



THE LAND HAS CHANGED

History, Society and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has been long in the making. The impetus for the book stems from my study of gender relations focusing on widowhood practices among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria in 1996. During that research, I found that various aspects of rural life, including social and cultural practices, were interlinked with the economic life of the people. The research also raised important questions about the economy and rural livelihoods in a transforming society. Although I was interested in the cultural aspects of widowhood, it was apparent that widowhood practices had been influenced by external factors, including colonialism, Westernization, and new economic structures that had their origins in the increased commercialization of agriculture in the early parts of the twentieth century. The increased importance of palm produce (oil and kernels) for the European market in particular led to significant changes among the Igbo, including the commoditization of land and changes in gender relations of production. The changes that emerged and the impact of colonial construction of new economic and social formations necessary to achieve increased export production, as well as the responses of rural people in a predominantly agrarian economy, piqued my interest. How did official policies and attitudes influence the nature of agricultural change among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria? I sought to answer this question by exploring official agricultural policy and its influences through a multi-layered study of the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria. I was convinced that official perceptions about the local agricultural environment, the mode of production, and the role of colonial subjects – male and female – represented a narrow understanding of the local production system of the Igbo and how the culture affected economic life. The structure of the local production pattern was more complex than officials conceptualized it. By examining the historically important role that agriculture played in the encounter between the Igbo and the British colonial government, I sought to clarify the ways state policies transformed agriculture and, in particular, how local people responded to the transformation of the local society.

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