

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: **Equal Encounters: A Case of Gender, Language, and Power in the Ubang Community of Obudu, Nigeria**

Chinturu (Chi-Chi) Uchendu, Doctor of Philosophy, 2003

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This dissertation examines gender and the dynamics of equality in Northern Cross River State, Nigeria. It draws on 20th century post-colonial memory of pre-colonial culture and explores the different ways in which the socio-religious, political, and economic structures in Ubang society apportioned power to men women.

Based on an ethnographic study, "Equal Encounters ..." contends that a context-appropriate notion of gender equality must derive its epistemic stance from within the culture concerned. Consequently, the study moves away from received orthodoxies regarding gender and power in Africa and instead examines each structure through the lens of the Ubang belief system.

In the socio-religious sphere, I assert that womanhood is a shifting balance of extraordinary power, privilege, protection, and subservience depending on a woman's location at a point in time. In the political domain, I contend that men and women occupy separate, autonomous spheres in what I categorize as Ubang's complementary dual-sex system. Both sexes are also described as playing important complementary roles which bridge the gap between the separate spheres. The economic domain reinforces the

complementary dual-sex theory articulated in this study. I argue that this dual-sex structure is instrumental in the attainment and equity of power between husbands and wives.

The last chapter of the dissertation explores the unique phenomenon of gender diglossia in Ubang. The latter does much to enrich our understanding of gender equality in Ubang as a dual-sex society.