class, this *jihad* replaced the city-states with Islamic emirates. Uthman dan Fodio was concerned about the position of women, often writing about their appropriate treatment. He argued that women should be secluded and controlled by their husbands. At the same time he advocated educating women, even suggesting that they had the right to disobey husbands who did not educate their wives or who did not follow Allah appropriately (Ogunbiyi 1969). He acted on his views on women's education within his own family, considering it his duty to educate his wives and daughters. The Fodio family produced at least five generations of women intellectuals, who generated a body of work in Fula, Arabic, and Hausa that is still extant. Their writings focused on a number of the important issues faced by their contemporaries, as they defended the ideals of newly emerging emirates. Jean Boyd argues,

They wrote deliberately, purposefully, often with burning zeal. They taught and lectured, scolded, warned, exhorted, ridiculed; they marshaled recorded events and set them down; they wrote elegies which praised the dead for such qualities as modesty, piety, scholarship, humility, generosity, kindliness, but without mention of beauty, wealth, elegance of dress, strength, physical prowess, or feats of arms. (1986, p. 130)

The *jihad* influenced women's lives in a number of ways that dan Fodio never envisioned. For example, many free women found themselves exposed to the possibility of enslavement during the unrest created by the *jihad*. Once peace was restored, many women appreciated the order that left them less vulnerable to slave raiding. Internal slavery increased dramatically, however, as slaves were imported into the emirates. Most of these slaves were women who worked on small farms alongside their owners, or on plantations that ranged in size from a dozen to a thousand slaves, many of whom were women (Lovejoy 1988). Throughout the western Sudan, slave plantation production grew, affecting free women's work (Klein 1997). Slaves replaced free women in salt production during the nineteenth century, expanding production to meet increased demand in the region (Lovejoy 1986). Slaves relieved noble Maraka women from agricultural labor during this period also, allowing the elite women to expand the indigo-dyed cloth production that they controlled. These women welcomed the increase in slave labor, because it allowed many to increase their profits dramatically. They preferred female slaves to replace them in their work, but they used male slaves to weave cotton. It was not unusual in the region for male slaves to cross the nor-
mally rigid gender division of labor and take on female tasks (Olivier de Sardan 1997; Roberts 1984).

Unfortunately for noble Maraka women, slave production for male owners began to compete with free women’s production, threatening their economic resources (Roberts 1984). Unlike slave women, elite women were secluded and could go out only after dark, veiled. The differences between most slave and free women were summed up by a poem written in 1865 by the imam of Chediyia, a town between Kano and Bauchi: “Farm-work is not becoming for a wife, you know; she is free, you may not put her to hoe grass [like a slave]” (Lovejoy 1981, p. 220).

Not all slave women worked in agricultural production; some wealthy male traders and scholars had concubines that numbered in the hundreds (Klein 1997). These slave women found that Islam gave them some protection, including a rule that they should be unmanumitted after giving birth to their owner’s child. Of course, not all masters followed this law (Olivier de Sardan 1997).

The Hausa jihad also led to the enforcement of seclusion among Hausa women and a resulting change in women’s work in urban areas. Unable to work in the fields, women developed crafts and cooking skills that they marketed through an extended network of children and kin. The income generated from these activities often led to an increase in individual wealth (Coles and Mack, 1991). However, the conditions of seclusion also hindered women in developing large-scale enterprises. Prominent in almost all aspects of textile manufacturing, women could not organize and mobilize labor as effectively as their male counterparts. While women textile manufacturers remained concentrated in southern portions of the Sokoto Caliphate (Nupe and Ilorin), men developed large-scale enterprises in the north-central sections of the state (Kriger 1993).

The nineteenth-century political changes greatly affected elite women’s access to state power. As new political developments, women found themselves virtually shut out of the new governing structures. For example, as Baure formed, the ruling sarki became determined to protect himself by eliminating checks on his power by the magajiya (queen mother). Therefore, the office of the magajiya remained vacant for sixty years after the rise of the Fulani. The result for ruling-class women was that their most powerful position in the town government was undermined. Even after the position was filled, the magajiya no longer had the right to veto decisions made by the sarki. Her principal role was limited to directing the rituals of royal women at first marriages and childbirths. The iya continued to supervise di-

vorced women in the bori cult, but the cult itself lost power because of the increased influence of Islam as the state religion (M. G. Smith 1978).

Overall, therefore, as the Sokoto Caliphate established itself as the major regional power, the impact of the Fulani-led jihad on women was both uneven and contradictory. Ruling-class women lost much of their political and religious clout, a change that had roots in the changing state structure over the previous six centuries. They were also increasingly likely to be secluded. At the same time, Uthman dan Fodio urged men to treat their wives fairly and educate their daughters. The end of the jihad brought peaceful conditions that left women in Hausaland less vulnerable to enslavement but increased the numbers of female slaves from wars outside the caliphate. As the economy of the region expanded, these women were more likely to serve on plantations than in the past.

THE COAST AND ITS HINTERLAND DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

For many who lived along the coast of West Africa, the nineteenth century was a time of turmoil. Most important, the transition from slaves to vegetable products as the major trade items of Afro-European trade combined with internal developments to create an increase in slave raiding. Before this era, slave traders had sold most captive men to Europeans and kept women for domestic slavery. With the decline of the Atlantic slave trade, the sex ratio among slaves became more even. But women were still most likely to be enslaved; many men were simply killed during the raids. While women faced increased vulnerability, many were able to turn the rise in petty commodity production to their advantage. Patterns began to emerge during the nineteenth century that became clear during the colonial period. In particular, petty trading offered many women independence they ordinarily would not have had. Its limitations as a static economic sphere for women with few alternatives did not become obvious until the twentieth century.

Trade and Production

Women responded to increasing levels of trade during the nineteenth century by turning to marketing, in part because of their role in the subsistence economy. Their family obligations made the acquisition of marketing profits appealing, allowing them to provide more to their kin than they might simply from farming. Once women met their obligations to feed their families, their profits could be disposed
of as they pleased. Among the Igbo in what is now Nigeria, successful women used their profits to buy achievement-based titles. Both women and men could take titles, but men found it easier to participate in this system than women, because they generally had greater access to wealth. As Amadiume argued for the Nnobi Igbo, "there was a direct link between the accumulation of wives, the acquisition of wealth and the exercise of power and authority" (1987, p. 42). Men were able to increase their number of dependent laborers by marrying women. Wives worked on their land and produced daughters, from whom men received bridewealth payments. Successful women, however, could also marry wives, whose labor and children they controlled. Since the Igbo had a flexible gender system in which women could become "males"—that is, they could play roles normally reserved for men—woman-to-woman marriage did not disrupt their gender ideology or the gender division of labor. In her discussion of female husbands, Amadiume cautions her readers against confusing biological sex and socially constructed gender. Although a gender division of labor characterized Igbo society, women sometimes took on male identities.

Another example of the flexibility of the gender system is what Amadiume calls male daughters. Some lucky women could head lineages and inherit land and other property usually reserved for men if they were particularly favored by their fathers or if there were no appropriate male heirs. In addition, these daughters of a patrilineage acted like males toward the wives in that lineage. The bond between fathers, daughters, and sons set up the daughters of a lineage in a position of authority toward wives. Amadiume gives no examples of men who became women, an indication of the advantage that men have in a system that values them over women.

The number of women able to marry wives and take titles increased during the nineteenth century as the region became more stratified. Similar transformations occurred in Yorubaland, where trade began to replace agriculture as many free women's primary occupation; slaves, both male and female, took their place. In part, this change was brought about by increased urbanization and a modification of the agricultural sector that included the introduction of new crops. The increase in the numbers of slaves also liberated free women from household and farming tasks. As Afonja (1981) notes, this withdrawal of women from agriculture occurred more rapidly in urban than in rural areas, where women were most likely to combine farming and marketing.

Overall, however, the scale of women's trade increased during the nineteenth century as women entered the trade in cash crops.

The increasing importance of cash crops reflected changes in the Afro-European trade, as the British, in particular, demanded vegetable goods and tree crops instead of slaves from coastal traders. The region responded by increasing the production of palm products, a response that would greatly affect the social structure. As Afonja argues, cash crop production changes the values associated with the means of production—that is, with land, labor, and capital. These changes, which became more pronounced during the colonial era, began to emerge in the nineteenth century as lineages started to lose control over land and family labor. As individual ownership replaced control of land by male lineage members, the value of land became central to capital accumulation, and subsistence needs no longer dominated agriculture. Many women found themselves at a disadvantage in this new competition over land, because men were more likely to inherit land, resulting in an increased asymmetry between male and female power.

**Women's Organizations**

Although gender ideology often worked against their interests, women did have organizations that represented them. Among the Nnobi Igbo, patrilineage daughters were organized into the ụnwọ ọkpụ, led by the eldest daughter. The ụnwọ ọkpụ helped settle disputes in the lineage and also ensured that they were treated with the proper respect. Lineage wives joined the ienyem di, which helped organize women to meet their responsibilities toward the patrilineage into which they had married. At the same time, it stressed the need for cooperation and solidarity among women. All women, as wives and daughters, were under the jurisdiction of the women's council, ienyem ụnwọ. In contrast to the ụnwọ ọkpụ and ienyem di, leadership in the women's council was based on achievement and personality rather than seniority. The council was responsible for looking after women's welfare at the same time that it ensured their good behavior by levying fines. The council could protect women from abusive husbands and from decisions by the male elders that worked against women's interests. If necessary, it could call a strike, in which women refused to provide their normal services. Taken together, the three women's organizations worked both for and against women's interests. The daughters and wives of the patrilineage had conflicting interests that the women's council could only hope to mediate. In addition, the women's council was responsible as much for ensuring women's appropriate behavior as for defending women from men.

The Bundu secret society in Sierra Leone had a similar double-edged impact. Some authors have tried to determine whether Bundu was a positive force in women's lives. Hoffer (1972; MacCormack
1975) describes how Bundu gave women political power, while Bledsoe (1980) argues that it gave only older women power while contributing to the oppression of younger women. In fact, as an institution that virtually all women joined and that related to most areas of their life, it is not surprising that Bundu could work for all women’s interests at the same time that it contributed to the control that men and older women had over young women.

Bundu was clearly a powerful political and social force among the Mende of Sierra Leone. Sixteenth-century Portuguese travelers reported the existence of female solidarity. It is likely that the original Mende migrants to the area, the Mane, brought Bundu-like initiation societies with them, which became intertwined with the indigenous societies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Boone 1986). Similar to its male equivalent, Poro, Bundu was open to all free-born female community members, but it was structured hierarchically. At the top of the structure were women who had demonstrated their leadership abilities and passed a series of tests about their knowledge of philosophy and medicine. At the bottom were the new initiates, who underwent difficult rites of passage that tested their courage, strength, and knowledge of village history. Initiation into Bundu included a test of young girls’ virginity and certification through clitoridectomy for those who passed this test. Only those who joined these societies could expect to participate fully in village life. Surely no young woman could expect to marry without the approval of her Bundu elders, for it was they who arranged marriages with suitable men (Boone 1986). A study of Bundu demonstrates that women’s interests were not uniformly served. Clearly, the successful elders reaped more advantages than young, relatively powerless wives.

Women and Nineteenth-Century States

Throughout the nineteenth century, attempts to control and participate in the slave trade led to the increasing militarization of much of the region. With some notable exceptions, the growing importance of the military in the state apparatus disadvantaged women vis-à-vis men. Many women lost out because of heightened insecurity that resulted from greater slave raiding. Some women from the ruling elite lost access to state power. As we shall see, a few exceptional women were able to use military and economic crises faced by male rulers to gain political power.

For example, the Asante developed a centralized, expansionist state that left little room for women to participate in political power. The major exception was the asantehemaa, or queen mother, of the

Asante Union, who shared power with the asantehene (male ruler). Aidoo describes the asantehemaa’s office:

As a full member and co-chairman of the governing council or assembly of state, the queen mother’s presence was required whenever important matters of state were to be decided. She also had to hear all judicial cases involving the sacred oaths of the state. She was entitled to, and did have, her own separate court where she was assisted by female counselors and functionaries. Her independent jurisdiction covered all domestic matters affecting women and members of the royal family. In certain cases, however, male litigants could apply to have their civil cases transferred from the chief’s court to the queen mother’s where fees and fines were generally lower. (Aidoo 1981, p. 66)

Although the asantehene clearly exercised more power than the queen mother, the asantehemaa had the right to nominate a candidate to rule as asantehene. She could make three attempts to gain the approval of the chiefs of the states making up the Asante Union. Aidoo argues that the power of able queen mothers increased during times of state crises, when male leadership was in trouble. Under normal circumstances, the queen mother’s power was limited by a number of factors. First, it was not supported by her relationship to other women. She had authority over women, but she did not represent their interests and therefore could not build on women’s collective power. Second, the asantehemaa exercised power in a culture where aggressive men were valued but aggressiveness in premenopausal women was denigrated. Thus there was no place for premenopausal women in the all-important military. Third, despite the fact that women in this matrilineal society were treated with respect as mothers and sisters, Akan culture feared menstruating women and greatly restricted their public activities. As Aidoo points out, all of the nineteenth-century Akan queen mothers who participated in warfare were beyond menopause. Thus, the asantehemaa exercised authority as exceptional women and had to work around many limitations on their power.

Despite these limitations, a number of the asantehemaa during the nineteenth century played important roles in the challenges to Asante power by British imperialism. One influential queen mother was Yaa Kyaa, affectionately called Akyaaawaa. In the 1820s, she accompanied Asantehene Osei Yaw on his military campaigns to the south. Already in her fifties, she was described in 1824 by C. C. Rein-dorf, a missionary at the Basle Mission in Accra, as “a woman of masculine spirit” who did not approve of a tactical retreat from British
forces undertaken by Osei Yaw's army (Wilks 1988). Akyaawa took the license granted to postmenopausal women to openly criticize Osei Yaw's conduct of this military campaign, a role that may have been religiously sanctioned for her as well. She eventually became an important mediator between the Asante and the British, with whom she arranged an important peace treaty. In part, her influence reflected the troubled times Asante was experiencing as it began losing control over trade on the coast.

By the 1880s, Asante's capital, Kumase, was suffering from a serious internal political crisis, partially brought on by Asante's inability to deal with British imperialism. Into these troubled times of military defeat and palace coups stepped another asantehema, Yaa Akyaaw, who tried to assert control over the disintegrating kingdom. As a leading entrepreneur in Kumase, she was able to bribe politicians, wage war, and direct the campaigns to take over control of the asantehema and asantehene throne. She became asantehema by deposing her mother, placing her minor-age son, Prempe I, on the throne despite opposition from her brothers that cost many of their supporters their lives (Aidoo 1981).

Although Yaa Akyaaw had established herself as the de facto ruler in Asante, she could not withstand the power of the British. They had always looked askance at her "strong will and resolution" (Aidoo 1981, p. 74). For her part, she often treated the British agents in Kumase with contempt. When the British took the opportunity to dethrone Asantehene Prempe I in 1896, they recognized that Yaa Akyaaw was the real power and exiled them both to the Seychelles Islands. This act of direct imperialism ended the career of the powerful and shrewd asantehema, who died in exile at 75 in 1917 (Aidoo 1981). Like her predecessor Akyaawa, Yaa Akyaaw inserted herself into troubled times. Although elite Asante women generally lost political power during the nineteenth century, a few were able to gain power when the male elite's grasp on the state began to slip.

Madame Yoko, a Mende chief in the Sierra Leone hinterland from 1885 to 1905, was unusually successful at capturing state power in the context of slave raiding and military offensives. She gained control of a large section of the Mende, the Kpaa Mende, after her husband's death. Her skillful manipulation of the British based in the Sierra Leone colony on the coast contributed to her rise to power. In part because of the British role in helping her secure power, the legitimacy of Yoko's rule is in dispute by scholars. Abraham (1978) argues that Yoko, like other women rulers among the Mende, owed her power almost entirely to British colonial rule. But Hoffer (1972) points out that Mende women had a long history of political activity, which included becoming chiefs of towns. According to Hoffer, this unusual political power was based in the female solidarity, Bundu. Therefore, Yoko's rise to power should be distinguished from the power held by Asante queen mothers, who ruled without the support of collective women's power.

Madame Yoko increased Bundu's popularity among the Kpaa Mende, starting her own Bundu initiation school. Her ability to form alliances by controlling the marriages of the young girls whom she initiated clearly worked to her political advantage. Many powerful Kpaa Mende families sent their daughters to her for initiation, and even to live as wards in her households. Therefore, although she was unable to use polygynous marriage directly, as would a powerful man in recruiting dependents, she exploited Bundu as an alternative source. As Hoffer (1972) suggests, "Madame Yoko did what a male paramount chief could not do: she made politically significant alliances in two directions, both in taking the girls into her Bundu bush and wardship, and again in sending them out to husbands" (162). It would appear, then, that there was internal structural support for Yoko's power.

Nonetheless, the British influence radiating from the coast must have been crucial for Yoko as she enlarged the territory controlled by the Kpaa Mende. This influence needs to be viewed in the context of a century in which the British expanded an informal empire into the Sierra Leone hinterland. Clearly, many rulers brought the British into their disputes and came to depend on their military support and to anticipate their financial stipends (Skinner 1980).

Military expansion and civil strife interacted with gender ideology to influence women's lives among the Yoruba also. Women were called upon to provision armies during the Yoruba civil wars, often setting up their markets just behind the army lines (Ajayi and Smith 1964). Madame Tinubu played a crucial role in providing provisions for the Egba during the 1864 Dahomey–Egba war. She had established herself as an influential trader and politician during the 1850s at Lagos but was expelled for her opposition to British influence. She reestablished herself at Abeokuta during the Ijaye war in the early 1860s. She received the iyaloade title for her efforts and continued to be an important economic and political force until her death in 1887 (Mba 1982).

Two of the new towns established during the wars, New Oyo and Ibadan, represented the variety of changes that women's power underwent as these two new urban areas developed. The adafin (king) of
New Oyo was able to establish a more centralized state that could succeed better in warfare than the one he had left behind in Old Oyo. Unfortunately, for women, the power of the iyalode to represent women's interests was undercut by his increased, centralized control over the government. The royal mothers and priestesses in the palace came to dominate decisions on women's interests, but the royal women had fewer contacts with most women than had the iyalode in Old Oyo. Thus the interests of women as a group suffered, and the iyalode became more like the asantehemaa than she had in the past, cut off from collective women's power (Awe 1977).

In newly established Ibadan, however, the iyalode came to play an important role in the government's functioning. There the Yoruba fugitives established a new form of government that depended more on merit than on heredity. Thus the iyalode, like the other officers, gained office through contributions to the town's military efforts. One would think that military expansion would uniformly undermine women's access to state power, as it did in New Oyo and Asante. But women's experiences in Ibadan and the Sierra Leone hinterland suggest that some women participated in and gained from regional military conflict.

**Women in the Emerging Comprador Class**

While many of the changes faced by the women of this region stemmed from internal developments, such as the fragmentary tendencies in state governments, external factors were evident as well. Particularly important were European attempts to suppress the Atlantic slave trade, the expansion of trade in cash crops, and the establishment of European coastal enclaves. These changes brought about direct contact between some coastal peoples and European merchants, missionaries, and officials that led to the development of a new comprador class (entrepreneurs who collaborated with and benefited from European presence). Women played an important role in the formation of this class.

Sierra Leone produced one of the most complex and developed comprador classes. The British had established the colony with the hope that they could produce a society much like their own. They were especially concerned with encouraging African women to accept the kinds of roles that were developing in industrializing Britain. Much to their surprise, many of the women whom they settled in the colony turned to trade for their livelihood. This active participation in the economic domain was of great concern to many of the colonists and missionaries, whose own society was increasingly sex-segregated.

But the women used their ties to European firms and established connections with the people living in the hinterland to develop a flourishing trade early in the nineteenth century. Settler women brought in by the British took advantage of Freetown's growing population to expand the rice, garden vegetable, and fish trade with the hinterland. By mid-century, many established trading posts upcountry both competed against and cooperated with settler men traders. Others established themselves as far northwest as Senegambia and as far southeast as Fernando Po in a loose-knit trading diaspora that was centered on Freetown. By the end of the century, the settler women had come to dominate the coastal kola nut trade between Sierra Leone and the Gambia.

As the settler women created their trading network, they drew on Western and indigenous cultural elements to give their diaspora cohesion. A sizable number of the women traders were Muslim and were able to build trading connections to other Muslims. Some women married men in the interior to establish their legitimacy. Membership in the women's secret societies gave some traders indispensable connections and protection in the absence of kinship ties. Bundu could certify that these stranger-traders could be trusted in commercial relations at the same time that it held the traders to certain standards of local behavior (E. White 1987).

Although Bundu and marriage alliances facilitated trading relations for settler women, conflict sometimes erupted between these traders and their hosts. The traders had to watch out for looting and arson that was sanctioned by local authorities, and even for enslavement during the conflicts that plagued the region. At least two factors contributed to problems faced by the women traders. First, they shared with settler men problematic ties to the British. As the century wore on and Afro-British trading relations became increasingly weighted toward European interests, the people in the colony's hinterland became increasingly hostile toward the British and their local representatives, the comprador settlers and the missionaries.

Second, the presence of settler women in the hinterland created conflict because they implicitly challenged gender relations. They traded and traveled about with a kind of independence denied most other women. Local male authorities worried that the traders' lifestyles would appeal to their women. In fact, some indigenous women fled their homes and joined the settler women's trading diaspora.

Although the women traders were an important element in the expanding flow of natural products from the colony's hinterland to Europe, British traders, government officials, and missionaries seemed
uncomfortable with these women’s roles. As a comprador class, the settler traders had helped to establish a colony that competed with the Atlantic slave trade, demonstrating that Afro-European relations did not have to be based on European enslavement of Africans. But the colony did not look like the mirror of British society that its founders desired. Many settlers did convert to Christianity and became missionaries in the hinterland, and literacy became an important part of settler society. But with the exception of a few elite women, most settler women did not emulate their European role models. Rather than staying at home to preside over a domestic sphere that served as a refuge from the public world of men, most women joined in the brisk trade that characterized the colony. Some of these women traveled far and wide as they extended their diaspora from Senegambia to Fernando Po.

Settler women were able to establish such independence in part because they took advantage of dislocations created by the slave trade. As settler society developed during the nineteenth century, men were unable to re-create the patriarchal controls over women that they had had throughout most of West Africa. Consequently, family ties were relatively flexible, and women took the opportunity to move about freely.

By contrast, in nearby Cape Palmas of present-day southeastern Liberia, women who converted to Christianity tried to distance themselves from the local population and did not engage in trading or farming. Repatriated African-American settlers, Christian missionaries, and local populations all agreed on a distinction between “civilized,” a Westernized Christian prestigious category, and “native,” an indigenous, less privileged category. The specific content and meaning of those categories varied considerably, depending on one’s position in the hierarchy. The norms for “civilized” culture and society were first set by men known as Krumen, who traded with and worked on European ships. These standards were established by early African-American settlers, who, in large part, came from “a middle-class, business oriented, urban culture rather than an African American background characterized by rural plantation slavery and a strong core of modified West African cultural element,” as characterized Sierra Leone’s early settlers (Moran 1990, p. 58). Gender constructions played a major role in the establishment and reproduction of this prestige system. “Civilized” women were held more stringently to restrictive standards of behavior than “civilized” men; and women were more likely to experience downward mobility. Even upward mobility came at a cost for women, as they found themselves much more dependent on men for economic survival. In this case, the rise of a comprador class brought contradictory changes for women.

The development of a Western-educated, Christianized elite in Lagos and Abeokuta reflected the growth of a comprador class among the Yoruba as well. This newly emerging class recruited most of its members from the recaptives of Sierra Leone and became known as the Saro. The disruptions of the slave experience and the missionary efforts of the British created conditions for the lives of the women in this class that differed significantly from other Yoruba women’s experiences. The Saro women shared much with the elite settler women down the coast in Sierra Leone. As in Freetown, the close ties with the British exposed the Saro to Christianity and its European marriage institution. At first, many elite women found Christian-style marriage appealing, as they abandoned polygyny and bridewealth for British promises of a better life. In particular, married women initially found attractive British inheritance laws that gave Christian wives and their children the right to their husbands’ property. The policy, however, adversely affected others, such as plural customary or outside wives and their children (Mann 1985).

Christian marriage, however, did not develop as either these elite Yoruba women or the British missionaries expected. Marriage bonds proved to be very flexible, and men and women moved in and out of marriage with relative ease compared to most Yoruba. Early on, elite men were ambivalent about monogamy, often simply ignoring this requirement of Christian marriage by taking concubines and customary wives. Indeed, even some women began to turn against European-style marriage when they found it left them overly dependent on husbands who frequently failed to follow through on their obligations to support them. Abandoned wives and women whose husbands spent their resources on outside women had nowhere to turn for support. The conjugal relationship that failed many women in England proved especially fragile in Yorubaland, since the ideology that supported this relationship had to compete with the dominant Yoruba culture, which included polygyny, strong affinal ties created by the exchange of bridewealth, and women’s autonomous economic activity. Moreover, throughout much of the century, social standards set up by those Saro attempting to establish a distinct class position required that women forgo participation in trading, the occupation that helped so many other Yoruba women to survive. Toward the end of the century, women began to demand greater economic independence to respond to their vulnerable positions (Mann 1985). These elite women became involved in class formation, both by the devel-
development of distinct cultural markers and by promoting their economic interests. Many of them opened schools for girls to promote elite culture as well as to give themselves some economic independence. Others found ways to trade that did not involve sitting in the marketplace or publicly hawking.

The growth of the comprador classes along the west coast and in the hinterland reflected the increasing stratification of the region. Women had never been a uniform group with identical interests, but the differences among women increased over the nineteenth century. The expansion of petty trading and cash crops offered some women greater opportunities than others. Among the Igbo, an increasing number of women were able to buy titles and to marry women as female husbands. But far from becoming wealthier, many women suffered through the era as domestic slavery increased. Most slaves continued to be female, although the sex ratio began to become more balanced.

At the same time, many elite women, like the oyalo of New Oyo, lost political power as they were pushed aside by the development of more centralized and militaristic states that ignored women’s collective power. A few women, such as Akyawu and Yaa Akyaa of Asante, were able to take advantage of the disintegration of elite male power and to gain control of the state apparatus.

Throughout the period, women formed organizations that represented their interests and established female-controlled networks. Such organizations as the women’s councils among the Igbo and Bundu among the Mende reflected the double-edged impact of these groups. These organizations represented women’s interests to the more powerful men, but they also drew women into a system that ultimately was to their disadvantage as a group. Finally, since women’s interests were not uniform, these organizations represented the interests of the older, more successful women rather than younger women.

WEST-CENTRAL AFRICA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

West-Central Africa entered the nineteenth century with its coastal region still dominated by the Afro-European slave trade. Many areas of the region that had escaped the disruptions created by this trade fell under its influence during the nineteenth century, with the major area for slave raiding shifting northward. These changes had particular significance for women. Trade became increasingly dominated by men, who lived in single-sex coastal commercial centers where they could purchase their necessary goods rather than get them from their wives. Social mobility in the Kongo region became increasingly based on business success and connections, to which men had greatest access. Under these circumstances, elite women lost power and influence. Women often lived in separate quarters in the merchant houses and were segregated at public events. Rather than marry free women, many men preferred to purchase wives so that they could avoid obligations to affinal kin (Broadhead 1997).

Some new opportunities did open up for women. As food producers, they supplied the large-scale, clandestine slave-trade businesses during the first part of the nineteenth century. After cash crops replaced slaves in the Afro-European trade, many women turned to them. This shift away from subsistence agriculture to cash crops led to food shortages in some areas (Broadhead 1997).

Overall stratification among women declined during the nineteenth century. European observers noticed few differences between slave and free women as elite women lost power. Most women farmed, few having as much time for a leisure lifestyle as many women had in previous centuries (Broadhead 1997). Although a few women traders, such as Dona Ana da Sousa, rose to great prominence, political life became dominated by male traders, while women were confined to the subsistence sector.

As the northeast part of West-Central Africa entered this era of Afro-European trade, women found their lives affected in a variety of ways. Overall, women along the Congo River continued to work almost as they had in former times, despite an increase in cassava production. Trade along the river was organized in accordance with the existing gender division of labor. Men worked as paddlers on slave-raiding boats that could take up to sixty paddlers, and they fished during their spare time. Women had few chances to amass wealth in this trade, but they sustained the expanding trading system by increasing their production of cassava. One important offshoot of participation in slave-raiding was the dramatic rise in domestic slaves in the area, a rise that was particularly noticeable after the European-run markets for slaves shut down. The slave-raiding system continued to produce slaves, forcing their prices down and making them available even for some slaves to buy. A complex social structure emerged in which slaves and owners overlapped (Harms 1997). As in much of West Africa, many of these slaves were female.

In this matrilineal society, men found that marrying slave wives offered them an alternative to marriage with affines who might interfere in their lives. Thus men developed patrilineal, endogamous
trading firms that recruited wives through the slaving system. Consequently, many women had no natal kin to watch over their interests. The patrilineal companies that wealthy men formed did not naturally self-reproduce, and European observers noted the skewed ratio between adults and the far less numerous children (Harms 1997).

Most owners and slaves had an interest in controlling the number of children. The time that it took to turn children, especially boys, into productive family members made reproduction by cheap slave imports more cost-effective for both owners and slaves. Slave women were mainly interested in having people in their working group who could help them produce a surplus and make their lives easier. Moreover, slave women had little control over their children, since their offspring belonged to their owners and could not take care of their mothers in their later years. In addition, slave women responded to their forced marriages by limiting the number of children they produced (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1997; Miller 1983).

Most of the material available on women for this period in West-Central Africa focuses on the impact of the slave trade on their lives (Robertson and Klein 1997). As the Afro-European trade expanded to include new parts of the region, women were marginalized in state power and large-scale business. Stratification among women decreased as elite women's status declined. The enormous increase in slave-raiding increased the number of slave women in the region. Men turned away from the older, patriarchal kinship system, under which they waited for older men to help them obtain wives by providing bridewealth. Instead, they preferred to recruit wives through the slave-raiding system. Slave wives were very vulnerable, since they had no relatives to look after their interests. Free men with access to wealth preferred to avoid the ties to affines that came with older forms of marriage.

EARLY COLONIAL RULE, 1880–1920

At the turn of the twentieth century, colonial rulers were still in the process of establishing their hegemony over their recently acquired territories. Generally, colonial states were weak and could be maintained only by the use of force. For many women, the imposition of colonial rule initially led to unstable times. In Sierra Leone, for example, many settler women suffered great losses as the Mende rebelled in 1898 against the extension of a British protectorate to the hinterland in 1898. The settler women's kola trade, based in Mende and Sherbro territory, dropped off precipitously as a result of this re-

volt. Priscilla A. Jones reported to the commissioner responsible for investigating the rebellion that she had lost her husband and her trade goods:

I trade in kola nuts, taking them in exchange for cotton, tobacco, spirits, etc. The chief of Tombay township is commonly called Beah Boy; he used to visit my husband, and my husband read a letter to the chief from the District Commissioners about the hut tax if he could be given three months' grace. Sammuel Cole [her boat captain] told me that my husband had been killed and the property plundered.

(E. White 1987, p. 57)

The records do not reveal whether Priscilla Jones found the commissioner to be a sympathetic listener. Ironically, the British ignored the legitimate grievances of people coming face to face with the loss of their independence and blamed the settlers for fomenting this rebellion (E. White 1987). Many coastal traders faced similar difficulties. Omu Okwel of Ossomari, near Onitsha, lost her husband to British competition as the Royal Niger Company forced him and most of the other traders from the town of Brass out of the upper Niger with stiff and restricted competition. The British set the stage for this competition by bombarding the riverine towns into submission between 1892 and 1910. In an autobiography produced for missionaries, the ex-slave Bwanikwa reported that the coming of the Congo Free State in the 1890s destroyed the state in which she had been a slave, leaving her much more vulnerable to physical violence, for she was not always guaranteed the protection of an owner with a vested interest in her well-being (M. Wright 1997).

As the Europeans gained control over their colonies, they attempted to abolish slavery. The end of the internal slave trade and slavery itself eventually made life safer for many women and gave them more control over their own lives. Yet abolition offered less to women ex-slaves than to male ex-slaves. Men were more likely to leave their former owners than women because they had an easier time establishing economic security on their own (Miers and Roberts 1988; Northrup 1988; M. F. Smith 1981).

Colonial officials used confusion over the distinctions between wives and female slaves, especially concubines, to discourage women ex-slaves from leaving their masters. Europeans argued that wives belonged to their husbands. In areas where slavery was large-scale and most of the slaves were female, decisions by liberated slaves to leave their masters could have disrupted the economic and social relations that the colonizers needed to make their enterprises work
(Miers and Roberts 1988). Following the conquest of northern Nigeria, the British watched concubines flee from their former owners, which forced the owners to work in their own fields and surprised the British, who had thought the concubines were content (Hogendorn and Lovejoy 1988).

In the Maradi region of Niger, elite men and women used marriage to retain control of their former slaves. After emancipation, junior wives and concubines performed agricultural duties. These women responded by asserting the importance of marriage rituals, veiling, and purdah. In so doing, they both asserted their own worth and found a means of evading certain demands on their labor (Cooper 1994, 1997).

In some cases, as in the French Sudan, women joined men in forming new agricultural villages of ex-slaves. They often worked side by side in the fields, ignoring the gender division of labor that characterized the societies that surrounded them. Richard Roberts interviewed a freed slave descendant, who explained how hardship forced ex-slaves to ignore appropriate gender roles, a practice forced on them during slavery:

> At the start of liberation former slaves who installed themselves in a new village had to create a new life. For that end, effort was necessary. During this period the organization [i.e., division of labor under slavery] was observed. That is to say, that men and women did the same work. But with time, prosperity arrived. Women undertook food preparation and domestic chores. However, each woman retained the right to the "field of the night," just as the slaves had the right to their own fields. (Roberts 1988, p. 299)

To maintain their workforce, many masters offered former slaves new incentives, such as new clothes, more food, and better working conditions (Hogendorn and Lovejoy 1988). Many of the owners who lost most with the advent of abolition were women. Abolition wiped out a major source of labor for free and elite-class women who relied on slaves to increase their agricultural output. Both free men and women were now forced to turn to lineage ties as their major source for recruiting dependents, and men had greater access to lineage-based labor and wives’ labor than did women (Robertson 1997a; M. Wright 1983).

This desire by elders to depend increasingly on kin ties to gain laboring dependents was resisted by many young women, for this era was also characterized by a loosening of patriarchal control over some women’s lives. Many women took the opportunities offered by ur-
of other women traders. She developed important ties to the men on the Onitsha town council, who could look after her interests after the Council of Women lost their regulation of the waterside market to the town council. Women as a group lost significant regulatory power as the town government responded to expanding commerce. Okwe, however, stood to gain from the transfer of control over the main market from the Council of Women to the male-dominated town council.

Okwe was taking part in the process of class formation. Nonetheless, the European companies and the power of the externally controlled state to intervene in the market combined with a dramatic expansion in trade to increase the process of this class formation (Sacks 1982). Okwe became a wealthy and powerful petty bourgeois trader, whose mobility beyond this class was severely limited during the era of colonialism. Moreover, although she did relatively well during this era, the changes brought about by colonial rule did have consequences for her as a woman. Ossomari appointed her as omu of the Council of Women during an era when the omu’s power had been undermined by economic changes and the hostile British colonial state. Certain British traders could respect her abilities, but the colonial state looked askance at women wielding political power. The transfer of waterside market control from the Council of Women to the Town Council symbolizes this hostility toward women. It is not surprising, therefore, that the position of omu has been vacant in Ossomari since Okwe’s death. Her economic successes brought her to political power in an era when the office was less influential.

In part, the office of omu lost power because of a successful attack on it by Christian missionaries. Christianity and Western education, often indistinguishable, interacted in very complex ways with pre-colonial cultures to affect women’s lives. For example, missionaries began to influence notions of appropriate gender roles for women by holding up as a model the most conservative of Western family ideologies (Amadiume 1987). In the Congo Free State, missionaries combined with lineage elders to attack the growing independence of young women (M. Wright 1989). At the same time, missionaries often criticized the practice of pawning young girls, a practice that gave elite women access to labor.

Economically successful women appeared to lose out to economically successful men. For example, women in Lagos had less access to land ownership than their male counterparts. As land became commodified in the late nineteenth century, women’s restricted abilities to accumulate property made it difficult for them to keep abreast of economic changes. As Lagos’s population grew dramatically and commercial land development took off, women’s subordinate roles in family networks often prevented them from alienating family property. Thus they were unable to use land to secure loans just as land was becoming an important private commodity.

Kristin Mann aptly summarized many women’s expectations:

The penetration of European merchant capital in early colonial Lagos introduced new forms of land tenure and property rights that disadvantaged women. Many fewer women than men obtained alienable, individually owned land and houses in the scramble for landed property that followed the annexation. This loss was significant in itself because land was becoming an increasingly scarce and valuable resource. But it also limited women’s access to credit and hence to the capital needed to trade. Women’s disability in land acquisition put them at yet another disadvantage relative to men. (Mann 1991, p. 705)

The impact of the early colonial period depended a great deal on the place of women in the economy and lineage structure. Of course, all women and men suffered because of the loss of power to the European overlords, but the actual effect on women’s lives varied. Many women found themselves freed from slavery, while other, more elite women experienced a decline in their ability to recruit labor because of the abolition of slavery. All women suffered because the Europeans imported a conservative Western family ideology against which their lives were judged; some suffered more than others as missionaries attacked their sources of power. Overall, the period was one of greater stratification among women as commodification spread, and some women, such as Omu Okwe, succeeded in the competitive business world at the turn of the century.

**The High Colonial Era, 1920–1960**

By 1920, the Europeans had gained formal control over virtually all of continental Africa. More than in the early colonial era, the expansion of cash crops as primarily a male domain and male migration to towns and mining areas left women without the assistance of young men in subsistence farming. In order to feed their families and to make up for the low wages paid to men, women increased their agricultural input and turned to petty trading to supplement their farming.

Whereas the earlier period had been characterized by a trend toward the loosening of patriarchal control over women, this period witnessed a partial reversal of this trend. Several factors worked against
women's independence, including the attitudes of colonial rulers who felt that women should be under the control of men; the economic interests of the colonial state and foreign businesses, who recognized that helping heads of lineages and chiefs to maintain patriarchal control would increase agricultural production; and the interests of lineage heads, who wished to curtail the development of female independence (M. Wright 1997). Neither the colonial rulers nor the lineage elders were able completely to control changes in kinship relations, however. In many cases, young men used their newly acquired wages to secure wives at an earlier age than in the past. Polygynous unions, however, were often delayed until men grew older, because they could not afford the expense of several wives. More men than women settled in urban areas. For those women who did migrate to towns, economic opportunities continued to be limited to prostitution and petty trading (Luise White 1984).

In general, colonial rulers came from societies that did not recognize women's collective political power as legitimate. Once in control of West and Central Africa, they simply ignored the institutionalized power that women held in many precolonial societies. This attitude contributed to the erosion of women's political power, which was further undermined by missionaries who attacked its religious underpinning. Women did not always accept this situation without protest. They both joined in anticolonial activities and organized as women to protest their situation.

Erosion of Women's Economic and Political Power

Among the Baule of Ivory Coast, colonial penetration resulted in a loss of autonomy and power for women (Etienne 1980). The commodification of cloth was especially disruptive to the more egalitarian gender relations of the precolonial era. The Baule lived away from the centers of precocious trade and coastal state formation. Although they developed little centralized state authority, they did participate in interregional trade. A key trade item was cloth, which men and women produced cooperatively. Women generally grew cotton on land that men had cleared for their use. The women then cleaned and carded this cotton, spun it into thread, and produced indigo dye to color it. Once these processes were completed, they turned the cotton over to men, who wove it and sewed it into strips. Although men played an important role in the production process, the Baule considered women to be the owners of this cloth. At times the cooperative relationship between wives and husbands was altered by men who acquired cotton from women other than their wives, and by women who appro-
changes brought by colonial penetration with more room to maneuver. In particular, the expansion of the petty commodity market brought women new opportunities to trade. These opportunities, however, had a complex impact. For example, in many parts of West and Central Africa, commodification brought with it an unexpected crisis in gender relations. Much to the colonial rulers’ surprise, changes in the economy began to threaten patriarchal control over women. Commodification and a preexisting permissive attitude toward sex led to a dramatic increase in prostitution in the Cross River Basin of Nigeria (Naanen 1991). In many places, divorce increased as some women, especially those with successful trading ventures, gained access to the material resources needed to survive outside of marriage. As they earned enough money to exist without the institution that had formerly bound them to men, they inadvertently gained more control over their sexuality. Some women, then, were able to break away from unfulfilling sexual, productive, and reproductive obligations to their husbands. This independence worked against the interests of lineage elders and the colonial and local states. Women’s retreat from marriage threatened the production of cash crops and wage labor, since they no longer provided their husbands with the subsistence that freed them to devote time to the other activities.

A growing amount of literature recognizes that colonial control of the domestic sphere was also important to maintaining control of the male workforce. In Katanga, women’s ability to produce food and children ensured a stable workforce for the local mines (Gondola 1997). In offering regular prenatal consultations, supplementary food rations, and baby gifts, Union Minière of Katanga recognized that the workers’ wives were central to their enterprise (Dibwe 1993). In the Zambian copperbelt, male colonial officials and traditional male authorities struggled to direct women’s labor and sexuality by defining and redefining the institution of marriage (Parpart 1994). Similarly, when the black soldiers of the French colonial army were posted away from their homes, the French authorities recruited local women to act as cooks, mistresses, and wives, believing that these women would stabilize the forces and prevent desertion among their ranks. However, although this policy was initially successful, it ultimately undermined the authorities’ intent when these same soldiers developed a stake in the local community through their families (Thompson 1990).

Within Belgian Central Africa, where colonial authorities sought to categorize and tax women according to their marital status, changes in the definition of a single woman provoked a rebellion within Bujumbura. In an effort to end “camouflaged” or hidden polygyny among “Christian, colonial-educated, évoluée men,” the authorities passed an anti-polygamy law in 1950. It redefined polygynous unions as business relationships and did not recognize the right of polygynous wives to remain in urban areas. Outraged that wives of polygynous unions, widows, and prostitutes were all defined as femme libre (single women) and taxed accordingly by the Belgian authorities, Muslim women petitioned the vice governor-general and threw letters of protest into the cars of the entourage of the visiting Belgian king (Hunt 1991). Both local and state authorities worked to restrict women’s mobility and independence by strengthening marriage institutions.

In West Africa, such an effort on the part of the colonial authorities is well illustrated by the Sefwi Wiawso state in western Gold Coast (P. Roberts 1987). In this region, the state council moved to address a crisis in gender relations by passing a series of amendments to customary law between 1925 and 1932. Changes in the economy had led to this crisis. Before the widespread introduction of cocoa into the area during the 1920s, husbands and wives lived in complementary but independent economic spheres. Men cleared land for their wives and supplied them with meat and fish. Women farmed the land provided by their husbands and fed them and the husbands’ dependents who were assigned to the wives’ houses. Divorces were relatively easy to obtain, and women often retired to their natal family’s farm after they had children to avoid any further labor and reproductive obligations to their husbands.

Cocoa production disrupted this complementary relationship as men turned to their wives to work on their cocoa farms in the face of the collapse of slave labor as an alternative. But many women did not feel that they were adequately compensated for their labor, while they worked on crops that they did not control. Divorce often followed, as women complained that their husbands refused to give them their own cocoa farms or to divide property evenly among their wives.

The situation was further complicated by the collapse of the cocoa market at the end of the 1920s and the growth of mining and transportation towns in Sefwi Wiawso. Women responded to these changes by increasing their marketing in food crops to male wage laborers. For many women, this trade offered an alternative to remaining in marriage. From the viewpoint of local authorities, women without male guardians posed a threat to patriarchal families. In particular, they worried that men no longer controlled the allocation of women’s labor through marriage. These “free women,” as they were called, even interfered with the exchange of women by arranging their daughters’ marriages and divorces. The increase in the number
of independent women was accompanied by venereal disease and an anti-witchcraft campaign to counter the disease's spread.

To intervene in what male elders considered a crisis, the state council enacted laws designed to contain prostitution, to stabilize marriage through decreased divorce, and to stem the rising costs of acquiring a wife. These developments, however, were not within the state council's control. The growth of commodity production undermined attempts to control women, because trade offered them the opportunity to gain more control over their lives.

While commodification opened up new opportunities for women, especially female elders, the expansion of the world economy ultimately spelled disaster for most women. As women left farming for trading, they found that trade was becoming increasingly less important in the overall economy than it had been at the beginning of the colonial era. This process has been illustrated by novelist Buchi Emecheta (1979) in The Joys of Motherhood. Nnu Ego, the focus of the novel, follows her new husband to Lagos, where he works as a domestic servant. When he is forced to join the British colonial army during World War II, she is left with the responsibilities of supporting herself and her children. Petty trading opportunities do not seem to be sufficient for feeding her family and paying her children's school fees. Prostitution appears to offer her a better standard of living, but Nnu Ego's values do not make this a viable option. At several points she is reduced to scavenging for firewood to sell. Emecheta movingly portrays the plight of women at the very bottom of the petty trading hierarchy, as Nnu Ego tries to meet her obligations to her children with very few resources. Her daughters, however, look toward a future less constrained by traditional kinship ties, which their economic opportunities will not allow them to maintain.

Ga women traders in Accra experienced a new freedom to arrange their own marriages and to move in and out of marriage bonds, but trade was the only option for subsistence that some women had. Many men were able to convert their control over dependents to control over resources, monopolizing private land ownership. Moreover, women faced discrimination in the labor market, as men turned to wage labor and even participated in the state administration (Robertson 1990).

Both colonialism and the capitalism that accompanied it entwined with already existing social formations in a variety of ways. Colonial rulers had sometimes conflicting interests in stability that would make their colonies governable and changes that would facilitate capitalist penetration. As Sara Berry argues in her discussion of the Yoruba ex-

perience, colonial rulers attempted to co-opt established institutions and authorities in their efforts to consolidate their financial and political position. "In the process," she suggests, "capitalist penetration and colonial rule neither destroyed nor subsumed intact precolonial Yoruba social units but operated both to reproduce and to transform them" (1985, p. 12).

Perhaps the social units of greatest concern to the colonial rulers when they thought of controlling women were kinship organizations. The colonizers both built on existing kinship relations and sought to transform them when these relations did not ensure that women fit the gender roles that Europeans felt were appropriate. As shown above in the discussion of the Sefwi Wiawso, male elders and colonial rulers passed customary laws that attempted to keep women under the control of their lineages.

Western-style education was also used to set boundaries on women's behavior. Colonial rulers designed schools to teach girls how to be good wives to elite men. Jules de Coppet, the governor-general of French West Africa, sent a circular, "The Instruction of Native Girls," to his lieutenant governors. As Diane Barthel suggests, he made it clear that the goals of female education were "the inculcation of European ideas on health and child care, the training of suitable wives for the French-trained male elite, and also the socialization of future generations in French mores and culture" (1985, pp. 145-46). He stated,

The practical girls' school aiming toward the domestic and hygienic education of women is the natural complement of rural popular school. It is based on the same principles. It claims the same organization. It proposes the same goal. The education of the native woman permits the evolution of the family and does not limit to the individual level the action of education received. It will consolidate, finally, in successive generations, the new habits acquired by education and will permanently install our action within the indigenous society. (Barthel 1985, p. 146)

Most girls exposed to Western-style education were the daughters of the newly educated elite. In fact, Western-educated fathers, concerned that colonial rulers were not providing enough schooling for girls, demanded that their daughters be educated. The newly educated male elite wanted wives for their sons who were skilled in Western-style gender roles so that they could raise their children to maintain their class position. After 1920, colonial rulers also began to see the importance of producing suitable wives for elite colonized men. But the administrators were further worried about the devel-
opment of rebellious women who lacked the access to education that men had. For example, in 1921, George Hardy, once inspector general of education for French West Africa, worried about the development of a “Lyisistrata under the coconut trees” if only boys were educated and girls remained shut out of schools (Barthel 1985, p. 145).

The disadvantages faced by Ga women are highlighted by their educational experiences. Men had more educational opportunities than women, a factor that was to the latter’s disadvantage in the newly evolving economy. Women in the Congo faced similar problems. Most Western-style education there was offered by missionaries who shared the colonial rulers’ concerns that schools instil in their colonial subjects conservative Western values that centered on the family and work. Before World War II, both women and men were given limited education that attempted to Christianize them without Westernization. The Belgians feared the creation of an assertive Westernized class such as had developed in Sierra Leone. With hopes that women would introduce Christian values into their cultures through proper mothering, missionaries trained them to become Christian wives and mothers and gave them few skills that would help them compete in the colonial economy. In so doing, they also attempted not just to draw distinctions between whites and blacks, but to assert class differences among Africans (Hunt 1990). After World War II, education for boys became much more geared to preparing them for wage labor and administrative tasks. By the time of independence, however, women could rarely become anything but Catholic sisters or elementary school teachers. Throughout the colonial period, few women gained access to even this limited education; less than 4 percent of secondary school pupils were female on the eve of independence in 1960 (Yates 1982).

Education was obviously a major tool used to spread imperialist culture. Western ideology is embedded in the process of education; it was the “hidden curriculum” in the structure of the school day (Masemann 1974). All students were exposed to Western ideologies about time and bureaucracy. Of course, missionaries and European teachers did not have complete control over what girls learned. Some of these students went on to enter male-dominated professional fields despite their training as homemakers (Barthel 1985). Others, such as Adelaide Smith Casely Hayford, joined nationalist movements as part of an educated elite demanding control over their own nation-states (Cromwell 1986).

Indeed, the spread of European imperial culture was complex and contradictory in a number of ways, as can be demonstrated by examining the roles played by European women in the colonizing effort. As Helen Callaway points out, European administrators first saw the colonial service primarily as a male domain, and Africa as an unsuitable place for proper European women. Yet European women did go to the colonies. While they faced much hostility, they played an important role in stabilizing the colonial hierarchies established by male administrators. Europeans in West and West-Central African colonies both supported Victorian ideas of women’s place in the world and undermined these ideas by actively participating in the colonial venture, first as missionaries, then increasingly as nurses and educational officers, and eventually as administrators. This contradiction was explored by Margaret Strobel. She suggests that “even missionary women, whose commitment to career and calling was a challenge to those very [Victorian] notions [of domesticity and female dependence], accepted the patriarchal ideology and bureaucracy of the Church and promoted conventional European gender roles to African and Asian women” (Strobel 1998, p. 390). This contradiction represented the tension between sexism and imperialism, which on the surface seemed to work so well together. While colonialism and patriarchy may appear to be inextricable, European women’s participation in the imperialist endeavor caused disruptions and contradictions between the two systems of domination.

World War II was a watershed, ushering in an era of increased participation by European women in the colonies as the war effort occupied men. In her study of European women in colonial Nigeria, Helen Callaway describes World War II and the succeeding decolonization phase as an era of the feminization of colonial culture. As Europeans began to lose control over their colonies, men began to retreat and allow women to take their places. No longer was Africa a place for young men to prove their masculinity. The new women officers thus formed an interim “buffer” group between two separate structures of male prestige, the departing British Colonial Service and the advancing cadres of Nigerian politicians and civil servants. . . .

In this setting, the meaning of [European women’s] presence in Nigeria as administrators cannot be interpreted in terms of “equal opportunity for women” so much as providing the Colonial Office with a temporary and non-threatening group aiding the graceful exit of the Raj. (Callaway 1987, p. 144)

Callaway argues that colonial women are often unfairly accused of having “lost” the empire or having created greater distance between the races, when they should be acknowledged for the roles they played
in ending the era of direct imperialism. It is possible that they also helped disguise the meaning of the neo-colonial relations that replaced direct colonialism.

While some European women benefited from their participation in colonial rule, for many African women it meant the loss of political power and new restrictions on participating in government. Often the British and French in West Africa ignored precolonial women’s offices and directed everything through men. Thus, for example, the onwu or “mother” of the Igbo, who was responsible for controlling markets and settling disputes among women, lost power to the male ruler, the obi. The British legitimized the obi’s rule by giving him a salary to which the onwu had no similar access (Okonjo 1983). By independence, the office of onwu in many Igbo towns lay vacant. This kind of deterioration in women’s position led women to protest.

Resistance

Many West and West-Central African women responded to colonial rule with open hostility and even rebellion, often struggling to defend their economic interest as traders. Others protected their loss of political power during the colonial era. Many turned to their precolonial gender-based solidarities to organize themselves. Igbo and Ibibio women rebelled against the colonial rulers and their local collaborators during the Women’s War of 1929, revealingly called the “Aba Riots” by the British. These women used women’s networks to organize thousands of women to confront the Native Administration throughout the region. They used a mechanism known as “sitting on a man” to insult the local authorities and protest what they believed was a plan to tax women. Their hostility also was fueled by fears that both their land and their bodies were losing fertility. This rebellion, however, was more than symbolic; women attacked the sixteen Native Courts, destroying several. The British responded to these tens of thousands of women by killing more than fifty and wounding at least that many (Amadiumue 1987; Ifeka-Moller 1975; Mba 1982; Van Allen 1976).

A similar rebellion occurred in Cameroon between 1958 and 1959. As early as the late 1920s, women had institutionalized a precolonial tool, anlu, for punishing men who offended the women’s community. They developed a hierarchical structure with local chapters that looked after women’s interests. The anlu was able to call together up to seven thousand Kom women in a series of mass demonstrations at the end of the 1950s. As in the Igbo case, women felt that their economic interests were threatened. In particular, these women feared that the colonial government would give their land to the Igbo. In addition, they complained that the local chiefs would not protect their crops from the cattle of Fulani herdsmen. In contrast to the reaction to the Igbo Women’s War, the colonial rulers elected not to respond with physical force, and none of the protesters was hurt (Ardener 1975).

In Lagos, eight to ten thousand women joined together in the Lagos Market Women’s Association, led by Alimotu Pelewura. Most of these women were illiterate and poor. They protested taxation of women and opposed a price-control scheme imposed during World War II. This organization was explicitly anticolonial, joining a general strike called during 1945. During the same period, middle-class women began to organize under the leadership of Oyinkan Abayomi. Married to the leader of the Nigerian Youth Movement, Abayomi founded the British West African Girls’ Club, later the Ladies’ Progressive Club, in 1927. This organization had a limited constituency of Westernized Christian middle-class women; estimations of its membership range from five hundred to two thousand (Johnson 1981, 1986; Mba 1982).

Both Susan Gelger and Jane Turriffinn have examined women’s influence on anticolonial struggles. Gelger points out that it was “in [the African nationalist leaders’] interest to present themselves as enlightened proponents of Western democracy and equality, including full political rights for women” (Gelger 1990, p. 227). However, Turriffinn also notes that the male modernizing elite associated female-ness with backwardness and therefore had difficulty addressing women’s double oppression (Turriffinn 1993).

Within this context, more of the literature has begun to focus on a broader array of protest actions, specifically on forms of resistance unique to women such as “shaming” and “obscene” behavior. The growing literature available on individual women participants has also begun to reshape historians’ views of the nationalist movements (Gelger 1990).

Perhaps one of the most successful cross-class organizations, the Abeokuta Women’s Union, was founded by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. In the 1920s and 1930s, she was active in girls’ and women’s education, including teaching illiterate market women to read. In the 1940s, she became radicalized as she engaged with market women in struggles against taxation and for suffrage and political representation. Ransome-Kuti later became principal of the Abeokuta Girls’ School. She was careful to wear Yoruba clothes and to speak in Yoruba during
meetings so that she would be identified with her fellow union members rather than with the ruling British. The Women's Union worked against indirect rule, clearly exhibiting both a nationalist bent and a concern for women's economic interests (Johnson-Odim and Mba 1997).

A fictionalized account of a post–World War II railroad strike in Senegal in which women participated appears in Ousmane Sembéne’s God's Bits of Wood (1982). This novel brings out the important role that women played in supporting men who worked for low wages. Because of women's role in subsistence, the French were able to deny their workers a living wage. The strike could not have been successful without their support. Indeed, the most dramatic moment of the book comes when the women march from Thiès to Dakar to press the strikers' demands. Likewise, women played an important role in the Watchtower movement in Katanga, which was of great importance to the Manono miners' strike of 1941 (Higgins 1992).

One of the most dramatic cases of women's resistance took place in Guinea-Bissau during the 1960s and early 1970s. The people in this colony watched all the states in West and West-Central Africa except Angola gain their independence, while they had to resort to armed struggle to end Portuguese rule. Led by the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), the independence movement saw the expulsion of the Portuguese as only a stage in the transition to a socialist society. Integral to their struggle was the transformation of internal social relations, including gender relations. To this end, the PAIGC leadership argued that women had to take the lead in ending male domination. As party leaders expressed it, women must “fight against two colonialisms—one of the Portuguese and the other of men” (Urdang 1979, p. 15). This two-sided battle was responsible for attracting many women to the independence struggle as they saw the possibilities for ending their oppression as women (Urdang 1979).

PAIGC recognized the contributions that women could make to the independence struggle. And women did come to play important political roles within the party structure, although they served in defensive military positions rather than in offensive combat. Most important, however, was the feminism articulated by PAIGC members that gave depth to the liberation struggle. Stephanie Urdang, who was largely responsible for introducing the English-speaking West to the ideology of “fighting two colonialisms,” quotes one of the leading women party members on the new woman emerging during the revolution:

Such clearly articulated goals became an inspiration for women in liberation movements around the world.

Perhaps the greatest irony of the colonial era was that Europeans used an ideology suggesting that they would improve African women’s lives as part of their justification for imposing colonial rule. In reality, the changes set in motion by colonial rule and capitalist penetration impoverished many women. For example, commodification undermined the control that Baule women had over the cloth market in their region of Ivory Coast. Many women found themselves, like Emecheta's Nnu Ego, responsible for kinship obligations without the resources to meet them in new colonial towns. Moreover, the colonial rulers joined with lineage elders in attempting to limit women's independence and autonomy, for fear that women would not continue to subsidize the colonial economy by providing subsistence with very few resources. Rather than support women's traditional avenues to political power, the colonizers often actively undermined the political power of elite women. Finally, when women did gain greater economic or social independence, they did so despite the attitudes and policies of the Europeans. Women sometimes resisted their deterioration in status directly through strikes, nationalist activity, and, in the case of the Igbo and Guinea-Bissau, even actual rebel-
lion. More commonly, individual women set out to gain independence for themselves by migrating to towns without their families’ approval and turning the commodification of the economy to their benefit when possible.

THE POSTCOLONIAL PERIOD

Many people living in West and West-Central Africa entered the postcolonial era with very high expectations. Indeed, most governments attempted to meet promises made during the decolonization period by improving education, creating jobs, and facilitating Western-style development. Unfortunately, the independent states have not met the expectations raised by independence for a variety of reasons. Internal conflict caused by competition to control limited resources and these states’ weak positions in the international economy figured importantly among the factors that dished people’s expectations. Corrupt governments, sometimes supported by the West, have been another major factor.

Much of the literature on women during the contemporary period has examined these developments and asked the question, Have women gained or lost status since independence? Unfortunately, this question is too simplistic and ignores the realities of increasing class stratification among women. Some authors have begun to ask, How does gender interact with postcolonial changes to influence women’s lives? Such a question recognizes that women as a group are stratified by class, age, and status, and that the possibility exists for women to gain and lose at the same time.

Women in the Rural Economy

The life of most rural women is characterized by what Jane Guyer has described as “enterprise and autonomy on the one hand, and poverty and overwork on the other” (1995b, p. 19). This paradoxical situation results from the complex interaction between increased commodity production and local cultural systems that has dominated many women’s lives. Guyer’s review of the literature on rural African women has led her to suggest three ways that commodity production has affected rural women. First, production for international markets has expanded through the growth of export crop production by smallholder farmers. Second, internal, interregional trade has expanded. Third, wage labor for industry and large-scale agricultural enterprises has developed outside of the small-farming sector (G guyer 1995b).

This commodification has meant that many, though not all, rural women have been forced to feed their families on increasingly mar-

ganial land, and with less help from male relatives. Some women have responded to this situation by increasing their market activities and have added to the dramatic expansion of petty trading. In the cocoa-growing regions of southern Ghana, women often helped their husbands on their cocoa farms but continued to provide subsistence food for their families (Okali 1983). Some women have been able to move into cocoa farming themselves, but generally on a small scale; they collectively own less than 5 percent of all cocoa farms (G guyer 1995b).

When the cocoa boom began to go bust in the 1960s, men started migrating to towns, leaving women to feed themselves and their dependents. Thus, the trend begun during the colonial era of leaving women solely in charge of subsistence continued in the postcolonial period. Since cocoa farmers monopolized the best land even during this depressed era, women have been responsible for feeding their families on increasingly infertile land. Many have met the challenge by combining farming with petty trade, food processing, and wage labor (G guyer 1995b).

The growth of cocoa production has adversely affected many Yoruba women in similar ways. As in southern Ghana, some women have been able to gain ownership of cocoa farms, often through inheritance. Nonetheless, the commercialization of land has worked against most women, who generally have less control over land and family labor than men have. Women are more likely to work on their husbands’ farms than their own. As in the colonial era, Yoruba women have responded to these changes by increasing their participation in petty trading. They continue to dominate open markets; an increasing number have been able to move into the male-dominated domain of small retail shops, which require more capital than most women have (Afonja 1981, 1986). Commodification, therefore, has contributed to the increasingly complex stratification of rural women.

Many recent agricultural studies have given greater nuance and historical depth to the study of the gender division of labor. They have demonstrated that rural women often actively resisted new claims on their labor and sought ways to assert their economic independence. For example, Jane Guyer notes that among the Beti of Cameroon, the precolonial African crops tend to follow an activity-specific division of labor, while the newer cash crops tend to follow a system based on products or field types. This differentiation in patterns of production reflects both the growth of export crop production and women’s reactions to the process. When women lost access to land and certain “male” crops as a result of men’s increasing involvement with cash crops, women responded by “extending those farming ac-
tivities that relied the least on male participation.” They also attempted to gain access to male income generated by cash crops through other activities, such as selling cooked food, distilling liquor, and importing beer (Guyer 1991).

Studies of Gambian rice production have emphasized that the gendering of crops remains an ongoing process embedded in distribution of labor and power within the household itself. According to Judith Carney and Michael Watts, colonial officials’ efforts to increase Gambia’s rice output faltered as a result of the gender division of labor. These officials found that when men refused to cultivate a “woman’s crop,” women were unwilling and unable to extend the number of days they devoted to rice farming. Similarly, certain 1980s development projects encountered problems when women again reacted to the loss of access to rice land and property by withdrawing their labor (Carney and Watts 1991). More recently, a rise in the value of fruits and vegetables has altered rural labor patterns once again. As women’s proceeds from these “cash crops” have begun to exceed men’s, women have gained greater autonomy. Many have begun to challenge male authority and fail to perform certain kinds of domestic labor. In this way, gender relations have begun to shift, and many aspects of marriage have been renegotiated (Schroeder 1996).

Indeed, it is important to point out that developments in rural West and West-Central Africa have not affected all women the same way. Lucy Creevey (1986) has noted that women in Mali break with the common notion that rural women have declined in status in relation to men. This stereotypical view argues that men have either received tools and advice from colonial rulers and postcolonial development experts and turned to cash crops or migrated to plantations or towns to the south. Creevey found that most Malians, male and female, are still rural. There has been little migration by men, and women head only 14 percent of all households. She suggests that this stability has been maintained despite the difficult conditions created by periodic droughts and increasing desertification in the region. Creevey highlights the continuing interdependence of men and women in Malian agriculture:

Bambara men clear the fields, young boys fertilize them with animal manure, and men build storage huts and supervise the storage of grain, except for the family surplus which women control. Bambara women receive rewards in cash for their work on men’s fields. Furthermore, Bambara men help women by clearing land in their fields. Bambara women’s fields are not restricted to food crops; they also grow cash crops such as peanuts on their plots and use the revenue thus obtained for family needs and personal purchases. (1986, p. 58)

She further argues that ethnic background, age, religion, and family wealth affect the roles played by women. Although she recognizes the many problems faced by women in rural Mali, she argues that increasing commodification and economic development alone cannot be held responsible for these problems. It is unclear whether this case is unusual or represents a different interpretation by Creevey of similar material used in other case studies.

Women in the Urban Economy

The crisis in the rural economy of much of West and West-Central Africa, combined with the lure of opportunities in cities, has led to the migration of both women and men to urban areas. As Adepoju (1983) points out, migration is nothing new in Africa. Warfare, trade, evangelism, drought, the search for fertile lands, and the slave trade all contributed to a highly mobile population in the precolonial era; these migrations usually took the form of group migration. In contrast to the precolonial era, more men than women migrated during both the colonial and the postcolonial periods. Although the migration of greater numbers of unmarried childless women in the 1980s again caused a shift in colonial and postcolonial demographic patterns, men still have greater wage labor opportunities, while women continue to play an essential role in subsistence agriculture (Sheldon 1996).

Nonetheless, an increasing number of women have migrated to towns. Sudarkasa (1977) suggests that most of these women were seeking trade opportunities. Of the four groups who have dominated commercial migration in West Africa—the Hausa, Dyula, Igbo, and Yoruba—women are most numerous among the Yoruba migrants, even outnumbering Yoruba male migrants. Many other women accompany their husbands to towns or cities. An increasing number of women try to enter wage labor, but many of them are forced to turn to trading because of their limited education and the limited job opportunities for women. Some young women migrate to their relatives’ homes in towns, often exchanging domestic service for school fees.

Like their rural sisters, women in urban areas are largely responsible for feeding their families, perhaps the most fundamental fact of their lives. As a consequence, virtually all women are economically
active, whether or not they are counted among the labor force by census takers, who consistently under-enumerate them. Although increasing numbers are involved in wage labor, including factory work and white-collar service industries, most women have turned to self-employment to survive in the urban economy (Robertson 1997a). Within the informal sector, women have blurred the line between rural and urban by using urban land to grow the food that they then sell to local workers and residents for profit (Freeman 1993).

Self-employment in petty trade and food processing offers many women independence, but the sheer number of women who have turned to this economic alternative makes barriers to earning a comfortable living difficult to surmount. Alternatives to self-employment are more limited for women than they are for men. One major reason for the disparity between women and men’s wage labor opportunities is women’s limited educational opportunities. Although most postcolonial states provide education for a larger percentage of their populations than colonial governments did, illiteracy among West and West-Central Africans, both female and male, is widespread (Ware 1983).

Nonetheless, girls generally have less access to education than boys; and when they attend school, they are more likely to terminate their education at the primary level (Robertson 1997a). In both urban and rural areas, girls are more likely to be kept out of school because their mothers require their assistance at home, on the farm, or in the marketplace. Families generally do not hold similar expectations of young boys. It is not surprising, then, that when families find it difficult to obtain school fees, they are more likely to pay for boys than for girls (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa 1975). This preference is also supported by the reality that educated young men are more likely than educated young women to find jobs in the urban economy. Even with a primary or secondary education, women are often forced to turn to self-employment rather than being able to use their schooling to gain wage labor.

Enid Schildkrout (1983) points to additional factors that keep Hausa girls out of school. In northern Nigeria, many Hausa resist educating their daughters because they prefer to marry them at puberty to ensure that they are virgins at first marriage. In addition, many Hausa who are Muslims associate Western-style education with Christianity and moral laxity in schools. Such concerns are common in many West African countries.

The spread of Western-style education has had a profound effect on most urban women’s lives, whether or not they actually have been able to attend school. The mere presence of these educational systems has affected the economic stratification in towns and cities as educational qualifications become an important determination of position in the occupational structure (Fapohunda 1983). But the impact on women is complex and various. The expansion of educational opportunities in the postcolonial era has brought more girls into the system and increased literacy rates. In Ivory Coast, for example, a small number of women have gained access to the most elite education provided, although most leave school before the secondary level. This elite education includes training for professions that have been dominated by men in the West. In other countries, such as Cameroon, women are more likely to obtain secondary and post-secondary education than in Ivory Coast, but they are generally limited to education for jobs that usually go to women in the West and offer limited economic opportunities (Cignet 1977). In no states are women significantly represented in agricultural or technical training. Several authors have pointed out the irony of this fact, given women’s crucial role in farming (Boeserup 1970; Ware 1983).

In Emecheata’s novel Double Yoke (1982), Nko faces many of the problems confronted by highly educated women in Africa. Nko finds herself caught between conflicting expectations. On the one hand, her boyfriend expects her to fulfill the role of the idealized rural woman who quietly respects her husband’s wishes. On the other hand, she is pulled by the expectations of the educated elite that she has an independent intellectual life. Most significant, she believes that she cannot succeed at the university without agreeing to sleep with her professor, whom she does not desire. Education offers Nko both new opportunities and new, very frightening dilemmas.

Many urban women try to educate their daughters in order to increase their economic security and to ensure that these daughters will be able to care for their mothers in old age. This tactic, however, has mixed results. While in school, girls often miss out on important potential apprenticeships with women traders and other self-employed women. This gap in their training has significant implications, since so many women have to turn to self-employment despite years spent in school. Furthermore, schooling rarely makes up for these lost years of training by teaching educational skills, such as accounting, that could help them later in life (Robertson 1997a). Finally, women who send their daughters to school are deprived of critical assistance while they trade, making their own workload heavier (Schildkrout 1983).

As educational systems help increase the occupational hierarchies found in urban areas, stratification among women intensifies, and a
small number of women do well economically in this system. Most successful women gain a head start in life by being born into a privileged family (Barthel 1975). The small group of elite women found in the cities of West and West-Central Africa have received much attention, most of it focusing on their sexual and marital relations with men. They will be discussed further in the next section.

**Kinship, Marriage, and Religion**

The controversy over whether recent changes in the structure of kinship and marriage have been positive for women has been central to much of the contemporary literature. Most women marry at some point in their lives. Many families marry their teenaged girls to much older men. For many women, therefore, early adulthood looks much like the ideal expressed during the precolonial and colonial eras by most West and West-Central African peoples. But there are an increasing number of women who wait to marry same-age men when they reach their twenties. This change represents greater freedom for junior women and men to choose their own partners than was permitted in precolonial societies. Marriage has become more an expression of personal preference than the alliance between kin groups that it was in the past (Luise White 1984).

Moreover, divorce seems to be fairly common throughout West and West-Central Africa. Relationships formed with men after a divorce often represent a break with customary or Western-style marriage. Instead, divorced women may choose what the Asante call a lover marriage: they enter long-term love relationships with men without the formality of a marriage ceremony (Abu 1983). Not all women choose to form such relationships, as the evidence of growing numbers of households headed by women would suggest. Indeed, Michel Verdon (1982) argues that traditional and Christian marriage rituals have virtually disappeared among the Ewe of southern Ghana since World War II. Even before this era, divorce was common, because women were able to rely on their matrikin ties to obtain land rights, and they were able to maintain custody of their children. The disappearance of marriage ceremonies, however, has resulted from declining control of parents over their daughters in the face of labor migration and increased school attendance. In addition, marriage contracts no longer serve the economic function of bridging male and female spheres. Marriage bonds have become increasingly fragile under increased mobility and urbanization.

The meaning of these fragile marriage bonds in women's lives is complex and contradictory. As Luise White suggests, "labor migration and rural poverty have increased women's workloads and anxieties, but have also increased the options and social relations available to them, and placed many of the latter under the women's control" (1984, p. 63). On the one hand, many women find themselves forced to take on economic responsibilities alone that would be more easily met with husbands or stronger kinship ties. At the same time, some of these women have been forced to turn to their lovers for economic support, even though there exist few culturally sanctioned, organized roles for these lovers to play in supporting women and their children. In towns, isolation from family and kinship ties often deprives women of the lineage support that would have existed in the past. Thus, for example, women find it more difficult to share childcare responsibilities with family members and co-wives. On the other hand, many women clearly choose the independence that comes with flexible heterosexual bonds and loosening kinship ties. Many of the responsibilities in decision-making that now accrue to women are welcomed even if these new responsibilities signify increased economic burdens.

Much of the contemporary literature and popular wisdom on African women has revealed a discomfort with the loosening of conjugal and kinship bonds. Women's ability to move in and out of marriage relations is often disparaged in part because the relationship between women and men is often based on economic interests. As Mann suggests,

> Many African women have come to view relationships with men instrumentally. Women use domestic and sexual relationships as a means of obtaining resources and access to opportunities and of furthering individual social and economic ambitions. If a particular relationship fails to fulfill a woman's goals, she may leave it and seek another more rewarding. (1985, p. 110)

In Africa, as elsewhere historically, heterosexual bonds have long had a central economic element. What is new is not that heterosexual bonds are a source of resources and opportunities, but rather that the bonds between kin groups that marriage represented have disappeared. In this situation, both women and men have more freedom to choose partners and to break relationships, a double-edged sword for women who want independence but lack the resources to survive without male support. In this context, the position of the PAIGC of Guinea-Bissau against forced marriage, polygynous marriage, and limited
options for women to divorce is notable (Urdang 1979). Postcolonial states have been much more likely to support patriarchal control over women than to undermine it.

Flora Nwapa (1998) brings a feminist critique of marriage and family life to her novels about women in Nigeria. In *Ejuru* (1966a), *Once Is Enough* (1981), and *Idu* (1966b), she emphasizes the negative effects of traditional constraints on women's lives. Many of her main characters are childless and are therefore mistreated by their families. But Nwapa is also a critic of modern society; society's expectations work against women's interests. Women are too often tied into unhappy marriages or left to fend for themselves if they should be unfortunate enough to be infertile.

As Vidal (1977) suggests for Abidjan, changes in heterosexual bonds have occurred across classes. Many professional women have chosen to remain unmarried rather than enter a marriage that they consider unsuitable (Dinan 1977). High-income, educated women tend to object to polygyny because they do not wish to share their husbands' resources. For most elite women, their model marriage includes a monogamous relationship in which they share responsibilities with their (faithful) husbands. More often than not, the reality does not meet their ideals. Men resist the demands made on them by nuclear families. Often they develop relationships with outside wives or mistresses (Luisa White 1984). Oppong (1974) argues that elite women are more likely to live with their husbands than in the past and to suffer under their separation from matrikin. At the same time, their security in their conjugal relationship is undermined by outside wives and the demands made on their husband by his matrikin. Under such circumstances, many professional women choose to forgo or delay marriage, building pragmatic relationships with men that give them the necessary resources to survive and thrive in the urban economy (Dinan 1977).

As Nwapa shows in *Once Is Enough* (1981), the decision to remain single often leaves women open to charges of misconduct and immorality. Mariama Ba takes up a similar issue in *So Long a Letter* (1981). This novel focuses on two marriages, one between Modou and Ramatoulaye and the other between Mawdo and Aissatou. Ramatoulaye elects to remain a faithful wife despite desertion by her husband, while Aissatou decides to leave hers. Ramatoulaye faces the problems of raising her children on her own as she fights against the sexism that constrains women's lives in Senegal. Both Ba and Nwapa represent voices that have emerged in Africa's postcolonial era raising women's issues, although not all have explicitly declared themselves to be femi-

nists, and some keep their distance from Western feminists. Some novelists have given voice to African feminist concerns about women's desire for more autonomy and independence in a system in which women are caught in what Emecheta portrays as the double yoke of traditional ideas and contemporary realities. Others, such as Nwapa and Ama Ata Aidoo (1970, 1977), place the source of African sexism in European imperialism and colonial rule. Most African women writers focus on the tension between women's individual freedom and the needs of their families and communities (Okhamanafe 1990).

Not all women's protest voices are raised by novelists. Filomena Chioma Steady, a feminist anthropologist, writes of African feminism as the original form of feminism, and she argues for recognition of an indigenous form of women's political struggle that combines humanism with concern for women's welfare (1987, 1985). Without fear of expressing her anger, Awa Thiam (1996) has written a strong and provocative exposé of women's plight in West Africa. She includes a critique of clitoridectomy as it is practiced in much of contemporary West Africa. Olayinka Koso-Thomas (1987) joins Thiam in this critique. As a Western-trained doctor, Koso-Thomas attempts to place female circumcision in its cultural context and yet exposes the way it cripples so many women's lives. She writes with the passion of someone who has seen the damage that this practice can cause, with the authority of a doctor, and with the sensitivity of an insider.

Academic feminists have been gathering since at least 1977, when West African women intellectuals formed AWORD, the Association of African Women for Research and Development (Awe and Mba 1991). The women in AWORD came from anglophone and francophone West Africa: they attempted to stake out an independent feminist position that asked questions relevant to African women's lives. Building on such organizations, the Women's Research and Documentation Center (WORDOC) has been very active since its founding in 1985. Based at the Institute of African Studies at Ibadan, WORDOC has conducted lively and informative research in West African and Nigerian historiography (Awe and Mba 1991).

Women's personal lives are also influenced by the variety of religious experiences to which women in West and West-Central Africa have been exposed. In West Africa, Christianity remains a minority religion in all states but Nigeria, where the southern part of the country remains Christian. Instead there has been a dramatic spread of Islam. Just as the cultures vary throughout the region, however, Islam's impact has depended on the host cultures and the timing of penetration. In Hausaland, for example, one finds many women veiled
and secluded (Callaway and Creevey 1994). In other parts of West Africa, such as Senegambia and Sierra Leone, there are few physical restrictions on women's lives. It remains to be seen how the spread of political Islam, or Islamism, internationally will affect West Africa women's lives.

**Women, Development, and the State**

While expressing much frustration over the lack of progress on women's issues, the literature has expanded to incorporate women's actions in shaping and resisting the postcolonial state. During Nigeria's Third Republic, women attempted to incorporate gender relations within society and the family into definitions of democracy. Unfortunately, the government rejected most of these efforts, leaving women with few real gains (Shettima 1995).

In general, during the transition from colonial rule to independent postcolonial states, few serious efforts were made to increase the level of women's participation in state politics. Instead, states continued the practice institutionalized during the colonial era of ignoring women's political interests. Okonjo (1983) argues that women in Nigeria have been able to recapture only a small share of the political power they had during the precolonial era, when women held culturally acknowledged authority in a dual-sex system. The continuing development of a unisex political system that favors men has put women at a disadvantage. No longer do women control a parallel political system that addresses their various interests, as they did among the Igbo and Yoruba. Few women are elected to office, and most women who hold high offices must depend on men to appoint them to their political positions.

The record for military regimes is mixed. On the one hand, military regimes occasionally create space outside of “tradition” in which women can act publicly in new ways (Mba 1989). Also, because such regimes can more easily do things by executive fiat, they can, without nodding to “custom” or even consulting women themselves, implement radical changes in women’s lives. For instance, it was a military regime in Nigeria that in 1976 gave women in the Islamic north of the country the right to vote, more than a decade after women elsewhere in the country had gained that right. Similarly, in the early 1990s it was a Nigerian military regime that outlawed female genital mutilation (Shettima 1995). The more general rule, however, has been that military regimes manipulate gender in ways that are deleterious to women. For example, in some cases, men in power have set women up as scapegoats for the failures of their governments and capitalist development. Dennis (1987) argues that such was the case during the short-lived (1984–85) Federal Military Government (FGM) of Nigeria. The FMG took over in a coup during a period of extreme economic crisis for the Nigerian government and its people, a crisis brought on in part by declining revenue from oil, which had replaced cash crops as the main source of revenue during the early 1970s. In addition, the state was faced with paying for large-scale public expenditures on industrialization and public works that had been undertaken, with little return, during the oil boom years. Most important for women, the postcolonial Nigerian governments had continued the British practice of ignoring food farming, small-scale trading, and petty commodity production. Yet women, who dominated these sectors, still had the obligation to feed their families with little support and even some hostility from the state. Accompanying the economic crisis was what appeared to many to be a breakdown in social relations, as everyday life became increasingly capricious.

Underlying this socio-economic crisis was what Dennis has called “structural contradictions in Nigerian society and its external relationships” (Dennis 1987, p. 21). But the conflict between various groups of the national bourgeoisie to control the state and its resources was an issue that the Federal Military Government wished to ignore. Instead they charged that the crisis resulted from “indiscipline . . . failure of particular social groups to perform adequately their prescribed social role, preventing society from functioning as it should” (p. 19). Among the categories of women represented by “indisciplined” groups were working mothers and wives, who were seen as neglecting their children; single women, who were considered to be prostitutes who led men into undisciplined behavior; and petty traders, who were accused of hoarding goods and creating a crisis in consumer items. Taken together, these categories include most Nigerian women.

Complex factors led to this attack on women by the state. According to Toyin Falola, Yoruba women often gained authority through their control of the marketplace. This “women’s space” was both a political arena and one of the central institutions of Yoruba society. Powerful market women used their control of this territory to manipulate prominent men wanting to gain from the market. In so doing, they hoped to extend their authority (Falola 1995). Nevertheless, petty traders were an easy target because consumers, suffering under extremely high inflation and even shortages of some food and household necessities, were willing to blame them for these problems. In general, however, market women were the most powerless
link in the retail food chain; they could hardly be held responsible for such high prices. They were simply attempting to provide for their families in difficult times. Yet the government encouraged this unfair scapegoating by sending soldiers to the markets to beat traders and force them to lower their prices. Such activity was no long-term solution to deep structural problems.

This attack on petty traders also fit into the FMG’s development ideology. The government accepted the idea developed during the colonial era that Nigeria was divided into traditional, or backward, and modern sectors. They looked forward to creating industrial societies with urban areas that mirrored those found in the West. This worldview had implications for women because it assumed that market women and subsistence farmers lived in the traditional sector, which was in need of modernization. Indeed, petty traders stood in the way of modernization in this view, since they crowded streets and kept the informal economic sector thriving. Influenced in part by Western education and the colonial experience, and also by the growth of conservative Islamic in northern Nigeria, the military rulers felt that women’s proper place was in the home, taking responsibility for the morality of their children and husbands.

Most unfortunate for women, this ideology ignored the realities of most women’s lives. For many women the economic crisis meant increased marginalization, farming on infertile land, searching for employment, or trading in an economy in a downward spiral. Yet at the same time that it became increasingly difficult to find resources, most Nigerians still expected women to provide food for their families. The “War of Indiscipline” was based on a false notion of women’s traditional roles that assumed that women were responsible only for their children’s moral development, but not for their material well-being. The obligation and desire to feed dependents has forced many women into the informal sector, largely because the formal sector remains closed to them and farming is no longer productive. Ironically, this appeal to women as the guardians of morality and tradition contradicts the stress on modernization by the FMG, placing too many women in a no-win situation.

This appeal to mythical tradition that circumscribes women’s behavior might well sound familiar to an audience in the West, where women are criticized for neglecting their children when they are forced into the work world to ensure their children’s welfare. Other states in West and West-Central Africa have ignored such contradictions in turning to “traditional” values. In the 1970s, for example, Zaire’s president, Mobutu Sese Seko, articulated a return to traditional values in his policy, called authenticité. With roots in negritude and African nationalism, which appealed to many in Zaire (now Congo), authenticité helped Mobutu to legitimize his power by making his autocratic rule appear to be based on African values (Wilson 1982). These “authentic” values included a male-dominated state under the complete control of its ruler. Wilson argues that under this ideology, all authentic women were mothers and housekeepers who obeyed the authority of their husbands, kinsmen, and, ultimately, the president.

Like Nigeria’s Federal Military Government, authenticité held women solely responsible for the system of morality. Women who broke with their prescribed roles thus had to be reformed and policed. Once again, as in Nigeria, this appeal to tradition helped legitimize a state facing increased economic difficulties, which included a decline in the food-producing sector and a general economic downturn. In addition, the paradoxical contradictions in the state ideology characterized precolonial agriculture as backward and women farmers as beasts of burden. Needless to say, no efforts were made to improve the subsistence sector that women served. Authenticité also attempted to justify Mobutu’s repression of women. By declaring that women had achieved full emancipation in 1970 under his rule, he characterized any criticism of his policies toward women and the struggles they had to endure as a direct challenge that he would not tolerate. Likewise, the critics of the Mobutu regime questioned women’s sexual exploitation, but have left unexamined the larger context of unequal power relations within society (Mianda 1995).

The view held by so many states that women remain in a traditional sector has influenced the development projects undertaken by many governments and non-government organizations. As many critics of development strategies began to argue in the 1970s, too many government and international aid organizations paid little attention to women’s roles in production. Modeling development plans on Western experiences, most planners favored cash crop production and industrialization at the expense of food production (Nelson 1981).

As Dey (1981) argues, this undervaluing of women’s agricultural roles includes Chinese and Taiwanese experts. Dey compared three development projects in the Gambia: the Taiwanese Agricultural Mission (1966–74), the World Bank Agricultural Development Project (1973–76), and the Agro-Technical Team of the People’s Republic of China (1975–80). All three projects assumed that the male household head controlled the forces of production, land, labor, crops, and finances, and would be responsible for redistributing any increases in his income as the result of technological assistance. But the stated
goal of these projects and the Gambian government to reach self-sufficiency in food production remained unattainable. As Dey argues,

By failing to take into account the complexities of the existing farming system and concentrating on men to the exclusion of women, the irrigated rice projects have lost in the technical sense that valuable available female expertise was wasted. Furthermore, investment was focused on relatively expensive capital-intensive irrigation schemes when striking results might have been obtained by a few simple improvements in women's rain-fed and swamp rice. Finally, by excluding women, the projects have increased women's economic dependence on men who now control an additional food and cash crop, and thereby heighten their vulnerability in an increasingly unstable and changing rural economy. (Dey 1981, p. 122)

Yet the effects of development projects on women have not been uniform. Venema (1986) found a more mixed result in nearby Senegal. He agrees with Dey that it is a mistake to assume that heads of households will equitably redistribute benefits from development plans. He stressed that the Wolof in Senegal do not live in unified production units. But unlike many others who have studied development plans in Africa, he argued that women engaged in cash crop production benefited from some of the changes brought on by state planning. In particular, Venema wished to refute Ester Boserup's argument that the introduction of plows and oxen always worked against women's interests (Boserup 1970). In addition, mechanization did not have a uniform impact on Wolof women. In one case, the introduction of the seed drill used by men did not negatively affect women, because it helped increase the area cultivated by them. In another case, however, the introduction of the grain mill decreased their income, because it undermined their millet-pounding work parties.

In response to the feminist movement and the current food crisis in Africa, development agencies and governments have increasingly turned their attention to women (Lewis 1984). Mbilinyi (1984) has attacked much of the "Women in Development" ideology designed by international development agencies to rectify their previous oversights of women's roles in farming. She points out that many of these projects aggravate divisions among women by supporting increased stratification. In particular, bourgeois women who participate in development projects and the few women who directly benefit from them develop material interests that conflict with those of poorer women. Mbilinyi reminds us that "women are not all the same, nor do they all share the same interest" (p. 14). Clearly, further studies on the various impacts of development schemes on African women's lives deserve attention.

Many women went into the postcolonial era with high expectations that their demands, which could be described as African feminist, would be met by the newly independent governments. Many of the new states attempted to meet some of these demands by offering more education and health care and expanding the economy. As economies began to stagnate, demands for improving women's lives were no longer a priority for those in state power. In addition, some of the new ruling elites found it convenient to blame women for the problems created by the states and an economy that they could not control.

Through most of this contemporary period, most women continue to live in the rural areas, meeting their obligations to their kinship relations by farming and trading. Those who live in urban areas also find that they carry a heavy burden in feeding their families. While most women struggle to survive, women have become increasingly stratified by class, a process that began several centuries ago. Some women have more access to education, employment, and/or capital than others. But even elite women suffer from an ideology that restricts women's options and sets up images of the ideal woman that few can emulate. Despite these problems, women have resisted their oppression as women and developed political movements that are sensitive to Africa's place in the world economy but also hold society responsible for the gender inequality that they face.