justify, the discriminatory treatment they receive in the labour market. Given the existing ideological construction of jobs and positions, the perception of married women as potentially uncommitted workers could be generalized to shape the treatment women as a group receive regardless of how committed they are to their career.

Similarly, income augmenting measures may improve the family's economic well being, but may in the long run harm women's career prospects. As the previous chapters emphasize, Nigerian women's position in the family seems to be the ultimate deciding factor in their extra-domestic pursuits. As history has shown, Nigerian women's economic importance does not necessarily translate into more bargaining power in the domestic setting. When labour market options are attractive, their domestic obligations tend to pose a major obstacle. Whereas in the present economic situation, the labour market opportunities are in decline, and women are pushed into the unattractive positions, with family economic pressures against them. In this case, the respondents' career ambitions have taken a back seat to their economic traditional importance in the family. With most of their time spread across domestic and wage work and a side business, the working mothers in the

public sector are left with little time to explore other prospects for advancement.

Of course, the IM angle puts a twist to the story. With IM especially deriving from one's class position, it may be quite "safe" to "take it out on the system." Working mothers with connections in the right places can exploit various openings in the system in response to domestic obligations without endangering their chances of advancement. But given their class position, such women are not likely to be facing financial pressures from the family. Besides, if such women are actually responding to domestic pressures, their career ambitions may not extend beyond the top of the ladder in their present occupation. In the end, IM is essentially a survival strategy in the face of forces beyond women's control, not an option that many women would go out of their way to embrace.

The long term option of further training is a potential exit route. However, what appears to be a positive development has to be examined in light of the prevailing labour market implications. These women are hoping that more education will get them into more lucrative and satisfying careers at a time when education has declined in value as a means of gaining access to the critical (economic, social and political) resources in contemporary society.

A university degree no longer translates into the economic status and social prestige of the past. Not only is more training hardly a guarantee, but also its potential

viability depends on the particular type of training pursued. For instance, in Chapter Five, Uzoamaka's profile reveals that a higher degree in Education may not be a possible solution. For public school employees who have no professional training, an Education degree is crucial for the purposes of promotion or appointment into management positions. The prospects have drastically declined in recent times. Those who pursue professional degrees in Business and Law, have at least extended their options far into male preserves in the private sector.

Similarly, those who pursue this long term strategy also have to come to terms with the gender and class politics involved, which find a base in the ideological construction of wage work. The respondents' statements suggest that educational qualifications are only a basic prerequisite for making it in formal employment. Beyond this basic requirement, a number of factors come in as well. It seems that those with IM (whether through class connections or bottom power), do not have much to worry about in terms of specific qualifications or making it up the ladder. In contrast, those without IM may end up being the losers if they refuse to use their bottom power. As the respondents clearly point out, nobody raises eyebrows any longer over such relationships, but many women do not see this as an option.

The irony here is that the term bottom power casts Nigerian women in a seemingly powerful role. Interestingly,

all the women recognize the vulnerable situation of women who resort to this option, but seem more inclined to project the popular perception. The unequal power relation between men and women appears to be taken for granted. Going by the depth of analysis in existing studies, words like "abuse" and "harassment" do not seem to have made their debut, yet, in conceptualizing the relations of gender in formal work settings. The extent to which bottom power defines the relations of gender in various social settings calls for further research.

On the whole, the analysis in this section reinforces the main emphasis of this study, which is that the prospects of women's formal training and employment in Nigeria need to be reassessed. The liberal (modernization oriented) notion that the acquisition of these assets will guarantee women's emancipation has long been discarded. Present labour market realities have further undermined the claims to economic status and social prestige through higher education. Women must not only redirect their education efforts towards more lucrative fields, but must also prepare themselves for the relations of gender and class in the labour market, which are crucial for their entrance and advancement. In addition, they have their domestic obligations to contend with.

The references to the sexual division of labour in the family clearly indicate that women's domestic responsibilities severely limit their labour market options. So far in our

analysis, we have taken for granted the basis for this familial arrangement. The next chapter focuses on how the married women in the study juggle domestic and wage work, highlighting the ideological construction of the gender division of household tasks.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7.0. BRINGING UP THE REAR: IGBO WORKING MOTHERS AND DOMESTIC LABOUR

The personal profiles of four of the respondents analyzed in Chapter Five highlight the growing marriage/career conflict which has accompanied the expansion of Igbo women's career options in more recent times. This conflict is clearly expressed in Chapter Six by many of the respondents, especially the working mothers, who share some details of their work lives. The women's experiences indicate that domestic responsibilities constrain their labour market options. Similarly, the organization of wage labour, in turn, does not easily lend itself to domestic demands.

This chapter takes a closer look at how the married women in the study juggle domestic work with formal employment. Chapter Two notes that traditionally Igbo women, like their counterparts in most African societies, engaged in productive labour in addition to domestic work. In the pre-colonial era, women's economic activities, notably farming and trading, were crucial to sustaining most agrarian economies in Africa. Although the nature and conditions of their work may have changed over time, it appears that this dual burden also characterizes African women's lives in the contemporary

society (Guyer 1984, 1987; Bujra 1983, Iweriabor 1985).

Unlike women's traditional economic activities, formal employment does not easily accommodate women's domestic obligations. Some scholars argue that most female wage earners in Africa do not have to carry the dual burden of domestic and wage work since they can employ house maids (LIoyd 1974, Bujra 1983, Robertson 1984). But more recent studies question this assertion, pointing out that women's domestication in the African context was a short lived historical experience. They argue further that presently, elite African women cannot be conceptualized as a monolithic group. Many African women who fit this loose description shoulder a substantial part of the burden of domestic labour, regardless of their labour market status and the assistance of housemaids. Thus, the extent to which these elite women can embrace wage labour depends on their capacity to drag the "domestic rear" along (Fapohunda 1982, 1983, Mann 1985, Stichter 1988, 1990:40-45; Okeke 1989:56-60, Parpart 1990).

The analysis of Igbo working mothers' experiences in this chapter moves beyond these arguments. The question here is not only whether or not these women are responsible for a substantial part of domestic work, but also why. Chapter Four examines the basic elements of this structure. The analysis of the respondents' experiences and perceptions indicates that the demands of their primary role are bound up in a subordinate status, which is both materially and ideologically

constructed. In this context, domestic labour is only one expression of this subordinate status, but a very important one. This chapter tries to analyze the ideology and practice of domestic labour, placing them within the wider structure of gender relations in elite Igbo society.

The chapter is divided into three major sections. The first section identifies the reasons why the women in the study engage in wage work, despite the burden of domestic labour. The second section looks at the organization and delivery of domestic labour in the respondents' households. The final section analyzes the ideology and practice of delivery of domestic work, based on the women's stories.

7.1. The Rationale for Economic Work

There are a number of reasons why the respondents combine domestic and wage work. As in the case of other Nigerian women, these women are for the most part legally dependent on their spouses. They have few established rights to property jointly accumulated in marriage. Normally couples do not pool resources and women generally manage their own finances. Thus, the respondents' earnings provide some kind of financial autonomy. These women recognize that without an economic base outside the family, their economic welfare would depend mostly on the survival of the marriage.

Besides their own economic security, Igbo women work to help support the family. As mentioned above, Nigerian women's

economic importance in the family may have declined during periods of economic boom, but their income remains a crucial part of the family budget, especially in more recent times. Women's financial contribution to the family's upkeep not only improves their bargaining position as subordinates, but also helps them to protect their most important investment in the union: children.

For the women in this study especially, work means more than a meal ticket. Beyond the economic imperative, work for this group of highly educated women provides emotional fulfilment and a departure from the monotonous aspects of domestic life. There are twelve married women in the study. Except for Onyeka who was expecting her second baby, they all have at least two children. Their reasons for engaging in wage labour can be adduced from the following responses:

Chika, thirty-eight, is a school teacher and mother of three little girls. She is married to an architect:

> [Nigerian] Men no longer want liabilities. They want women who will be able to help out. In fact, these days, it is the woman's salary that is used to meet most of the immediate domestic needs like food, medical bills, school fees and clothes, while the man keeps his own money for major projects like building a house ....
> I know that as long as I give these girls the best I can afford, a good education, they would grow up to assume all those responsibilities that are normally expected of men. If my husband decides at any time that the marriage has to break up simply because I could not give him a male child,...that is fine by me. I know that I can take care of myself....

Nnenna, thirty-four and a legal manager in a commercial

bank, is married to a professor of Microbiology and has two young daughters:

> A basic attitude of Nigerian men [is that] everything is theirs as long as you're their wife... That bit of economic independence a working woman has helps in resisting these pressures to an extent....

Uju, thirty-eight, is a school teacher. She is married to a senior civil servant and they have five young children:

> Things are very hard in Nigeria today and many families cannot make ends meet. Women with [university] degrees would most certainly look for jobs... to be fairly independent also....
>
> To tell you the truth, although I'm also concerned about my husband's welfare, I try extra hard because of my children..., to give them whatever they need as long as I can afford it... I don't earn much, but I struggle to keep them healthy and to see to it that they get a good education.

Ifeyinwa, thirty-eight and a civil servant, is the mother of five children. She is married to a business man. She does not hide her cynicism regarding the "bliss" of full-time domesticity in the Nigerian context. Couples neither manage financial resources jointly nor have equal access to the "family purse." The unemployed wife is therefore at the mercy of the breadwinner who controls the purse strings:

> It is not that I earn much, but I think that a woman really has to keep busy and also, have some financial independence. You cannot depend one hundred per cent on a man. If you want one naira (Nigeria's currency) toilet paper, you go to him. If you want five naira lip stick, you go to him... I also think it is a good idea for women to get out of the house from time to time and not get stuck there because she is looking after the children.

Chinelo is thirty, an accountant in a commercial bank and

the mother of two children. Her husband is a wealthy businessman and does not even want her to work. But she views the situation differently:

> I believe it is quite boring just staying at home taking care of kids... Of course, he [husband] doesn't see what I'm making out of my job. I know I'm comfortable, but I can't abandon my career. I love banking and would like to make something of it. You have to think of the future, something to work towards beyond a husband and kids.

Uchenna, the only single woman who discussed this issue at length, appears to capture the unanimous impression quite succinctly. She is thirty-four and a senior accountant in another commercial bank:

> There is no question about a woman not working in this country. The man [husband] might be able to provide all your needs now, [but] what about tomorrow? What if he dies?... What will I fall back on? You know how it is in Nigeria. Even if the money is there most men don't often discuss their investments with their wives. In many cases, the wife will not know the extent of his business dealings... And sometimes, even if a man left his estate to the wife on the event of death, the brothers, sisters and mother-in-law, will make sure they wrest control from her and make her beg for whatever she needs...
> Yes, I know that there might be some women who are living in luxury on account of their husband's wealth..., but let's face it, such women are few. In any case, one has to think of tomorrow... I don't feel comfortable with not having my own money. You know... going to your husband for everything. It's unthinkable for a woman who has proper qualifications not to work in this country.

Wage labour provides these women with a source of income outside the direct control of men, and the opportunity to fulfil some of the needs stated above. However, their capacity

to embrace wage labour depends on how much room their domestic role leaves them.

7.2. The Organization of Domestic Labour: Who Does What?

Chapter Six highlights some of the conflicts the working mothers face in trying to combine domestic and wage work. In the labour market they face rigid work periods without part-time/job sharing alternatives and an inefficient transport system. Their resort to "cracks" in the system is, in part, due to the inadequacy of existing work policies (such as maternity leave and break periods for nursing mothers) to respond to inflexible domestic demands.

This section looks at how the women organize domestic labour in order to deal with these conflicts. Most of the interviews took place in the women's homes. Knowing that their conception of domestic work may not include some tasks, the researcher noted her own observations as they described their daily activities. For the most part, the juggling act appears successful and where the "rear" slips, as it does from time to time, it is not due to lack of effort. From my observations, these women in most cases work from morning till night. They wake up very early, some as early as five in the morning. They seemed to be always doing something every time I visited, even during our interviews. It was either a pot of rice cooking on the stove or the maid interrupting with the shopping list for dinner before leaving for the nearby evening market. Of

course, the children were always around and "keeping an eye on them" was not really seen as work.

Essentially, the same questions were posed to each respondent. These questions included a description of their work-day routine, weekend routines, what specific domestic tasks entailed and the division of tasks among family members (see interview guide in Appendix B). However, some of the information slipped out either when the women were discussing other aspects of their lives or when they were asked to clarify earlier statements. As the data on their domestic lives grew with each interview, some common themes began to emerge. These common themes were employed to build the composite picture presented in Table 7.2

Table 7.2 describes the division of tasks in the women's households. As pointed out in Chapter Six, the private sector workers have a longer work day (8.30am/9am - 4.30pm/5pm, officially) than public school teachers (7.30am - 2.30pm) and civil servants (7.30am - 3.30pm). Three of the women work in the private sector, including Alice, who runs her own private legal practice. Four of the women are civil servants and the rest are teachers. Domestic work is mainly shared among the women, the house maids and daycare centres.

Domestic work in the women's households involves mainly childcare and housework. Although often ignored, domestic work in Nigeria includes the care of relatives from both sides of the extended family. From the table, it is evident that men do

very little at home. Husbands' assistance tends to be restricted to non-repetitive tasks (household repairs) or on occasions when the woman is ill or otherwise unavailable. Given the limited service provided by day care facilities, live-in maids are needed to maintain the balance between domestic and wage work. However, it appears that the respondents carry out a substantial part of the tasks. The children do not seem to help out much. Three of the women had grown daughters, but they are either in unversity or not living at home. In any case, these grown up children do not seem to be appreciably involved in domestic work.[46]

As Fapohunda (1982) notes the supply of housemaids from less privileged relatives has remarkably thinned down in recent times. According to the working mothers in the study, most of the maids who are non relatives are employed on a contractual basis. Only three out of the twelve married respondents reported having maids who are either related to them or their husbands. Most of the maids either attend school or train for vocations such as sewing and hair dressing for about six to eight hours every week day.[47] Except for

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[46] Stichter (1988:199) in her study of similar households in Kenya suggests that "the low level of child participation is mainly attributable to the competing demands of schooling, but may also be related to the increasing complexity of household tasks."

[47] According to the respondents, there are actually nearby towns noted for supplying maids. Often the women or their husbands go through middle men and women who take them to respective families. Schooling is one of the conditions for acquiring a maid. It is still possible to hire maids and pay them on a monthly or bi-weekly basis. However, it is likely that most elite families cannot afford the cost, especially with the increasing decline of the value of wage income. More importantly, those in the less privileged classes are realizing the

Chinelo, the accountant with two children, none of the women have a full-time maid on salary. According to the respondents, two maids are normally required to share the tasks since one maid will often be at school during working hours. It must be noted that what is reported as the maid's portion of the domestic work may, in reality, be shared by two maids.

At the time of the interviews, seven of the nine women had two maids each, four had one maid each and one woman was in-between maids. Where both maids were enroled in any kind of formal training, each attended either the morning or afternoon session. For working mothers with infants, this arrangement ensured that someone stayed with the children during working hours.

Table 7.2. Gender Division of Household Tasks: Weekly Schedule

Weekends	Time	Public Workers	Private Workers	Maid	Spouse
Friday	5:30pm - 10:pm	childcare supper, bulk cooking, meals	childcare supper, meals	childcare cooking ingredts. meals	____
Saturday	6:am - 11: pm	childcare cleaning, laundry, bulk shopping/ cooking, meals, socials	childcare cleaning, laundry, bulk shopping/ cooking meals, socials	childcare cleaning, laundry, Assist in cooking meals	house repair car wash & repair

importance of women's education and many parents stipulate at least some kind of vocational training for their daughters/wards employed as maids. A few of the maids are extended family relatives who provide domestic services for the elite family, who pay for their training.

Sunday	7:am - 10:pm	childcare bulk cooking, meals, socials, weekday schedule	childcare bulk cooking, meals, socials, weekday schedule	childcare meals	____
Weekday	5:30am- 7:30am	Light house cleaning, childcare meals, noon-snack, school-run	Light house cleaning, meals, childcare noon snack, school-run	Light house cleaning, meals	____
	8:am - 12 noon	work hours	work hours	cleaning, Laundry, meals, childcare shopping,	____
	12noon - 1:pm	snack, school run, shopping	snack, school run	childcare	____
	2:30pm - 3:30pm	end of workday	work hours	childcare	____
	3:pm - 5:30pm	shopping, dinner, rest, supper,	work hours	childcare	____
	4:30pm - 8:pm	supper, children homework, school supplies	end of workday, supper childcare shopping	light-cooking, childcare	____
	8:pm - 11:pm	children homework, next day schedule leisure, childcare	children homework next day schedule leisure, childcare	generally assist	____

7.3. Caring for Family Members

The women's domestic responsibilities can be analyzed from the point of view of the main agents who benefit from their labour - infants and children under five years old, school-aged children, relatives and husbands. The care of relatives is left out of the composite picture intentionally. Some of the women did not have extended family relatives living with them at the time of the interview. For a few, it was an off-and-on occurrence. Instead of attempting to represent every circumstance, the researcher decided to include this aspect only in the analysis.

7.3.1. Care of Infants and Children under Five Years Old.

The working mother shares childcare with the maids and day care facilities. There are hardly any daycare centres for infants. The care of infants involves a lot of washing and cleaning.[48] Cloth diapers are more commonly used in Nigeria and maids normally do the washing. None of the respondents report ever having used disposal diapers. However, the washing and sterilization of infants' feeding units (bottles,

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[48] Working mothers also benefit from traditional child rearing practices notably the "omugwo". In Igbo culture, a mother or any other older woman available (eg: mother-in-law, auntie) is expected to come and live with and assist the young woman in caring for a new infant for a period as long as a month or more after childbirth (Amadiume 1987:76). For older women, this is regarded as an honour and most women will invite their own mother if she is available. This cultural practice may die with younger generations as more women enter the labour force. For instance, two of the respondents' mothers are formally employed. During omugwo periods they have to settle for part-time assistance from them or from their mother-in-law.

the working mothers prefer to perform most of the tasks related to an infant's feeding, baths and dressing mainly for safety and hygiene purposes. They do not feel the maids can handle such responsibilities and the reasons for this will be addressed later in the section on maids.

For some of the mothers with infants, their daily lives can be chaotic. Chidimma's story (in Chapter Six) gives an idea of how chaotic the childbearing years can be. Often, their work schedules merge with the domestic routine, especially when they have to leave work to go and nurse the baby. Those without private transport have to deal with the inefficient transport system. Besides, for what they are paid, the civil servants are not particulary motivated to bear such inconvenience.

Day care facilities are few and the services offered very limited. In most cases, children have to be at least two years old before they are admitted. Minor ailments often mean children have to stay at home with the maid or their mother. Most of the respondents have children either in the school system or in day care centres. The younger children stay with the maids during working hours.

Even with the maid's assistance, it is often difficult, particularly for nursing mothers, to fit childcare into rigid work schedules. For instance, the respondents are the ones who stay at home when a child is ill and needs the attention of a parent. Moreover, health care delivery is inadequate and

inefficient, and time spent taking children to the clinic or hospital can easily run into hours. This appears to be a common problem faced by working mothers, at least in Southern Nigeria. For instance, Fapohunda (1983:8, 1982:282) makes the same observation in the case of female wage earners in Lagos including university professors.

It has been pointed out in Chapter 4 that childbearing is seen as the Igbo woman's primary responsibility. Their careers should be secondary. Meeting the requirements of this crucial responsibility (i.e., having a child, a male heir, a certain number of children, etc.) means that often career ambitions and the particular demands of present employment wage work may be compromised. As Chidimma admitted, while the work is tiring, public sector employment is perhaps the most convenient work for them, at least in their child bearing years.

7.3.2. Care of School-aged Children.

Part of the working mother's morning schedule includes preparing the children for the day, especially the younger ones, making breakfast and lunch packs. The maids assist with some of the specific tasks involved. The working mother not only participates, but has to supervise the entire operation. On weekdays, working mothers who have personal cars usually take the children to school and fetch them in the afternoon (school run). Seven out of the nine women with school age

children have their own personal cars. The husbands of the other two women do the school run.

Moreover, the respondents attend mainly to issues concerning the children's schooling such as children's school needs (e.g. fees, uniforms and books)[49], Parent/Teacher Association (P.T.A.) meetings, sports competitions, homework, purchasing school supplies. In addition, the women are mainly responsible for the children's social life. According to the respondents, not many social activities involve the whole nuclear family. The respondents organize in many cases for their children parties (e.g. birthdays), visits to relatives and family friends and to public parks.

7.3.3. Care of relatives.

In addition to caring for their children, most of the respondents have to cater to members of the extended family either occasionally or on a regular basis. Extended family members may help out with domestic work, but they also tend to exert more financial strain on the family. Besides, relatives prove quite a challenge to the working women who have to cope with many concerns within and outside the home. Onyeka, a young mother in her early thirties, had three of her husband's relatives staying in her home barely two years into her marriage:

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[49] Husband may actually provide the fees and the money for purchasing these items.

> As much as one getting married would expect to have a family to cater for, a family that would enlarge over time, sudden increase without planning gets you destabilised, for some time. That is the part that worries me. Ideally, you need to plan for large families. [However] it's one thing to plan for the children and the maid, it's another thing to plan for adults. Sometimes, you can't concentrate at work, thinking about the family, how to make ends meet....

Parents-in-law are top priority according to the women. Chika describes a typical work day schedule when her mother-in- law is visiting:

> I go in to greet her first thing in the morning... and inform her (after instructing the maid) that the maid will attend to her whenever she is ready for food and bath. When I come back from work, I have to make out time to chat with her... I might suggest a visit to some relatives and if she wants, take her myself. It is also nice to buy on your way from work, fruits and other little things you know she likes. And then you have to shop for the items she might like to go home with.
> ... My husband comes [back] when the woman is already in bed. The only time he stays with her will be when he is preparing for work. He may chat with her for about thirty minutes. [In fact], mothers tend to spend more time with their daughter-in-law.

Iruka, thirty-two, a school teacher and mother of one little girl, had to nurse a dying father-in-law:

> He was very sick and bed-ridden. He took an entire room and we [husband, daughter and maid] had to squeeze into the other room. It wasn't easy. By culture, I should not complain, but sometimes I did, venting my anger on my husband. I'm human! He did understand though. He consoled me reminding me that it will be for just a while.

7.3.4. Husbandcare

As pointed out at the beginning of the chapter, Igbo women's responsibility for domestic work is bound up in the ideologies surrounding their familial status. Husbandcare is deeply routed in these ideologies and will be reviewd in more detail later in the chapter.

All the respondents agree that there are certain tasks that under no circumstances should be delegated to the maid, notably soup preparation. According to them, this is one of those tasks a woman must perform as wife to the head of the household. Christie, the forty-nine year old assistant director with two children states:

> Of course, that is the period in your life that it is absolutely necessary you be the one to do it. Most men won't eat soup prepared by the maid.

Onyeka, the civil servant with a young daughter, confirms this view:

> When I'm sick, I still manage to cook at least the soup. My husband is very particular about that. As far as he is concerned, I have to be the one to prepare the soup. I can't remember ever falling so sick and not being able to cook the soup.

The respondents are especially careful about the personal care of their spouses. For instance, they are expected to serve their husbands' meals except if they are ill or at work. Veronica, fifty-five and a school principal, comments:

> If he[my husband] is around, I wouldn't stay here and let the girl [maid] cook. If both of us are watching TV and the girl is cooking, he wouldn't like that. He would rather I finish with the cooking, first, before coming to relax in the

> living room. They also want to be served by the wife. If I'm tired, I could let her boil the rice or yam, but never the soup....He would still like to see that I care about what he eats. The fact that I 'm a principal has nothing to do with my responsibilities at home.

These observations will be critically analyzed in the section on domestic labour ideology.

7.4. Managing the Household

This section takes a look at the range of tasks associated with managing the household. The tasks are grouped under cooking, shopping for food, cleaning and planning for social activities. In performing all these tasks, the woman is the prime organizer. Besides her own share of the tasks, she is fundamentally responsible for making sure that the rest are accomplished and properly too. Combining domestic and wage work requires careful planning and scheduling, especially at a time when the condition of basic infrastructures, such as electricity and water supply, have deteriorated. For instance, all the respondents mention the endemic problem of an unreliable power supply which does not allow for planning ahead or keeping bulk supplies. In many cases, this means more frequent cooking, more trips to the market and provisions for alternative fuel, than would have been previously required.

7.4.1. Cooking

A good part of food processing and most of its preparation is still done within the family. Even in an urban

centre like Enugu, most of the respondents and their families have virtually all their meals at home, except for midday snacks at the office. Cooking is made more tedious by the fact that the basic ingredients for food preparation like vegetables, meat and fish, often are not packaged for ready use. Moreover, the respondents only have available to them basic labour saving devices such as refrigerators, electric/gas cookers or kerosine stoves and blenders. Often, domestic tasks such as pounding fou fou, grinding pepper and doing the laundry have to be done manually in most of these families.

As shown in Table 7.3, working mothers do most of the cooking. On their part, maids are responsible for a substantial part of the cleaning schedule. Husbands' assistance is negligible. Usually, the working mothers make out a cleaning and cooking schedules with their housemaids. Bulk cooking,[50] general household cleaning and scheduling for the next work week, usually take place over the weekend. As most of the women point out, the weekend is the only time they have to tie all the loose ends accumulated over the work week. It is also a time to give the family a "treat" to compensate for their absence on weekdays.

Simpler cooking tasks are delegated to maids, especially during the work week. However, the women do the bulk cooking that will sustain the family throughout the work week. Bulk

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[50] That is, cooking that will last for most of the week days.

cooking starts from Friday evening. Most of the respondents make two pots of soup and one of stew.[51] Usually the maid will prepare the ingredients (eg: grind pepper, crush tomatoes, peel onions, wash the utensils needed).

7.4.2. Shopping for Food

Where the ingredients required are not available at home, the working mother has to do the bulk shopping on Saturdays. Maids may help to carry purchases to the car during shopping. Some of the respondents say that their spouses may purchase bulk supplies such as rice and beans during their visits to the village.[52] Shopping presents a serious problem to the working woman who may not only have to combine the weekly bulk shopping with a heavy cleaning schedule, but also must buy perishables on a daily basis. Maids can only purchase some of the items and, in most cases, the respondents shop three out of the five working days. Those in the civil service can "stretch" their lunch hour to squeeze in some shopping. Onyeka, the civil servant with two young daughters, explains:

> The break period is about the only time I have to go to the market. Every female civil servant does it. Even our ogas [bosses] know about it, but they understand. In fact, some of them who are not

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[51] The soup goes with "fou fou", a porridge which can be made from cassava, yam, maize and other starch staples. Stew is used for rice, beans, plantain.

[52] The nature of the items to be purchased dictates the shopping schedule. For instance, items such as rice and beans are usually bought on a yearly or bi-annual basis. Other items such as meat and onions could be purchased monthly in bulk and shared with other women. In fact, working mothers tend to form a kind of office "co-op" for such bulk purchases.

living with their wives often send their typists to get them foodstuff at the local market.

Working mothers in the private sector have no such privilege. Usually, they shop after working hours on their way home. According to them, their schedules are closely monitored by their superiors. Given the high rate of unemployed and the attractive conditions of service in this sector, they cannot afford to endanger their jobs.

7.4.3. House Cleaning and Laundry

General cleaning on Saturday mornings may start as early as five-thirty. Most of the respondents take care of their bedroom, living room and delicate laundry[53]. The grown children clean their own rooms. The maid is largely responsible for cleaning the kitchen, bathroom and the rest of the laundry. In many cases, the working mother co-ordinates the cleaning schedule as she carries out the bulk cooking. The schedule is often interrupted to prepare the family meals for the day. Except for making home repairs, or washing some of their own laundry, husbands do not generally participate in housework.

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[53] Often, the maids are not conversant with the washing instructions for delicate fabrics. Moreover, some of them are quite young and may not be able to do very heavy laundry or clean what respondents consider to be the important areas in the house to their satisfaction. The working mothers also prefer to wash the couple's underwear. They consider underwear very personal, pointing out that their husbands would equally frown at passing this responsibility to the maid.

7.4.4. Socializing

The Saturday schedule usually ends around 3.pm to make way for social events. Apart from socializing with their children, the respondents may attend social events like weddings, christenings and funeral ceremonies, with their spouses. Often these events involve a lot of work, although the respondents do not always see them that way. In fact, most of them mention various events in passing, simply as social outings and gatherings. However, when asked to describe exactly what takes place, it becomes evident that in many cases they take part in organising these events. For social gatherings involving close friends or relatives, the respondents may have to go ahead of their spouses to help out with the preparations. When couples attend these events, the Saturday schedule tends to extend to Sunday after the church service.

The efficiency of the work week schedule depends on how much preparation has already been done over the weekend. Maids act mainly as deputies during the work days. Working women may delegate simpler cooking tasks to them such as the preparation of fou fou, rice or plantain. Maids may also handle catering to the children, the spouse and cleaning up while the respondents are at work.

7.5. Maids: Limits to their Assistance

Earlier studies seem to confuse two issues - elite women's involvement in domestic labour and the exploitation of housemaids. This section attempts to clarify some of the arguments surrounding these issues. It highlights, foremost, some of the limitations of employing maids, because these are part of the reasons why elite women are compelled to shoulder this burden. The organization and delivery of domestic labour discussed in this chapter clearly shows that the respondents do combine wage work with a substantial part of domestic labour.

It is important to note that by virtue of their background, house maids are not very conversant with the quality of service demanded in elite homes. For instance, the standard of hygiene is higher in the cities than in the villages because social amenities such as water and electricity are readily available in the former. As Rose, fifty-seven, an assistant director in a government department points out, "If you want your moi moi sand free, you have to do it yourself."

Besides, in most cases, housemaids do not provide full time service. As pointed out earlier, many of them attend formal training of various kinds daily for at least six hours. Moreover, in many cases the maids are relatively young and there is a limit to what help they can render in the household. They may only handle basic tasks often under the

supervision of the working mother. Maids may not be trusted with large sums of money because of their age, especially in the harsh economic times when available finances have to be stretched to cover household needs. The non relatives particularly, have to earn the trust of their employers over time.

As Fapohunda (1982:279) points out (see Chapter Two) older women may not readily leave the peace and quiet of village life to become city nannies. Older girls are not preferable because they may prove to be more difficult to control and more expensive to maintain than younger girls. Maids who are family relatives may have a freer reign than non relatives. They have to be handled with care in order to avoid any bad feelings among members of the extended family, especially where such ties are still relatively strong.

In general, there is a high turnover rate of maids in elite households, especially where the female wage earner is still in her childbearing years. One of the respondents explains that maids tend to avoid employment in such homes because of the heavy domestic work entailed.

Besides the quality of service provided, some of the respondents also worry about the maids' influence on their children. Such influence stems from their general demeanour, which does not appeal to the elite person. For instance, many

of the maids speak the more comfortable "pidgin"[54] English to the children. Female wage earners do not feel comfortable with the long periods of time their children spend with maids (Stichter 1988:196-200).

Evidently, having housemaids does not free these women from a substantial part of their domestic work. Even with the maid's help, the working mother drags the domestic rear along with wage employment.

Despite these limitations, the claim by Bujra (1983) and other writers that elite African women still need housemaids in order to engage in wage labour, still stands. Indeed, it is clear from table 7.3 that, despite the respondents' share of the burden, maids are crucial to maintaining a balance between domestic obligations and the demands of wage work. Moreover, in terms of the rewards these maids receive in return, they are no doubt exploited. The employment of maids does not in any way change the gender division of domestic work, but it is one way of maintaining class divisions among women at present. This class division cannot be overlooked simply because it allows some women to participate in wage labour.

However, these studies go too far in placing the burden of maid exploitation solely on elite women. The origin of this exploitation must not be confused. Maids are exploited not merely as a cheap pool of labour for elite women. Given their

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[54] A corrupt form of the English language often spoken by the less educated and commonly used in public places such as open markets, motor parks and bus stops.

social background, they often have no better options than to become housemaids. It is important to recognize that to most of these maids, this option is a step closer to a better life. Their exploitation is reinforced by their lack of skills, since many of them are relatively young and can only provide a limited range of service. In terms of relative exploitation, one also has to consider the respondents' remuneration.

Earlier studies do not go beyond the "maid/madam" relationship to place domestic labour within the wider malestream social arrangement that created this hierarchy. As Bujra points out, (1983:31) male domestic servants were quite prevalent in most African cities during the colonial period. In Nigeria, housemaids have replaced "houseboys" over the past twenty years as men moved on to more lucrative areas. The maid issue can therefore be seen as part of the on-going trend of ghettoizing women, the analysis of which tends to focus only on more formal work settings.

7.6. The Domestic Labour Ideology

Most of the respondents believe that the unequal gender division of labour in the household, if not natural, cannot be easily changed. Although many voice their discontent with the situation, they made it clear that they are not in a position to question men's non-involvement in domestic work. Nnenna, the legal manager comments:

> I guess we're made to withstand more stress [than men]. Even as kids, we know that women have to work

> more around the home. As you grow up, society cushions the impact and nothing comes as a surprise. Here in Nigeria everyone accepts that men must be men.

Christie, forty-nine, an assistant director in a government department and mother of two young children, argues:

> We are raised in this country and we are used to the hardships. The Nigerian man does not do anything at home... Somehow, I know that women are cheated and that our men are not being reasonable. You care for the children, you do the household chores, you go to work. Once in a while, you find some of them being sympathetic and helping out, but generally, they don't. They think that it's your role, your job and you must do it. I know that women are cheated most of the time. I really feel sad about it, but even over the years, I haven't observed any changes.
> Once in a while you...point out to him that this is not fair. We [women] do talk about it, but there hasn't been any concerted action as a group. Once again, we see tradition coming into the equation. It's the woman's place to take care of the home. Of course, when you push too far they say you're a feminist, that you want to convert the man into a maid. But I can tell you that women are not happy about it. They are complaining, but we haven't been able to take any action. We don't want to be branded feminists.

Christie fears being branded the "man" in the family. She is more highly placed in the civil service than her husband and it is important for her to project a subordinate stance in the domestic setting to give the impression that her qualifications and position at work have not "gone to her head." As she humorously points out, "Yes, I may be his boss in the office, but in this house he will remind me that he is the master."

The respondents accept the fact that the society views

the domestic domain as their responsibility. The married woman's economic importance is recognized only to the extent that this does not threaten the gender equation at home. Chika, the school teacher with three young daughters, states:

> You know that in this environment, the man is not interested in how you cope or what you are going through to be able to get the home running smoothly. All he cares is that he gets his meals on time. He is not interested in the fact that you have to wake up at 2 a.m. in order to do this.
>
> ... The typical Igbo man does not bother with such [domestic concerns]. He sees them as the woman's responsibility and if he has to help out on occasions, you have to really talk to him and explain why you cannot do it yourself. That way, he is sure you know it is your responsibility. So he does it for that day and shifts it back to you. (p.10)

Nnenna, the legal manager, gives one of those instances when her husband, a professor of Microbiology, would expect her to defer to his own professional expectations. His feelings about her career underscore the point made in Chapter Six that employers know where the working mother's loyalty lies. He apparently expects such an understanding in his wife's case:

> ... He [husband] objects when [my career] gets in the way. There was this day I came home late and he asked me to go and tell my employers that I'm a married woman and that I have a family to look after... Of course, I felt very bad. I said to him, "When you go to work or on one of those your research trips, I'm often very supportive and concerned about how they turn out, but when it comes to me, it's another story."

Uju, the school teacher with five children argues, in the same vein, that many Igbo female wage earners often end up

against their own personal convictions in jobs compatible with their domestic duties:

> I'm telling you this. It's a fact that's affecting a lot of women... They're influenced by their husbands. As for what they actually want to do, these women will do something different left on their own.

The gender division of labour in the elite household points to the conditions under which women are allowed to gain status in the malestream social order. Contrary to the materialist emphasis in marxist-based analysis, these women do not take on the burden of domestic work simply because they are economically dependent on their husbands. Four of the women are in senior positions, earning substantially higher incomes than some of their male peers. As is evident in Chapter Eight, each of the twelve women devotes a significant proportion of her income to family upkeep.

The analysis of the gender division of domestic labour in these households has to be placed within the larger structure of gender relations outlined in Chapter Four. The latter stresses the fact that, regardless of their economic status, these women are primarily subordinates in the marital union. They have a list of requirements to meet. Domestic labour is merely a part of these requirements, but unlike a male heir for instance, it is an on-going requirement. The division of domestic work is bound up with the responsibilities a wife has to her husband, her husband's people, her own family (who has to ensure they bring up a marriageable daughter) and to the

malestream society. Fapohunda (1982:281) reiterates Caldwell's (1976) point that:

> A significant redefinition of conjugal roles with increased sharing of domestic duties may require, as a precondition, the development of stronger nuclear families with closer emotional ties between spouses... The Nigerian extended family deliberately depreciated emotional relationships between spouses because it was important for family solidarity that the husband give primary consideration to the wishes of his kin rather than of his spouse. If a husband attempted to assist his spouse with "female" domestic tasks, his mother or kin would intervene and would warn him of the unnatural influence of his spouse[55]

It is also pertinent that the underlying power relationship between the spouses not be overlooked. The responses of the women clearly suggest that there is a connection between the services they provide at home and their marital security. Preparing soup, for instance, is not just one of the chores necessary in order to make it through the work week. Admittedly, it is in part, an expression of affection to a spouse. Underlying this food-love connection, however, is a clear recognition of the women's subordinate position and the requirements this position entails.

The conception of domestic labour as a women's domain shields and legitimizes the exemption of men from participation. It tends to create a facade which trivializes the sheer difficulty of the work involved, given the limited range of labour saving devices available, which may discourage men's participation. In fact, the women's description of

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[55] In Caldwell (1976:107).

husbandcare almost idealizes what they do, projecting it as a labour of love rather than of work (Luxton 1980). But it has to be recognized that the benefits accruing from this labour are not equally shared between spouses (Chodorow 1979:96-97). This is even more so where, for the most part, they do not pool resources together.

The availability of maids actually distorts the central argument for gender equity in the sharing of domestic work. The impression is created that maids solve the problem of domestic work. Meanwhile, the gender division further pushes this responsibility on to women. The respondents' experiences clearly show that maids are not the solution to an unequal division of domestic work which is bolstered by extensive patriarchal structures.

With the present organization of wage labour, maids remain the most convenient option for Nigerian female wage earners. It seems that as the traditional support system for domestic work crumbles, Igbo women like those in the West, tend to resort to alternatives that will not upset the patriarchal structure of the family. While Igbo working mothers enlist the help of housemaids, their Western counterparts shift some of the burden to a feminized and underpaid capitalist work force. None of these alternatives results in any appreciable restructuring of the domestic relations of gender.

The use of maids as a stop gap measure does not

significantly upset the nature of husbandcare and should also be weighed in the light of the present economic situation. Men's acceptance of this arrangement may have more to do with the need for a second wage to meet the family budget, than with their appreciation of their wife's career ambitions. The analysis so far has taken for granted how women's income affects the distribution of responsibilities and entitlements in the household. Based on the respondents' experiences, the next chapter re-examines the prevailing perception of women's income as an economic base outside the direct control of men; a source of bargaining power for them in the domestic arena.

CHAPTER EIGHT
8.0. WHAT HAPPENS TO WOMEN'S EARNINGS?: THE GENDER DIVISION OF FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND ENTITLEMENTS IN THE NUCLEAR HOUSEHOLD.

Based on interviews with the twelve working mothers in the study, this chapter reexamines the link between Igbo women's formal employment earnings and their financial security. It is true that the respondents have a customary right to manage their own finances and, to some extent, they exercise this right. But this financial autonomy is embedded within a structure of gender relations. Indeed, it is the structure of gender relations within the household that actually shapes the division of responsibilities and entitlements between spouses. The nature of women's responsibilities largely determines how they spend their earnings and the degree of control they can have over their finances.

This chapter takes a critical look at how the married respondents manage their finances. The first section of the chapter examines the concept of separate resource structures (non pooling of income) as it is practised in the respondents' households. The second section focuses on the distribution of financial responsibilities and entitlements between the women and their spouses. The final section analyzes the implications

of this arrangement to women's personal autonomy both as wives and as individuals. The experiences of these women are analyzed in the light of the present economic situation, which has created additional financial burden for them in the household.

8.1. Separate Resource Structures (SRS)

The practice of separate resource structures (SRS) is briefly addressed in Chapter One. It is noted that women in pre-colonial Nigeria contributed to the family's upkeep, but did not generally pool resources together with their spouse. However, women's financial autonomy was tied to their relationship with men and their economic importance in the family hinged on their primary responsibility for children. Without any established rights in marriage, women's property or earnings was in principle owned by their husband. With no direct access to the means of production in either their natal or marital families, women's income was indirectly controlled by men, who allocated farming plots (Guyer 1984, 1987; Robertson and Berger 1986, Iweriabor 1985). In contrast, the means to women's wage earnings is not directly within men's control. The source of women's earnings therefore introduces a different perspective to the notion of SRS.

Many studies have shown that the gender division of financial responsibilities in African elite circles still retain certain features of SRS (Oppong 1974, Lewis 1982:257-

268, Stichter 1988:188-193). This practice (in whatever form it takes) appears to be perpetuated by the conflicting loyalties elite couples have to deal with. These conflicts create mixed feelings about SRS among men and women, depending on their individual circumstances. Based on the respondents' experiences, this section weighs the benefits and caveats of this practice for both husbands and wives.

8.1.1. SRS: On the Part of Educated Male Elites

For elite husbands, SRS may prove beneficial in a number of ways. First, SRS can shield them from having to make joint decisions on financial matters with their spouses. The men are already vested with most of the decision making powers (Karanja 1988). Besides, they usually earn higher incomes than their wives. The elite husband may not feel comfortable giving up his dominant position in return for a partnership of some sort.

Moreover, conjugal decisions over finances may expose the elite husband's own personal interests, especially those which conflict with their commitments to the nuclear family. Igbo men often face the conflict of providing financially for the nuclear family as well as for their immediate and extended natal family. Caring for one's aged parents is a good example. Chika, in her late thirties, a civil servant and mother of three little girls explains:

> Men would rather not have you nose into their business. My husband tries not to involve me in

> discussions about giving [financial] assistance to his family. He feels that if I get to know what he gives them, I might start complaining that all the money is being pushed to his people. That might not be the case, but often times, that's where the trouble starts...

Almost every one of the respondents indicates that her husband sends a monthly allowance to either his mother and/or father, but only one woman knew the specific amount.

Extra- (and semi-) marital affairs also represent another aspect of conflicting interests that elite Igbo men would like to keep to themselves. The responses of women in this study (in Chapter Four) indicate that extra-marital liaisons are not unusual among elite Igbo men who normally try to keep their tracks covered. Some men in monogamous marriages may have "outside wives." Such relationships could result in the birth of children who traditionally belong to the man. Even if such unions are not formalized in the strict sense of the word, the men would usually provide some form of financial support for their "outside family" (Fapohunda 1982:280). As respondents emphasize in Chapter Four, such appendages are the man's business. He is expected to deal with it in such a manner that it does not become detrimental to the welfare of his wife and children.

Despite the privileges SRS may allow elite men, they have a number of caveats. Foremost is the reality that their control on wage-earning wives may be limited. According to the respondents, a highly educated wife with a lucrative job represents an even stronger threat to the elite man's

unquestioned dominant status in the household. Nnenna, thirty-four, a legal manager with two young children argues:

> You know... I think for most Nigerian men, an educated wife,... a [university] graduate wife, is a threat. They will not openly admit this, but it often comes out in their behaviour... They will say things like, "Why are you so proud? Are you the only lawyer around here?" Yes, I'm a threat to him [my husband], even to his relatives [elder siblings]... Often, he will try to impress this upon me by putting his foot down during arguments no matter how unreasonable his stand is....

Rose, fifty-seven and mother of three grown children, looks back over the years. An assistant director in a public department; she was one of the few Igbo female university graduates of the early 1960s. She joined the civil service in 1962 with a degree in history and subsequently got married. Her early marital experience is very revealing:

> The Nigerian man still feels that he owns the woman...He is not ready to accept you [his wife] as a partner. You don't count as a person at all in equality terms. Many of us resisted pressures to surrender our pay checks. Do you know that there are still some Nigerian women who are forced to do that?...at least in my knowledge, up till the 1970s. I know of a lady in a school here at Enugu who was repeatedly beaten up by her husband whenever she refused to hand over her salary. She was even a [university] graduate. ...My husband tried to do that, but I was adamant. In fact, I saw this as an achievement because in those days, the moment you entered into the [marriage] contract, you'd be asked to explain what you did with your salary. I made it clear to my husband then that he should forget the marriage if he was interested in my money. I was allowed to spend my own money the way I chose... The Nigerian man has not reached the point where he can sit down together with his wife, put their resources together.

Indeed, more than their wives, elite men are expected to provide financially for their nuclear and extended families.

They may therefore view their wives financial "freedom" differently. Of course, the women's primary commitment is with their children. Nevertheless, a potential conflict exists regarding the manner in which they choose to distribute their earnings between nuclear and extra-nuclear demands. Not being able to exert enough control over his wife's income means that some form of negotiation must take place before he can gain access to her funds.

8.1.2. SRS: On the Part of Female Wage Earners

SRS may prove advantageous to female wage earners in a numbers of ways. Elite women are essentially subordinates in the union and an economic base outside their husbands' direct control is likely to strengthen their bargaining position in the household. The respondents, themselves, have stressed in the previous chapters the need for women to maintain some degree of personal financial independence. Nnenna, the legal manager, echoes the feelings of the younger respondents in the study:

> It's a basic attitude of Nigerian men. Everything that belongs to a wife is theirs. As long as you're their wife you should be dependent on them. That bit of economic independence a working woman has helps in resisting the pressures to some extent....

Most importantly, Nigerian women's control of their earned income is crucial to the protection of their most important investment in the marriage: children. The analysis in Chapter Four indicates that although by custom, men "own"

the children, the primary responsibility for their welfare usually falls on women. In any case, regardless of their spouses' commitment to the welfare of their children, elite women, by virtue of their vulnerable position in marriage, know very well which party is the stronger ally.

It is also noted in Chapter Four that Igbo women maintain strong ties with their relatives, which often involve the exchange of gifts and money. The highly educated female wage earner is in a very good position to foster these ties with financial resources at her disposal. The support of relatives in turn strengthens her bargaining power in the marital household. Chika, the civil servant and mother of three children puts it this way:

> Being a woman [subordinate], you want to help your relatives without giving your husband the impression that every kobo you earn goes to your family. For instance, you don't tell your husband that you purchased "George" [women's cloth wrap] for your mother. He might not be happy to hear that. If you begin to inform him whenever you give some assistance to your family you might be asking for trouble. In fact, he might even begin to think that you're spending the family's allowance on them... To make sure that you don't get into all that, you do your own thing secretly. If he decides at any time to help your family [financially], just thank him.

As in the case of their husbands, the Nigerian female wage earner may not advocate SRS for some reasons. For instance, some female wage earners may advocate the pooling of resources with their spouses in order to foster a closer emotional bond. Those who earn much less income than their husbands are likely to encourage the common purse approach in

order to safeguard their economic welfare and that of their children.

8.1.3. SRS in the Elite Household: A Compromise of Some Sort

The conflicts SRS present to elite couples have transformed the practice of SRS in the household into a compromise of sorts. According to the respondents, SRS (with these clauses of compromise) appear to be widely accepted among the Igbo elite. Usually couples share the responsibilities within the nuclear household, but maintain a respectable distance from their spouse's extra-nuclear interests. However, this financial arrangement does not always work out in reality. For women especially, managing their own finances does not necessarily imply spending their income any way they choose. It is important to remember that husbands can overrule their wives' decisions, especially when their points of view differ.

The women's response to SRS is mixed, reflecting their individual circumstances. For example, the respondents with the highest paying jobs tended to advocate more financial autonomy. Christie, for instance, is not bothered about what her husband does with his income, as long as he meets his own part of the household responsibilities. Christie is forty-nine and a mother of two young children. She is an assistant director in a government department. Both she and her husband have substantial financial responsibilities with their

respective families:

> I never believed in joint accounts... and I'm not the "busy body" type. Once he gives me his part of the family allowances we agreed on, what he does with the rest of his income is his business.

Unlike the four highly paid married respondents, the other eight, who earn fairly high to moderate salaries, appear to have closer financial dealings with their husbands than the four in higher-paying jobs. Their responses reflect both their financial strength and their economic importance in the family. For example, Iruka has to work out the monthly budget with her husband in order to stretch their total income to cover the regular financial demands from his younger siblings:

> Of course you don't feel good when they keep making incessant demands. You sit down to draw a budget for the month with your husband and he begins to list the demands from his brothers..., you know how it feels. You feel cheated; like you slave away for some other persons besides your husband and children. The money is not even enough for us!

In contrast to Iruka, Chidimma is married to a wealthy medical doctor and enjoys a much higher standard of living than her income provides. She has tended to assume a more subordinate stance than women who are financially more independent. She is thirty-one, a school teacher and mother of five children. Her husband is the second son in his family and is partly responsible for the education of six younger siblings. According to Chidimma, she is not in a position to question how her husband handles his finances:

> [My husband and his siblings] normally keep me out

> of such discussions. When his brothers visit, they hold private discussions with him. I would know that he has given them some money, but not the exact amount or what it's for. He would not, for instance, tell me that he has given them school fees or pocket money. Occasionally, I do come across their letters to my husband. Then, I'd have an idea of what is going on. Normally, I won't make any noise about it. Once you start complaining, he becomes more secretive about his financial dealings with other people and begins to confide even less in you.

Chidimma does not want to jeopardize her position. Her husband could keep his financial affairs to himself, but he has chosen to trust her, to some extent. After all, she reasons, it is his money and he can spend it anyway he wants.

Despite many conflicting interests, elite couples have a considerable stake in protecting the union. They obviously share some concern for each other's welfare. Most importantly, regardless of the competing claims being made on their resources, the interests of their children is foremost. Moreover, elite men such as Iruka's husband need their wives earnings to make ends meet. They may therefore be more co-operative than their better placed colleagues.

8.2. (Assumed) Division of Financial Responsibilities Between Spouses

The respondents initially discussed in general what they perceive to be the responsibilities of wives and husbands in the household. They were further prompted to discuss the division of financial responsibilities in more detail. Table 8.2 outlines the household financial responsibilities that

each spouse is expected to meet in principle. How these responsibilities are shared between the women and their husbands in reality will be discussed in the next section.

Table 8.2. Spousal Financial Responsibilities

Male	Female
School Fees	Supplement family allowance
Rent/family home	Housemaids
Utilities	
Hospital bills	
Family allowance	
Repairs (home, car, etc)	

Table 8.2 outlines the gender division of responsibilities as reported by the respondents. They unanimously agree that men should bear most of the household responsibilities, advancing various reasons for this view. Chika, thirty-eight, a school teacher with three children, is married to an architect. She argues that husbands should remain the primary breadwinner in the home:

> It is his responsibility in the first place to cater for his family. If I was not working, he would still have to find a way to fulfil this responsibility...but since I work, well... he would expect me to pitch in something. That seems reasonable enough.

Ifeyinwa, thirty-eight, a civil servant and mother of five young children, cites the instance of children's school fees:

> It is the man's responsibility to pay his children's school fees. After all, the children don't bear the woman's maiden name. They belong to the man.

Based on the same argument, a husband is also primarily responsible for rent, hospital bills, utilities and repairs in the home. In addition, the man is expected to give his wife a monthly allowance for the family's upkeep, which she augments with her own salary. A good portion of the entire allowance goes into the food budget, although other items such as toiletries and clothing may also be included.

It would seem that these women are embracing a non-traditional view, seeing themselves as other than a full- time housewife who may not be expected to contribute toward the family's upkeep. But perhaps their statements reflect a reasonable appraisal of the situation in which they have found themselves. Nigerian and Igbo women's access to economic ventures depend on their relationship with men, usually husbands who provide the farmland and /or initial capital (Iweriabor 1985, Dennis 1991). The income realised from these goes mostly towards caring for the children. In a sense, one can argue that husbands delegate responsibility for their children to their wives, along with [access to] means of subsistence. Within this context, the differential allocation of rewards and entitlements in men's favour seems justifiable.

Translated into the context of elite households, it becomes understandable why many women would agree with Chika and Ifeyinwa. Wage labour affords them income earned (even if

their husbands sponsors their training) on their merit. The gender division still allocates more rewards and entitlements to elite men. Therefore, women's contribution to family subsistence cannot be a response to delegated authority. The respondents recognize that, despite their new economic importance, men still gain more in the financial bargain. Hence, they insist that ideally men shoulder more household responsibilities in return.

This is how the married respondents present SRS. However, when it came to the details of household monthly expenses, it becomes clear that the actual distribution of gender responsibilities differs remarkably from the impression conveyed in Table 8.2.

8.3. What Happens to Women's Earnings?: Actual Gender Distribution of Financial Responsibilities.

Usually the respondents spread their income over the family's upkeep and personal expenses, major family projects, assistance to relatives and personal investments.[56] Apart from the family allowance, the rest of the items are not analyzed in any order of priority.

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[56]The respondents do not normally keep detailed records of their expenses. The information provided in Table 8.3 is based on estimates of family expenses during the field work. This was fairly easy because the family allowance, a monthly contribution from both spouses, took the largest share from women's earnings.

8.3.1. Family Upkeep

The proportion of each woman's monthly income that goes into the family's upkeep seems to depend on both the total family income, and her income relative to her husband's. The respondents fall into three categories as shown in Table 8.3

Table 8.3. Women's Monthly Income and Proportional Financial Burden (In percentages)

	Average relative income to spouse	Prop. of income to family upkeep	% of total family purse
Group 1. (4 respondents)	80%	55%	55%
Group 2. (6 respondents)	57%	80%	45%
Group 3. (2 respondents)	15%	60%	20%

The women in Group 1 have high paying jobs in either the civil or the corporate sector. Two of them, Christie and Nnenna, actually earn as much income as their husbands or more. But they all contribute more resources towards the family's upkeep than their spouses. Those in Group 2 consist of school teachers and middle level civil servants. They earn a little more than half of their husbands' income, but contribute about half of the entire family allowance. The two women in the last group, Chinelo, thirty, an accountant and Chidimma, thirty-one, a school teacher, are married to a

wealthy business man and a medical doctor respectively. Both women spend more than half of their income on the family's upkeep. Unlike the women in the first two groups, however, their contributions hardly match that of their spouses.

Table 8.3 deviates remarkably from Table 8.2 and is a clearer reflection of the direction of Igbo women's vested interests in the marital union. Of course, despite their feelings about the unequal division of rewards, the respondents have accepted primary responsibility for their children's welfare. Normally, they are the ones directly responsible for the day to day running of the home and, for the most part, deal with the never ending stream of unbudgeted expenses. In the Nigerian context, this responsibility presents some peculiar challenges.

First, it is difficult to budget for the family's upkeep with the usual "disruptions" from extra-nuclear family attachments. Many of the respondents were quite amused when they were asked how they handle such uncertainties. Chika (Group 2), the school teacher with three children who is married to an architect, simply shrugged and said:

> There isn't much to decide on because often, they don't inform you that they are coming. You either meet them at your door step or they are already in the house when you arrive from work.

Dealing with relatives is an accepted reality in elite households. However, as two of the respondents indicate in their own instances, not all families have such an open door policy as conveyed by Chika. It is pointed out in Chapter Four

that many elite families no longer have very strong ties to the extended family. In any case, the respondents appear to have a good idea of the limits they are expected to go in meeting such obligations.

Apart from irregular expenses, women also have to deal with the skyrocketing inflation that has characterized the SAP era. The respondents point out that, in many households, the woman's earnings are increasingly needed to meet what have become regular shortfalls in her spouse's budget. Most of the women report that they can no longer keep track of the unstable market prices, which rise daily. Some of the respondents cannot even count on their spouses for the regular monthly allowance. For instance, Chika is married to an architect whose financial contribution to the family purse depends on how well his business is faring. Private business ventures are no longer as predictable as they used to be. The situation is different for Iruka, Onyeka and Uju (Group 2) whose husbands are civil servants with perhaps smaller, but more regular incomes.

More importantly, the women have to respond to family economic needs because they are well aware that their husbands cannot shoulder the financial burden of the household alone. In fact, most of the women in groups 1 and 2 report that they have, on occasion, paid a part of the rent, the children's school fees and hospital bills. Some of them have assumed responsibility for one or more of these items on a regular

basis. In general, the women are increasingly taking on more of the family's financial burden. In spite of their beliefs about sharing family responsibilities they appear quite willing to make more financial sacrifices. Uju, a thirty-eight year old mother of five, is a vice-principal:

> Although I'm also concerned about my husband's welfare, I try extra hard because of my children,...to give them whatever they need, as long as I can afford it...I don't earn much, but I struggle to keep them healthy and to see to it that they get a good education.

Christie (Group 1), the assistant director in a public department, is equally concerned. She married at thirty-four, having risen to a more senior rank than her husband. She has two children, a daughter and a son, but her husband has other children from a previous marriage. Her marriage, she remarks, has been a constant struggle to assert herself and her economic status has been crucial in this struggle. According to her, she wants her daughter and female relatives in her care to have this leverage:

> I'm very particular about the girls' education...They must be able to defend themselves...These days, no man would be prepared to marry a woman who is idle. I keep telling my daughter, "Just go on and read. Don't look back. Keep going. This is your only route to independence."

A good education, most of the respondents emphasize, provides the children, especially girls, with a more secure future than they otherwise may have. It may also be seen as future insurance for the respondents in Groups 2 and 3.

8.3.2. Catering for Housemaids

In addition, the respondents have to cater for their housemaids either on their own or jointly with their husbands. Maids are relatively cheap to maintain. Most of them are not employed on salary. Often, the basic requirements are food and clothing, which come mostly from the reserve of family "cast offs." Equally, the cost of formal training is quite affordable since maids are normally sent to public schools or non established vocational training centres. Three of the women report that their husbands usually pay the maids' school fees.

However, some of the women voiced a few concerns which might impel them, if they could afford it, to assume full financial responsibility for the maid. First, if they had enough financial resources at their disposal, they would have full control over the number of maids to employ. For instance, Onyeka, thirty-two and a civil servant had one maid before the birth of her one year old daughter. She needed an extra hand with another baby arriving, but her husband, who would have to provide for the maid refused, insisting that one live-in maid was enough. It took the intervention of her mother-in-law to change his mind. In contrast, the women in group 1 assert that the number of maids they choose to keep is their own business since they, not their husbands, foot the bill.

In general, female wage earners feel they need to

maintain closer supervision and control over their maids given the susceptibility of extra-marital liaisons in the elite circle. Nnenna (Group 1), the legal manager, remarks:

> Some women are unfortunate. Their husbands sleep with the maids. That creates problems, especially if she gets pregnant. In that case, you have to deal with your husband, the maid and her people...My husband leaves everything concerning the maids' welfare in my hands. I buy their clothes, I pay their fees and I discipline them if they misbehave.

Like Nnenna, women in monogamous unions have to watch out for any threat to their marriage in a society where men's extra-marital liaisons are not strongly frowned upon. It is important for the elite Igbo woman to guard against setting the seduction scene herself, given that many less privileged women would not hesitate to step into her shoes, or even accept a less formal arrangement with her husband. The female wage earner's financial responsibility for the maid indicates to the latter, who "can make or break" her in that household should she take any wrong step.

8.3.3. Major "Family" Projects

The respondents also assist their husbands in major family projects such as building a new house, renovating or furnishing the family residence, car repairs or purchase and starting a business. Ten out of the twelve married women in the study have participated in a number of such projects. Those in Group 2 directed their financial assistance mainly towards augmenting a part of their husbands' share of the

family allowance. The women in Group 1 often have a substantial portion of their income left after household expenses. They are therefore able to make direct cash contributions to major projects. In fact, of the four women, three provided the furnishings (chairs, curtains, rugs) for a family owned building. The fourth woman, Rose, fifty-seven year old director in a government department, bought the land for the family's residence at Enugu.

Indeed, the respondents know that despite some legal claims they may have, their husbands' traditional right to the family property does place them in a vulnerable situation when it comes to long term investments. However, they appear to accept the risk involved, as other women in their position would. This is reflected in the financial support they are willing to provide. In fact, three of the women in Group 1 actually initiated the idea and pressured their husbands into taking the first steps toward building a family residence in the village. Evidently the women benefit from such projects, at least as long as the union lasts. First, as part of the man's nuclear household each woman enjoys the comfort and social prestige attached to the family home(s) and car(s). The village residence, although unquestionably the husband's property, is for the woman, a safe haven that shields her from prying eyes and the hoards of less privileged relatives who besiege the family whenever they are visiting.

8.3.4. Personal Care and Investments

In terms of expenses for personal needs, most of the respondents appear to spend very little on luxuries such as cosmetics, clothing and jewellery. Again, those with higher incomes and/or wealthy husbands tend to spend more than those on tighter budgets. Those in Group 3 often receive these items as gifts from their spouses.

Despite their financial commitments to family projects, the respondents seem to be well aware of their marital position, especially in the long run. Those with fewer resources tend to invest mainly in their children. Those with higher incomes take a further step in securing their future by undertaking capital investments, in addition. For instance, most of the women in Groups 2 and 3 reported having to empty their savings virtually every month as they dip in continually to meet household expenses. By the time the financial responsibilities of the nuclear and natal families are met, they have very little left by way of personal savings.

In contrast, the four women in Group 1 have healthy bank accounts. Rose, who owned the land on which the family residence was erected, recently purchased another piece of landed property for herself:

> The C.I.O. [certificate of occupancy] is in my name so that if anything happens, I can sell it or build a house on it...You have to make plans...acquire properties or shares in your own name... Such precautions save you from going under if anything happens. If you're lucky, it [divorce or separation] may not come at all. Knowing that it could happen and society will not see anything

> wrong with [your being disinherited] you'd better prepare yourself from the word go by putting certain measures in place.

According to the respondents, women are expected to seek their husband's consent for fairly major expenditures. It seems, however, that where there is a possibility that such a venture might meet stiff opposition, some women may take action first as in Rose's case, and later find a way to sell the idea to their husbands. For instance, Nnenna, the legal manager, is currently "working" on her husband to get his permission to make major repairs on her car. She has secured a loan from her bank for the expenses, but her husband insists that she spend the money otherwise:

> He asked me to purchase tyres with all the money, instead. Of course, I don't want to do that. Now he is threatening that I must not go ahead. So, I have to gradually steer him around to see things my way without causing trouble. Yesterday, I bought all the things needed for the job. I haven't told him yet....

In order to gradually win her husband over, Nnenna adopts a non-confrontational stance strategy. She has to tread carefully because she earns as much income as her husband, if not more. It is not simply a question of car repairs versus tyre purchase; it is not only her husband that is involved in this case. A host of considerations are usually involved. Even if she ignores his feelings, she has to deal with his relatives who would think that their son is being humiliated. It is not fashionable for a wife to flaunt her economic independence in a society where it is assumed that the husband

should be calling the shots in all instances.

8.3.5. Assistance to Family relatives

Outside the nuclear household, the respondents also extend assistance to their parents, siblings and relatives. Again, the proportion of income spent depends largely on each woman's economic status relative to her natal family and her responsibilities in the nuclear household. For instance, women such as Nwanneka and Chidimma have escaped direct obligations to either parents (who can support themselves) or kin. Having elite parents themselves, ties to the extended family have been considerably weakened. Their parents and siblings are financially comfortable and do not require financial assistance from them.

In Chika's case, however, she has both an aged mother and a younger brother who is in school to provide for. Uju's youngest sister is living with her and together with her other siblings, she is also supporting a few other relatives, some quite aged. Christie has only two children, but has to support a niece and a nephew in school. She has also seen two distant relatives through secondary school. In addition, she extends assistance to some aged relatives, though not on a regular basis.

8.5. SRS, Women's Bargaining Power and Economic Security

The gender division of responsibilities and entitlements clearly portrays the dual status of partner and subordinate assumed by the Igbo female wage earner in marriage. As partners, women are inclined to invest in the marriage and "jointly" accumulate capital, knowing that their contributions strengthen their vulnerable position as subordinates. As subordinates, it is equally important that they secure their own future as individuals either through their children and/or direct financial investments.

The actual distribution of financial responsibilities strongly undermines Igbo women's potential to maintain a balance between providing for the household and for their own personal economic well being, in a union whose long term stability is anything but certain. The respondents are saddled with a myriad of seemingly trivial household expenditures. In the uncertain economic climate the respondents live in, it is difficult to keep track of and plan for these expenses ahead of time, even if there is any money left at the end of the month. This balance is crucial because that is what the respondents can invest for the future. Going by their actual contributions relative to their income and their entitlements, the respondents are more than mere helpmates. But the bulk of these contributions remain in a sense "invisible" and this appears quite convenient for the maintenance of men's dominant status and special privileges.

Unlike the women, elite men's financial responsibilities in the household tend to be limited to major and/or predictable items of expenditure such as fixed monthly allowance, school fees, building and car purchases. These expenditures stand out and make the women's contributions pale in significance. Even when women shoulder some of men's responsibilities, it is perceived as mere assistance. The notion that women are only "helping out," reinforced by the male breadwinner ideology, undervalues and renders invisible women's economic importance in the family. In effect, men can easily pass on some of their own responsibilities to their wives without endangering their dominant position in the family. In fact, they do not necessarily have to account for or seek their wives' approval for other expenses outside the family. This may not be the case for all couples, but, in general, men nevertheless have the prerogative to keep their financial dealings personal. The respondents' involvement in "family" projects would be justified even more if their rights to "family" property were adequately protected. But as subordinates, women have to co-operate, at least in order to strengthen their bargaining power in the marriage.

Besides, even for the women in Group I, the surplus after their contributions to the family is not entirely under their control. Their economic status notwithstanding, these women value their marriage security for many of the reasons

described in Chapter Four. Wage labour merely improves, to some extent, their subordinate position in marriage. Their financial burdens may be increasing with the economic situation, but not necessarily their bargaining power. Rose, the assistant director, sums it all up:

> They [husbands] will make you spend every penny of that money on the family. You will be the one to spend your money alright, but you will be forced to use it to maintain the home. You may even end up with nothing to give your parents. However, I will still prefer to be the one giving out the money.

Evidently these women are responding to their situation and exploiting every crack in the structure of gender relations to safeguard their interests and that of their children. They seem to clearly recognize that their overall well-being in society is inextricably linked with both their position at home and at work, hence they try to make use of opportunities in both settings. It appears that ultimately the female wage earner will need to advance high enough in the labour force in order to exert enough influence and beyond that, to ensure her personal financial security.

CHAPTER NINE

9.0. CONCLUSION AND ISSUES ARISING

This study set out to examine some important patterns in the lives of Igbo women who have acquired higher education and are currently employed in the wage labour market. Patriarchal continuities and contradictions form the central theme around which the experiences of the respondents are analyzed. This theme underscores the underlying assumption that however women's status was constituted in pre-colonial Nigeria, especially Igboland, colonization and capitalist expansion has created a different social arrangement. In the latter, what is "traditional" and what is "modern" intersect, blur and conflict in many ways. Elite Igbo women's lives, in particular, reflect the dialectics of social change, with all its continuities and contradictions. Although they remain, for the most part, subordinates in relation to men, new spheres of opportunities, privileges and rights have become available to elite women, some of which even transgress what may be seen as cultural boundaries (Henn 1988:52).

It is in the context of this state of flux that the potentials of higher education and wage employment for the respondents are assessed. In drawing attention to patriarchal continuities and contradictions, therefore, the study re-

examines the thesis that with formal education, Igbo and indeed Nigerian women, can gain economic and social status and thus overturn the balance of patriarchal power in the family and society.

As crucial assets in the struggle for social emancipation, elite women's educational qualifications and position in the labour market have clearly distanced them from most of their less educated or illiterate counterparts. But their status has to be weighed in terms of the conditions under which they acquire and utilize formal training. The experiences of the respondents point to the fact that Nigerian women's lives are embedded in a structure of gender relations which shapes their opportunities and options. In the elite circle, women's primary roles as wives and mothers require them to satisfy both cultural and modern (Western influenced) expectations. These expectations are not only mutually conflicting in many ways, they also create tensions in terms of how they fit in with women's personal aspirations. The question that this study attempts to answer therefore is - how does the social construction of elite women's position impact on their acquisition and utilization of higher education?

In order to answer this question, the researcher had to seek information from those who are living through the experiences under investigation. Deviating from the typical trend of mass surveys and overviews, the researcher carried out in-depth interviews with eighteen currently employed,

university educated Igbo women. This purposive sample of both married and single women included school teachers, lawyers, accountants and civil servants. The interviews, which were carried out over a seven month pe.iod (August 1991 - March 1992), focused on their schooling experiences as well as their lives at home and in formal employment. These interviews yielded the primary data for this thesis.

Chapter Four begins the analysis of the respondents' lives as women living within a particular cultural milieu. This chapter highlights important facets of the structure of gender relations typical of elite Igbo circles, including marriage and family, procreation and son preference, extended family ties, polygyny and polygynous incursions. What the analysis in the chapter clearly portrays is the fact that one cannot examine women's situation in any sphere, whether public or private, in isolation. It is necessary to locate women's experiences within the larger structure of gender relations which define the roles of women and men in a particular society. This is the underlying framework from which began the analysis of their experiences in three specific areas - the school system, the family and the labour market. The study explores their lives as highly educated women, female wage earners, mothers, single women, sisters, sisters-in-law, and so on.

The analysis of the structure of gender relations in elite Igbo circles brings to the fore the complexity of the

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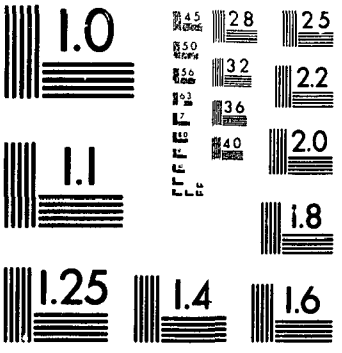

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interrelationship between women's positions and roles in different spheres. More importantly, one perceives the double standard in men's favour running through this structure. In general, the reactions of the respondents to this structure suggest something of a generational shift. The older women are understandably more accepting of the restrictions this structure places in their path. In contrast, the younger women have set limits on how far they are prepared to submit to the system. At the base, however, it is the personal circumstances of each woman which determines her bargaining position.

Chapter Five uses the profiles of four of the respondents - Alice, Chika, Uzoamaka and Uchenna - to highlight some of the broad patterns of experience typical of Igbo women who pursue higher education. Their stories, which span four decades, show how social expectations regarding elite Igbo women's roles have been modified, as economic and political conditions changed over time. Their experiences of schooling reinforce the stance of many scholars that the expansion of formal education in Nigeria has proceeded with little consideration for women's participation (Robertson 1986, Otu 1989, Okeke 1989, Mammudu 1992). Rather, women such as those in this study have taken advantage of and continue to exploit periodical booms in educational opportunities.

In their educational pursuits, these women have had to wrestle with a persistent ideology underlying female education in Nigeria - that women should benefit from formal education

mainly as wives and subordinates to elite men. One finds, however, that from Alice to Uchenna, this ideology has not quite stayed on course, given the gradual expansion of women's educational options. From the initial status of full-time housewives, elite women have not only moved into pink collar occupations, but are also invading some of the professions that were formerly regarded as exclusive male preserves. But this wider range of options needs to be assessed in terms of what exactly they mean for women in the Nigerian context.

For a developing country, Nigerian women's educational and wage employment profiles are quite impressive (see tables in Chapter One). For instance, their representation in the legal profession (Doherty 1990) favourably compares with that of women in some industrialized countries. In broad terms this may be seen as one among the many unpredictable outcomes of African development, in which new institutions (such as formal schooling and wage employment) have evolved without the backdrop of deeply entrenched roots of systemic oppression. But on closer examination, it is also evident that the relations of power between women and men have reconstituted themselves in many ways, albeit with many contradictions. One only has to look at the lives of the respondents, particularly the spheres of influence open to them, to recognize the gendered nature of their envied status. For instance, it is telling that Nigerian women have excelled more in, say, the legal profession than in the political and military ranks

where the bastions of power largely reside.

The respondents' lives as wives and mothers are also clear reflections of how the social construction of women's roles limits the potential of their training. From Alice to Uchenna, we observe a trend of widening career choices and options for Igbo women without a considerable loosening of the rigid restrictions surrounding their primary role. In effect, the message being sent to Nigerian women is - "You can embrace these opportunities as long as they do not interfere with your primary role." The ambitious Igbo woman, therefore, faces a growing conflict between her primary role and personal aspirations as she moves up the educational ladder. As the experiences of the four participants portray, both married and single women have to deal with this conflict, although the nature of the problems encountered might differ. As ambitious as all the participants in this study are, they do not lose sight of the costs attached to "stepping out of line." They know that there are real limitations to consider in their decisions about schooling and work.

Chapters Six and Seven show how the married respondents live out these conflicts. The analysis of the respondents' labour market experiences in Chapter Six indicates that the conditions of formal employment, the organization of work, employment policies and practices are still, in many ways, structured along the lines of the malestream colonial model. The organization of wage work constrains not only the

respondents' career options, but also the extent to which they can devote time to their present jobs. The working mothers, especially, find the work environment and its demands largely unresponsive to their domestic obligations. Hence the chance of advancement, particularly for those in the more competitive private sector, is considerably reduced.

The restrictions to labour market participation imposed by women's domestic role cannot be ignored in assessing the extent of labour market discrimination they face. But it must also be remembered that the structure of jobs, work practices and policies further limit their labour market options. The domestic argument obscures these other factors to justify the treatment women receive in the labour market. Thus, one finds that the constraints of women's domestic roles and the ideological construction of jobs, reinforce the discrimination women suffer in formal employment. As many of the respondents point out, single women suffer discrimination not only as potential working mothers, but also as women in certain professions (e.g. government protocol) that have evolved with a strong male presence. The latter tends to unduly shape the nature of the job itself making it difficult for women to fit in.

Beyond the real and perceived restrictions to wage work attached to their domestic roles, Nigerian and Igbo female wage earners also have to deal with the class and gender politics pervading the rank and file of formal employment in

Nigeria. The worsening economic situation has meant not only fewer employment opportunities, but also a declining economic value attached to formal education. It is also important to consider the differential effects such a trend has on men and women. In fact, it can be argued that the present trend of ghettoizing women in the public sector, essentially perpetuates an historically instituted pattern. The sexist and racial inequalities which characterize job structures and remunerations have, for the most part, benefitted men. In the present situation, working mothers compared to their male colleagues, are forced to respond more to family economic needs rather than to career opportunities. Furthering their career often entails adding more responsibilities to an already heavy workload.

Perhaps what is interesting about their stories is not so much the structure of domination in which their lives are embedded as their resilience and wit in sustaining a personal agenda. Despite the social pressures to marry and raise a family, these women know what their eventual position in this marital arrangement will be. Of course, their experiences clearly show that they are not immune to social pressures. Most of them have had to adjust their aspirations in one way or the other to accommodate the demands and concerns of family and peers. But evidently they have managed to exploit the opportunities available to further their goals.

Having obtained a university degree, many of them have

resorted to part-time educational programs. Some of the married women are prepared to juggle professional programs with domestic and labour market responsibilities. Even for those who are married to highly placed men in the community, the reality of their status in marriage is not lost on them. Thus, when the question is posed as to why they engage in wage labour, all the married women stress the need to have their "own money." Although relatively free of domestic responsibilities, the single women must consider the threats that wider career options present. Again, establishing some degree of financial independence remains the overriding principle. In the end, for both the single and married women in the study, their educational plans necessitate a balancing act between personal aspirations and social expectations.

Formal training has helped to heighten the respondents' awareness of their situation as women in a specific social setting. It has also improved their financial status. The structure of gender relations does not appear to have altered remarkably in their favour. But strategizing, for them, has certainly taken on a new meaning. For instance, it is understandable, within this context, that most of the single women (who are already university graduates) tend to assume a cautionary stance in their attitude toward furthering their careers. Their strategy makes sense particularly if there is a possibility that they could indeed further their education after marriage, as some of the married respondents have

succeeded in doing. They are acutely aware that these are not decisions to hurry over, given the cultural milieu in which they operate.

There is also a noticeable difference, indicative of social change, in the way the older and younger respondents handle the marriage/career conflict. More than the former, the younger women tend to see their labour market responsibilities as an integral part of their lives. Moreover, the single women, unlike the case in Alice's day, are more inclined to defy social boundaries in order to excel professionally. To the extent that they resist social pressures, women such as Uchenna have faced up to what they perceive as unpleasant consequences. But as she points out, her present status far outweighs the personal costs she has incurred.

The respondents' labour market behaviour, especially the working mothers who are either civil servants or teachers, shows that, in some ways, they are redefining their own terms of engaging in wage work. Confined to a section of the wage labour market, with men moving on to greener pastures, many female wage earners find themselves "taking it out on the system" to make up for the short fall. "Moonlighting", shorter working days, sexual favours, part-time educational programs, are some of the means that they adopt.

Of course these strategies end up reinforcing their subordinate position. For instance, that women's vulnerability and their resort to sexual favours is perceived as power,

suggests how much their social mobility is still tied to their relationship with men. This is one aspect of Nigerian women's labour market experiences that has not received much attention in literature. The attitude of the respondents to "bottom power", suggests that it is taken for granted as a "natural" feature of gender relations, both within and outside the labour market. Bottom power, so defined, obscures the dominate/subordinate relations of power involved and, in effect, legitimizes elements of abuse and harassment.

It is also from the context of women's fundamentally subordinate position in the family and society that this study investigates the issue of "the double burden." The analysis of the gender division of domestic work in Chapter Seven emphasizes not so much the implications for women's wage labour participation as the ideology behind the arrangement. Indeed, more recent studies highlight the double burden African female wage earners shoulder inspite of the availability of housemaids. The experiences of the married respondents reinforce this view. But this study goes beyond the emphasis on the relationship between women's domestic and wage work.

The analysis of domestic work has to be placed in the larger context of gender relations. The experiences of the women in this study would be grossly simplified if the focus rested mainly on what women do at home and in the labour market. Domestic work, especially husbandcare and childcare,

is in part a labour of love. One detects almost a note of pride as some of the married respondents describe the specific tasks associated with husbandcare and the pains they take to accomplish them. At the end of the working day, these women drop their professional garb to give their spouses special attention. Husbandcare may be idealized to some extent by the married respondents, but one cannot ignore its exhaustive nature, the underlying threats that compel women to "perform" and the differential benefits it offers to men.

Again, the stories of the respondents are indicative of their own appraisal of these constraints as well as the strategies they employ in dealing with the situation. They have accepted the reality that domestic work is the woman's domain. Of the three major aspects of this work, husbandcare is crucial to their marital security. Hence, they must perform the bulk of husbandcare while childcare and other tasks can be delegated in degrees to housemaids. The division of labour between the working mother and maid(s) allows her to "do what she necessarily must do" in order to keep her position in the household and in the labour market. The resort to housemaids, which has received much emphasis in earlier studies, should also be analyzed from a similar perspective. It is simplistic to explain away the problem merely from the point of view of maids as victims in the hands of elite women. As Bujra (1983) notes, paid domestic workers in colonial Africa were mostly males. In the past three decades,

housemaids have gradually taken over as men moved on to more lucrative employment opportunities. As in traditional society, domestic labour is once again women's work, this time stripped of its traditional support networks. But how much of the domestic labour a woman gets to do depends largely on her social position. As long as the majority of Nigerian women remain at the bottom of the social ladder, those of the respondents' status will remain in the minority. To the extent that the respondents have to accept the dictates of the malestream order, the employment of housemaids will be crucial in sustaining their status.

While reinforcing the class divisions among women, the organization of domestic work in the elite household finds legitimacy in the wider structure of gender relations. Of course, it serves men's interests, to some degree, that they are culturally excused from domestic work. In particular, it serves elite men's interests that, whether performed by a maid or their wives, households tasks get done, at least eventually. As the weekly organization of domestic work in Chapter Seven clearly shows, the division of labour between the female wage earner and maid does not particularly threaten husbandcare.

Much as they would like things to change, the respondents are not in a position to alter the gender division of domestic labour. As both victims of and actors in the structure of gender relations, they look to less privileged women as their

traditional support network crumbles. The situation is not likely to change until the socio-economic status of the female majority improves, with the pool of cheap female labour ultimately exhausted. Then, wage earning elite couples may have to renegotiate domestic relations.

The experiences of the respondents also bring into focus the importance of elite women's financial status as opposed to merely their economic importance in the family. Many studies have analyzed conjugal decision making in elite African households, including the management of financial resources (Oppong 1974, Stichter 1988). These studies do not focus specifically on what women do with their earnings. In analyzing the practice of separate resource structures (SRS), the main emphasis appears to rest on women's financial autonomy and their economic importance in the family. To some extent, this has turned attention away from what exactly happens to women's income and the basis for this financial arrangement.

This study tried to put in a broader perspective the ideological basis of access to and the distribution of financial resources in the Igbo family. As farmers and traders, Igbo women's relative financial independence is widely recognized. But access to these economic ventures is tied to their relationships with men and the proceeds are mainly for family subsistence since women are often directly responsible for their children's welfare. Formal employment as

a source of income outside the direct control of men, makes the practice of SRS, at best, tenuous for elite couples. This is a society where the nuclear family is never completely separated from the extended family; where the dominant status of the husband should not be in question, and the in-laws (on the husband's side) often expect to exert some degree of control on the couple, particularly the wife. Thus, the wage earning wife (depending on her income relative to his) could pose a threat to her husband. It is therefore not surprising that elite men do not readily accept their wives' financial independence.

If elite men felt threatened in the past because of their wives' relative financial independence, the economic downturn has further complicated matters. As the analysis of conjugal division of financial responsibilities in Chapter Eight indicates, the working mothers' income has become crucial to the family's economic survival. Some of the married respondents have to jointly work out a regular budget with their husbands in order to make ends meet.

The experiences of the married respondents suggest, however, that their relative financial autonomy has been greatly undermined by the gender distribution of financial responsibilities and entitlements in the household. Given the nature of their financial responsibilities, most of the women exhaust their income on household expenditures. That they have to advance considerably up the ladder in order to achieve any

appreciable degree of financial security, gives one a good idea of what the traditional conception of women's financial autonomy was fundamentally meant to achieve.

Nevertheless, the married respondents try to use the means at their disposal to strengthen both their marital and financial positions. They recognize that it is important for them to have their own money even if they have to spend most of it on domestic needs. Their attitude towards conjugal financial relations points to a tension between modern and traditional expectations. Educated elites they may be, but they cannot disentangle themselves from the cultural milieu shaping their elitist values. The fact is that for both wage earning spouses the idea of husbands assuming full responsibility for their wives' welfare (as in the instance of domesticated Western women) is not original to the Igbo culture.

The same can be said of women in many parts of West Africa. For instance, Lewis (1982:268) cites the case of married women seeking employment in the Ivory Coast. She notes that the women's emphasis on having enough money to meet their own "little needs" reflects "the husbands' view that women should look after their own needs (including clothing and social obligations requiring cash), and women's oft-stated view that `it makes one ashamed to hold one's hand to one's husband."

The respondents know that having direct control over

their finances is crucial for many reasons. First, their economic importance in the family strengthens their bargaining status in the marriage. Even though the division of financial responsibilities is hardly egalitarian, their co-operation is increasingly needed in order to keep the arrangement in place. Second, the respondents' direct control over their income guarantees the welfare of their children, their strongest allies and most important investment in the marriage. Further, these women try to squeeze something out of their pay cheques for their own immediate and extended natal family. Those who can afford it go beyond these limits to make capital investments. One sees in this distribution of income not merely an attempt to help out. The manner in which these women organize their financial portfolio suggests that they not only recognize their vulnerable marital status but also where their sources of strength lie.

The analysis of the respondents' lives clearly reveals patriarchal continuities - in the school system, the family and the labour market. But we also see contradictions in the definitions of their roles, the specific requirements attached to them, and the rewards accruing from their efforts. Some of the vivid contradictions can be seen in the conflicting traditional and modern expectations, widening career options and rigid domestic roles, malestream work structures, work practices and policies unresponsive to domestic demands; and an autonomous source of income undermined by the gender

division of financial responsibilities and rewards.

As their stories clearly reveal, the respondents are fighting the system, but with only the limited means available to them. Of course, they do not always succeed. Some of their strategies successfully challenge patriarchal authority, while others actually reinforce their oppression. These patriarchal continuities and contradictions have to be considered in assessing the potentials of formal education for Igbo and Nigerian women. It is evident that their struggle to establish a niche in contemporary society does not stop at the door of higher education. Women must grapple with various facets of a fundamentally subordinate status at home and at work. In addition, the impact of social, economic and political change on the value of formal education should also be considered; particularly their differential impacts on men and women.

It needs to be stressed that Nigerian women's representation in higher education, wage employment and in the government, amounts to a gross under-utilization of half of the population. Their social location as presently constituted, not only keeps this state of affairs in place, but also curtails the range of influences available to the minority who enter the privileged ranks. For Nigerian women to contribute to nation building, they must be provided not only with the educational opportunities, but also with the freedom of equal participation with men.

9.1 Policy Implications

This thesis was not intended to make specific policy proposals. It is essentially an exploratory study aimed at identifying crucial elements that structure elite Igbo women's education and wage employment. While one cannot make generalizations based exclusively on the experiences of a small group of Nigerian women, it is evident that the experiences of the respondents reflect some broad patterns typical of women in their position. The analysis of these experiences does not elicit specific recommendations, but points in broad terms to some issues of policy interest.

Aligning their observations with historical and current trends analyzed in Chapter One, it appears that attracting Nigerian women into the educational system is not simply a matter of expanding structures and facilities. If women are to participate, adequate provision has to made in terms of both access and distribution within various fields. As the experiences of the respondents portray, educational expansion does not necessarily imply increasing female participation. In any case, without adequate provisions, some women might make it to higher education, but the segregation which is reinforced in the labour market, persists.

The issue of women's representation across the professions is even more crucial in the face of education's declining economic value. As far back as the 1960s, scholars have questioned the economic prospects of large investments on

formal education in developing countries such as Nigeria (Robertson 1986:107). It is only in recent times that the education of girls, in particular, has attracted similar attention. Given the gross gender imbalance in access to formal education, Nigerian women's participation has long been advocated as an end in itself so that the associated disfunctionality is often ignored. Robertson's (1986) study of women's education in Africa from 1950 to 1980 highlighted the progressive decline in the labour market prospects of girls with secondary education.

More recent reports from UNECA and the ILO referred to in Chapter One have taken up the case of higher education, predicting an even gloomier picture for African women than their male counterparts. It seems, therefore, that policies on women's education in Nigeria have to go beyond providing more places for women. Both the level and kind of training have to be considered if women are to be properly equipped with the necessary skills for the changing labour market of the post oil boom era.

Similarly, formal employment policies appear to be geared towards accommodating women in an essentially malestream work environment. Existing policies for expectant mothers and nursing mothers are essential, but as the respondents' labour market experiences suggest, they do not get at the underlying problem. It is the very structure of jobs, the organization of work and the conditions of service that policy has to address.

Unfortunately, one cannot expect any remarkable improvement if the relations of gender in the family remain unchanged. The situation working mothers find themselves in is, in part, a reflection of the rigid and unequal division of domestic responsibilities.

The conflicts the respondents face in their decisions about schooling and work, and in domestic and wage work, indicate that the larger structure of gender relations must radically change. Policies on women's education and employment cannot lead to any fundamental improvements without confronting the patriarchal continuities and contradictions in the Nigerian society.

9.2 Issues for Further Research

One obvious emphasis of this thesis is the need for more in-depth studies on women; studies that project the voices, view- points and experiences of women. As the review of related literature in Chapter Two clearly portrays, the sheer thinness of the data base renders most of the analyses and debates on African and Nigerian women's conditions of existence, at best, tentative. More in-depth studies will be needed not only for purposes of developing appropriate analytical frameworks, but also for establishing a clearer link between research and policy.

Such analyses should reflect the specific circumstances of women in various social groupings. The experiences of the

respondents clearly show that we must go beyond a material analysis in order to understand what formal education and wage employment mean for Nigerian women. Evidently, culture and social ideologies even shape the material relations of gender within and outside the family. There is therefore a need for more in-depth analysis that reflects both a good understanding and a critical view of the cultural milieu in which Nigerian women's lives are shaped. In this regard, the contributions of indigenous female scholars is especially called for.

This study has also raised a number of issues, some of which the researcher hopes to pursue. First, further research will need to include the experiences of a cross section of women in order to better assess the potentials of formal education and wage employment. For various reasons outlined in Chapter Three, this thesis focuses mainly on the experiences of university educated women. Their experiences suggest that, to a large extent, the potentials of these assets may have been exaggerated. Elite women should be at the forefront of the struggle for social emancipation. Therefore, their situation points to the prospects of the larger female majority. Nonetheless, the experiences of a specific group of women are hardly a representative sample. Studies of cross sections of women with different educational qualifications will be required.

The issues of sexual harassment and abuse (however they may be perceived or defined) also call for more detailed

research. This thesis did not set out to investigate these issues, but they emerged during the interviews with the respondents. As mentioned earlier, the attitude to "bottom power" clearly shows that it is a taken-for-granted element of gender politics in formal employment. However, what is reported are the women's observations, not personal experiences. As pointed out Chapter Two, more detailed research is needed in order to examine the many ramifications of this problem.

In addition, the researcher hopes to build on the thesis by integrating the perspective of the other major actors in the relations of gender. Not withstanding the importance of projecting the perspective of women, it is also important to reflect men's perspective. The scope of the present study could not accommodate this broader perspective. The in-depth interviews, background data collected during field work and relevant literature made for an insightful analysis. Nevertheless, the perceptions of the male actors (such as the husbands of the married respondents) could provide important information as well.

Finally, it is my hope that this study will attract further research efforts. As present, this is only one out of a handful of in-depth studies in the field. I feel particularly privileged to give voice to the feelings, views and aspirations of Nigerian women with whom I share some experiences. Their stories not only speak to the problems

faced by women in their status, but also establish some common threads with women in other social groupings within and outside Nigeria.

I also hope that Nigerian and African policy makers will recognize the need for studies of this nature. I believe that beyond the figures, surveys and forecasts, the fabric of women's lives provide important clues to their oppression as well as the key to their emancipation. African governments are apt to pay lip service to uplifting women's status. Often the emphasis is on their primary role, the assistance predicated on the heavy burden of family subsistence they bear. But African women's contribution cannot be limited to their primary role. They should be given the right to register their contributions beyond the domestic sphere.

I would like to end this thesis with a reminder to African governments of their sworn commitment (of which Nigeria is a signatory) to pay the debts owed to women in the continent:

> In view of the critical contribution made by women to African societies and economies and the extreme subordination and discrimination suffered by women in Africa, it is... [our] consensus... that the attainment of equal rights by women in social, economic and political spheres must become a central feature of a democratic and participatory pattern of development. Further, it is... [our] consensus... that the attainment of women's full participation must be given highest priority by society as a whole and African governments in particular (African Charter for Popular Participation in Development 1990:19-20).

APPENDIX

Appendix A.

Study of Currently Employed Female Graduates in Enugu: Information and Consent Form for Prospective Respondents:

I am a Ph.D student at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia (Canada). My interest is in women's education and employment. I am undertaking a study on the relationship between Nigerian women's education and their socio-economic status. I am using as my respondents university trained Igbo women working in Enugu.

I would like to interview you about your educational experience and your life as a working woman. This would entail your giving me some information about your personal background, what you do at home and at work. It will involve our meeting for about six hours at various times and in a location convenient for you. In order to accurately use the information you give me, I will need to tape the interviews.

The information you give me will be used solely for the purposes of my research and will be treated in strict confidence. The tapes from the interviews will be transcribed and in the process your identity will be protected. Your name will not be given to any other person or agency in connection with the interview material. If I quote any information obtained from you in my dissertation or in any papers or publications resulting from my study, I will do so in such a way that you cannot be identified. I have no connection with any government department here in Nigeria or abroad.

I would like to assure you of the importance of this study, as a means of enabling Nigerian working women to identify the problems they encounter in their attempt to gain some independence through wage employment, and to help in bringing these problems to the attention of policy makers.

Your participation in this study however, is voluntary and you can withdraw at any point if you no longer wish to continue.

Will you participate in this study?
Philomina E. Okeke,
School of education, Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia (Canada)

I,.....am willing to participate in Philomina Okeke's study as described to me. I understand that I can cease participation at any time, if I wish. I understand that the interviews will be taped, but that my identity will remain anonymous in the transcribed copy. I understand that Ms Okeke may want to quote parts of what I say to her in any written material resulting from this study, but that she will not do so in a way that identifies me.

Signed.....

Date.....

Appendix B. Questionnaire (Interview Format)

The interview format below consists of suggested questions and prompts which may be used during the interview sessions. The purpose of preparing such a format in advance is to ensure that the same area will be covered with each respondent. Specific topics will be addressed as they arise during interviews. They sequence of this format will therefore not be followed rigidly.

First Interview: Education and Labour Market Experience.

My interest here is in examining the range of things that happen to you at home and in your job as they affect your work life. I will be asking you questions that may entail your taking time to elaborate. Please ask for further explanation if you are not sure of my question.

A. Demographic Details: Information on (Show card with a range of options),

- Name, age, religion and marital status of respondent.
- Members of the household, relationship, sex and age distribution.
- Educational and employment record.
- Salary range of respondent and spouse (if any).

B. Current Job Situation: (General Information)

1. Tell me what you did today: how you prepared for work, what you did at work and what happened after work. [Probes: specific tasks done, with who, departures from daily routine, eg illness].

2. If I were in your office today, what would I have seen you doing with your colleagues? [General impressions of colleagues, organizational structure at work, division of tasks among workers, departures from daily routine]

3. How do you find the job generally? [hectic, fun, boring, interesting?]

C. Work History: (Use chart to pin down basic information)

Now, I want us to go through your working life from your first job to where you are presently.

1. For each job, where appropriate: [Probes: source of information about job, procedure for getting employed, conditions of service, job description]

2. What made you take the job? [Probes: positive or negative influences of people, parents, siblings, husband, teachers; gender, marital status; b. typical features of job, eg teaching young people, lucrative; c. economic constraints, eg need to cater for self and dependants d. personal aspirations; reasons for quitting]

D. Educational Experience:

1. We shall return to your job later. For now we will review in more detail your educational background in relation to where you are now. Tell me about your primary and secondary education until you got to the university [Which school did you attend?: public/ private/religious organization in charge; where?: urban/ rural /North/South, duration, qualifications]

2. You said you attended ....(university). What made you read X?
[Probes: influence of people, eg parents, siblings, husband; peers economic factors, features of the course, etc]

3. Looking back now at your thoughts about the future while in the university, how have your dreams worked out in reality?

4. What would you say are the educational factors that brought you to your present position in your job? Tell me first about the factors that gave you strength. (They may be bad experiences like someone's death, that gave you strength, or people doing things that encouraged you, or opportunities presented by, eg the oil boom, free education policy)
-What are the things that discouraged you?

5. If you were to do it all over again, how would you have handled university? [Probes: marriage and career decisions]

Second Interview: Current Labour Market Experience.

(Transcript or summary of first interview is given to respondent to confirm, correct or add new material).
Today, we shall be discussing in detail, various issues concerning your present job. I will be asking you questions about hiring, leave, transfer, training and so on. You may not know about some of the underlying management policies. What is important however, is what **YOU** know about them and how you

think they have affected you.

A. Interaction in the Work Place:

Before we get into specific issues concerning your job, I want us to talk a little bit more about those you work with. [Respondent's relationship with work mates, junior/senior colleagues, boss]

B. Hiring:

1. Now, tell me what you know about hiring in your job. [Probes: specific individuals involved: men/women, official and perceived un-official criteria, workers in other categories, perceptions of current practice]

2. Looking at what happens in X, do you see that as the general pattern of hiring in other places?

C. Financial Entitlements: (Chart from salary scale document)

1. I want you to tell me a little bit about the various entitlements in your job such as salary and fringe benefits. (Show chart to indicate range of salary, housing and leave allowances, car loan, etc.) [Probes: differences due to gender, marital status; workers in other categories, respondent's perception of policy]

D. Tax:

1. What range does your monthly tax fall into? What deductions are you entitled to? (show card). [Probes: differences due to gender, marital status; workers in other categories, respondent's perceptions of official tax policy]

F. Leave:

1. Let us take a few moments to discuss the various kinds of leave available to workers in your level. [for each: details of procedure, official and perceived un-official criteria for eligibility, influence of gender, marital status, respondent's experience, case of colleagues/ workers in other categories, personal perceptions of current practice]

E. Maternity leave:

1. Let us now talk about maternity leave. I realise that policies differ in various jobs making it easier (or difficult) for women to obtain maternity leave. In addition, it is also possible that there may be a difference between the official policy and what actually happens in the workplace. [Probes: influence of marital status, personal experience, case of other colleagues perceptions of current practice]

F. Training:

1. What do you know about training in your job? [Probes: organization, eligibility, influence of gender, marital status, personal experience, case of other colleagues, other kinds of training, perceptions of current practice]

G. Promotion:

1. Tell me what you know about the promotion policies for workers with your qualifications. [Probes: eligibility, official and perceived unofficial criteria, influence of gender, marital status, personal experience, case of colleagues, perceptions of current practice]

H. Transfer:

1. Thinking about your work life in general, I want you to tell me what your experience has been with transfers. [number of and reasons for transfers, effect on job, eg opportunities for training, promotion, etc]

I. Professional Associations:

1. What professional associations do you belong to? [For each: organization, gender and marital status distribution, respondent's degree of involvement, perceived impact of association on respondent's career, case of male and female members]

J. Summing up:

1. I asked you this question before, but now we have discussed what happens to your job in more detail. Thinking about your own experience now, what would you say are the things you did that put you where you are today? [Probes: productivity and non productivity related factors, comparison with colleagues]

2. How would you have done things if you were to start all over here?

3. What are your plans about working in the next five years? (specific goals, possible constraints, strategies for tackling them)

Third Interview: Job and Family Life.

(Transcript or summary of second interview is presented for comments)

A. Current Situation:

1. General information: [Current residence, rented or owned, distance from work place]

2. Describe for me a typical working day in your family life [Probes: division of tasks among respondent, spouse, children, house maid, other household members; routine on non-work days, eg weekends]

B. Childcare:

We are now going to talk about the way caring for your children has affected your working life both in the past and presently

1. Starting with the children, how do you organize for taking care of them? [Depending on where appropriate: homecare, eg preparation for school, outings, health; schooling, eg PTA meetings, school summons, homework,; Disruptions from normal routine, eg illness]

2. What happened in previous times?

3. What was/is the effect on your work life? [Strategies at home/work for coping]

C. Care of Relatives:

1. I want us to discuss what is entailed in caring for others in the household besides your children. [Depending on where appropriate: parents, parent's-in-law, siblings, extended family, unexpected situations]

2. What happened in previous times?

3. what was/is the effect on your work life? [strategies for coping]

D. Housework:

a. Cooking.

1. I want you to focus on how you would normally plan a typical week balancing home and work commitments. Now, describe for me a typical one week cooking schedule; [Probes: division of tasks among respondent, spouse, children, maid and other family members; disruptions from normal routine]

2. What was the case in previous periods?
3. What is/was the affect on your work life? [strategies at home/work for coping, eg lunch break shopping]

b. House cleaning.

1. I want you to think about a typical one week in your life as a working woman. Then, describe for me the typical things that are done within the course of one week, the division of tasks among family members, describing them as they fit into your work life.

2. What was the case in previous periods?

3. What is/was the affect on your work life? [strategies at home/work for coping]

c. Leisure.

1. We have been talking about the myriad of things you have to do at home and at work. I am left wondering about time for relaxation. What do you do for leisure? [Probes: activities engaged in: job/ non-job related, how organized, other participants: husband, children, co-workers]

2. What was the case in previous times?

E. Decision making:

In this last section, I want us to discuss how decisions are made in your household. The important thing here is how decision making in your household has affected your work life.

1. Monthly budget: (Show chart) I would like to start with how

you spend your monthly income. Can you tell me how this is usually broken down? [show budget card: food, rent, school fees, clothing, utilities, car maintenance, pocket money, others; personal: dresses, shoes, jewellery, etc]

2. Major financial decisions: How was the decision arrived at?, how was it financed?, any connection (negative or positive) with your work life? [eg:Car purchase, house repairs, household appliances, financial investments, inheritance]

3. Job related decisions. Earlier on we talked about when you had to go (or forego an opportunity) for [eg: training, conference, appointment, transfer]. For each:

-How did you arrive at this decision?

-How do you think it affected your career?

4. Other decisions: [Where appropriate, Topics: Children's schooling, eg choice of school; house maids; prompt for relevant issues not thought of]

Appendix C. Ethical Considerations in the Study

The study will require information about each respondent's life at home and at work. The interviews will therefore reveal various aspects of their personal lives. Below is a summary of how the ethical issues of informed consent and confidentiality will be dealt with.

1. Information about the study and the respondent's rights in deciding to give or withhold consent will be clearly spelt out and their decision in this matter will be respected. Attached is a copy of the letter that will be given to every respondent before the interviews are scheduled.

2. The interviews will be carried out at a location convenient for each respondent. The latter's participation and actual information disclosed will be treated in strict confidence.

3. The taping of the interviews will proceed upon the consent of each respondent. Interviews will be conducted in English or Igbo language, the choice of which will be left to each respondent.

4. The tapes from the interviews will remain in the possession of the researcher. They will not be open to examination by a third party.

5. Tapes will be transcribed into English and in the process, all names and personal references will be changed to retain the anonymity of respondents. These transcriptions may be examined by members of the thesis committee.

6. Transcripts of previous interviews will be presented to respondents at subsequent interview sessions to permit them to ensure that their views have been accurately conveyed. Where this is not possible, the researcher will provide a written summary.

7. Publications resulting from the study may quote aspects of the interviews but will not in any way reveal the identity of any of the respondents. Specific circumstances may also be changed where they might lead to an identification of the

respondent concerned.

8. As a Nigerian and an Igbo woman, I am aware that there are peculiar aspects of our customs and heritage that must be captured in a study of this nature, in order to reflect the proper context in which social interaction occurs. I will therefore try as much as possible to ensure accurate and respectful descriptions of this culture. In addition, the dictates of the culture with regard to discretion in obtaining information about women's personal lives will be adhered to.

The information will be used solely for research purposes and will not in any way damage the collective status of the women as a social group, in Nigeria and abroad.

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