

**WOMEN AND ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLE IN EASTERN NIGERIA,
1929-1960**

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**AN ORIGINAL ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by Precious Mbaka in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, under my supervision

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Date

Date

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty for his protection and guidance and to my family.

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My profound gratitude to the Almighty God, without His divine guidance and grace, this accomplishment would not have been possible.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Certification-	- - - - -	iii
Dedication-	- - - - -	iv
Acknowledgement-	- - - - -	v
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION		
Background to the Study-	- - - - -	1
Aim and Objectives-	- - - - -	8
Scope of Study-	- - - - -	9
Literature Review-	- - - - -	9
Methodology-	- - - - -	14
Endnotes-	- - - - -	15
CHAPTER TWO: WOMEN AND NATIONALISM IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA BEFORE 1929		
Introduction -	- - - - -	18
Madam Tinubu: Her Contributions to Lagos and Abeokuta-	- - - - -	19
Ogidi Palaver-	- - - - -	21
The Nwaobiara Dance-	- - - - -	31
The Calabar Market Women Protest-	- - - - -	34
Endnotes-	- - - - -	40
CHAPTER THREE: WOMEN AND NATIONALIST STRUGGLE IN EASTERN NIGERIA		
Introduction -	- - - - -	41

The Women's War of 1929-	- - - - -	41
Margaret Ekpo: Her Role in Nigerian Nationalism-	- - - - -	52
Endnotes-	- - - - -	59
CHAPTER FOUR: WOMEN AND NATIONALIST STRUGGLE IN		
WESTERN NIGERIA		
Introduction -	- - - - -	61
The Lagos Market Women Association (L.M.W.A) --	- - - - -	61
The Abeokuta Women's Union (A.W.U.) -	- - - - -	70
Endnotes-	- - - - -	79
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION		
Conclusion -	- - - - -	80
BIBLIOGRAPHY-	- - - - -	88

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

To be able to effectively discuss women and their form of nationalism in Southern Nigeria before independence, one may need to understand the role women played in precolonial Southern Nigerian societies, how women were viewed, their rights and privileges, the impacts colonial rule had on them, and how they responded to this rule.¹

In precolonial Nigeria, the position of women was a reflection of their subordinate status. Men held the premiums in the society, and women had the sole purpose or responsibility to be mothers of the children of these men. The ability of a woman to give birth won her the closest attachment of her husband while barren women were always the object of scorn in the society. An instance is the Esan woman who is socially not recognized. She is always represented by her husband in any social affair even if the issue at stake directly concerns or affects her. Whatever contribution she has to make, she does so through her husband who is her voice and mouthpiece. This is only when she is respected, recognized and her contributions highly welcomed and valued. Also, as long as a woman is not married in Esanland, no matter how successful she may be, her views and

contributions are not welcomed or accepted. She is considered to be an outcast and is treated as one without an owner. She is not also recognized in and among the women community. Women are seen through the lens of marriage in a homestead.²

Just like the Esan women, the plight of Igbo women was not very different. According to G.T. Basden in his work titled, *Among the Igbos of Nigeria*, he argued that “women were the burden-bearers of the country. Women had but few rights in any circumstances and can only hold such properties as their lords' permit. There is no grumbling against their lot; they accept their situation as their grandmothers did before them and taking affairs philosophically, they manage to live fairly contentedly. Women in Igboland were denied many rights, she was counted as a property of her husband after marriage therefore she had no rights. If the marriage is unsuccessful, she has no right to seek a divorce but the husband. She also has no right to the ex-husband's property and their children when she is divorced. The ex-husband reserves the right to reclaim his dowry and other expenses from her future husband when she remarries. Also, women in Igboland has no right to own lands except someone acts as a proxy, she does not have a right to inherit landed properties both in her family of origin and in the family she is married to. But the Igbo woman minimizes her dependence on her husband through trade. Trade afforded them the commercial power and economic Independence. Marriage in

precolonial Nigeria are contracted with the native law and customs and are more or less compulsory as the culture frowns against those who remain single.³

Politically, it was uncommon to have women become leaders, but in the precolonial period, African leaders who were mainly men, had many influential women around them who represented the interest of women. Some scholars believe that Southern Nigerian women ruled jointly with their men before colonialism but with the incursion of colonial rule, the participation and involvement of women in government and decision making was suppressed. An example of an influential woman in Southern Nigeria before colonialism was Queen Kambasa of Bonny, a warrior queen. She became a patron of artistic activities of the men's cultural group. The Queen trained a formidable army which ransacked the form of Opuoko for killing some members of the cultural groups. Queen Kambasa believed that a woman should not be more restricted than a man. Queen Kambasa is only one of the several influential women in precolonial Nigerian politics. Therefore, it can be rightly said that women in the precolonial era were actively involved in the politics of their societies. And ready to sacrifice themselves in this service.⁴

Economically, in most precolonial trading systems, African women tended to be more predominant and they combined it with their household chores. Women were

predominantly cloth weavers, basket makers, bead makers and so on, in precolonial times. Women who were married and successful in business were considered as crowns of glory to their husbands and children. Women weaved their clothes, baskets, hand rings, bracelets, leg wears and so on. In these sense, women were significant to men, economically.⁵

Historical accounts and oral records reveal that, the Nigerian women had actively participated in the social, economic and political development of their societies as far back as the nineteenth century. Women were considered to be socially, economically and politically independent. Women traded carrying heavy loads on their heads moving from town to town. They also assisted their husbands in agricultural activities, thereby playing active roles in food production. As observed by Ottanburg (1962), the Afikpo women of Eastern Nigeria "take larger part in economic production than men and" appeared "to work harder. They grow all the crops, apart from yam, ranging from the collection of palm fruits and tendering of new introduced crops such as rice. The women processed virtually all foods for home consumption and for sale. The women of Delta attracted European visitors through their salt production. Salt was the chief item of import from the Delta into the hinterland, and was a lucrative source of revenue in exchange for pots for women in Oha Uzara, Uburu, Ishiaga axis. This encouraged inter-zonal trade in Southern

Nigeria. Women were also involved in cotton and textile production in all parts of Nigeria.⁶

Places in Southern Nigeria where this production was carried out extensively include Ekiti, Ogbomosho, Iseyin, Abeokuta, Ijebu, Owo, Okene, Ilorin, Oyo while the Igbo women of Ndoki, Akwete, Anioma (Onitsha and Asaba), Nsukka-Udu (Enugu) and Abakaliki were involved in the production of cotton clothes. Women were permitted to trade without being harmed in precolonial times. The contribution of women to the economic growth of their society cannot be overemphasized. They played several and also roles in agriculture trade and industry and even in politics to serve the economic needs of their time. They struggle alongside their men to feed themselves and also engage in the productive sector though at fundamental stages. Yet they were still discriminated against not minding their contributions.⁷

In later times, Britain had established her influence in the Nigeria area. Britain established a consular authority for the Bights of Bonny. Gunboats diplomacy was adopted to protect their commercial interests against the coastal states. In 1851, the British in the dynastic dispute in Lagos and they completely took over Lagos, in 1861, as a colony. From Lagos, the British gradually became involved in the developments of the

Yoruba hinterland. In the Niger-Delta region, the British used a series of forceful manipulations, making the Delta states do their biddings. From the 1850s, the Niger River became the medium through which British influence spread to the North.⁸

Before 1884, there was the increase in commercial rivalry among the major European powers. This rivalry took a distinctive dimension after the Berlin Conference as each of the European powers sought geo-political control to protect its commercial interest. This was preceded by a phase when the European powers signed agreements with local authorities to formally establish their interest. The signing of the documents (treaties) established the European powers politically. The British, having fulfilled this requirement in Nigeria by 1900 defined the Nigeria area as the colony and protectorate of Lagos, the protectorate of southern Nigeria and the protectorate of Northern Nigeria.

With the coming of the Europeans and the establishment of colonialism, several changes occurred in African cultures which trampled on the few rights women had. Women were marginalized and relegated to the background unlike the precolonial period. Women lost all their political rights. For instance, in the British Legislative Council, no woman was recorded to have been appointed to represent her people by any of the colonial governmental bodies. This was seen as a relegation of women's rights from what

they enjoyed in precolonial times.

Socio-economically, the colonial period did not improve the status of women. Colonialists established male-oriented schools with the aim of producing clerical staffs and interpreters for their regime which only men can do at a cheaper labour. African women later had the opportunity to receive western education in the early twentieth century. This gave them the opportunity to compete with their male counterparts for certain governmental jobs. Although, at this first stage of women education, the women were restricted to domestic sciences such as cooking, needle work, housekeeping and laundry. African women were generally peasant farmers without capital depending on their husbands. They had no access to credit facilities such as bank loans, and due to their traditional position, banks thought them to not represent good risks and made no loan available to them or their organization. This widened the labour gap between men and women. Women remained in subsistence farming while the men embarked on mechanized farming. All these oppressions contributed to the marginalization of women in colonial times. Women were also being taxed after the discrimination by the colonialist.

These developments made women organize themselves into pressure groups, which

generally contributed in the development of Nigeria. These pressure groups fought injustices, exploitations and oppressions of the colonial administrators and the native authority. These could be considered as women nationalism in Nigeria.

Nationalism could be described as a theory, movement, creed, ideology or consciousness. It is an awareness of political oneness that gives the citizens of a country the feeling of patriotism. Nationalism can be conceptualized as the attribute that members of a nation have when they care about their national identity and the actions members of a nation take when seeking to achieve or sustain some form of political sovereignty. Expressions of women nationalism in Southern Nigeria can be understood using the Women's War of 1929 also called the "Aba Women Riot", the Abeokuta Riot and several other pockets of resistance which must have taken place during colonial rule. Some of these form of resistance or women nationalism shall be considered during the course of this study.⁹

Aim and Objectives

The aims and objectives of this study includes:

1. To analyze the historical involvement of women in Southern Nigeria in significant political events with an eye to understanding their political value and involvement in the

movement for an independent nation.

2. It would also foray into how women were once viewed in their various societies.

3. This study is also aimed at understanding the dynamics of women resistance in Southern Nigeria during the colonial period.

4. This study tends to examine how women related with the problem of gender discrimination in colonial times.

This study could also be considered to be an argument channeled towards the consideration of women in several matters relating to politics and their environment.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the involvement of women in nationalist struggle and resistance in Southern Nigeria during the colonial era. This study would also consider the political role, responsibilities and involvement of women before 1929 and also consider their contributions to nation-building in those times.

Literature Review

There are several literatures by historical scholars and social anthropologist on some of the events of this time, either as individual happenings or as groups of worldwide

political resistance. Literature from both African scholars and European scholars would be considered.

In Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch's; *African Women: A Modern History*, chapter four talks about powerful women in African societies, warrant chiefs and their role in the society. It also explained the topic of Queen Mothers and Female Regents in Southern Nigeria. Chapter fifteen of this same book talks about Women and Politics, addressing the encounter between market women and the elite, their struggle against taxation, the Lagos Women struggle, the political alliance of Egba women and female pressure groups and political parties.

In *Women in African Colonial Histories* edited by Jean Allman et al in chapter eleven written by Misty L. Bastian titled, "Vultures of the Market Place,"¹⁰ Southeastern Nigerian Women and Discourses of the Ogu Umunwanyi (Women's War) of 1929, which discusses the Aba Women Riot of 1929.

In Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Korieh edited work titled, *Shaping our struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture and Social Change*, chapter one written by Adiele Afigbo talked about Women in Nigerian History. Chapter two 10 of this same book written by Nwando Achebe explained the 1914 Women's Market Protest.¹¹ Chapter three

talked about Women and Peasant Movement in colonial Eastern Nigeria authored by Chima J. Korieh Chapter four¹² explained colonialism and the social status of women in Ibibio society, authored by Violeta I. Ekpo.¹³ Also, chapter seven" written by Biodun Adediran and Olukoya Ogen talks about Women, Ritual and Politics in precolonial yorubaland while the article written by Funsho Afolayan also talked about Women, Politics and Society among the Igbomina- Yoruba.¹⁴

In A. E. Afigbo's book titled, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria 1891-1929*,¹⁵ chapter two talked about the coping stone of lugardism or the fatal remedy; 1927-1929 which gave a prelude and explanation for the Aba Women Riot of 1929. Chapter three talked about the Warrant Chief system anatomized.¹⁶

In *Women and Revolution: Global Expression*¹⁷ edited by M.J. Diamond, chapter seven authored by Felicia I. Abaraonye examined the 1929 Women's War. Also in *From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women in the world*,¹⁸ Vol. iv written by Marilyn French and forwarded by Margaret Atwood, chapter eight titled, *Anti-Imperial Revolutions in Africa*, explained various anti-imperial revolutions in Africa. My interest in this chapter is its explanations of the Aba Riots and the Yoruba in Lagos, Nigeria.

In the edited work of George Uzoma Ukagba(Ph.D) et al titled *The Kpim of*

Feminism,¹⁹ chapter twelve discusses the Esan Woman- her crown and respect, written by Morris K. Edogiawerei. Chapter thirteen written by Obioma Des-Obi²⁰ explained the role African women played in nation-building as institutions of morality, and as instruments of character formation and also as mediators of conflicts in traditional Africa

The article authored by Amaluche - Greg Nnamani discussed Women's struggle in both precolonial and post-colonial Nigeria.²¹ In chapter twenty-three of *The Kpim of Feminism*, Kelvin C. Arua explained in *Women and Development* about the role of women in governance and virtue.²²

Also, in *The Fall of Nigeria: The British Conquest* by Obaro Ikime,²³ part one examining the British penetration of Igbo and Ibibioland, the Asaba Ekumeku Movement and British occupation of Yorubaland.

In the third volume of the book, *History of Nigeria: Nigeria in the nineteenth century*,²⁴ edited by Toyin Falola, et al chapter one discussed the early phase of British rule and their measure in carrying out their aim. Some other chapters discussed the political impacts of colonial rule in various parts of Nigeria.²⁵ and the economic and social struggle put up by Nigerians against British colonialism.²⁶

In Obaro Ikime's edited book titled, *Groundwork of Nigerian History*,²⁷ chapter

twenty-two discussed the Eastern Province under colonial rule written by A. E. Afigbo and chapter twenty-three by A. I. Asiwaju discusses the Western Province under colonial rule.²⁸

In an online publication by Tunde Oduwobi titled, "From Conquest to Independence: The Nigerian Colonial Experience",²⁹ the imposition of colonial rule, colonial regime, and growth of nationalist sentiments in Nigeria were examined.

In a journal written by Ubaku Kelechi Chika, Chikezie Anyalewachi Emeh and Chinenye Nkiru Anyikwa titled, "Impact of Nationalist Movement on the Actualization of Nigerian Independence, 1914-196030; the concept of nationalism was explained, nationalist movement before 1914 in Nigeria, what led to its increase after 1914 and its impacts beginning from 1914 to the year of Nigeria's Independence.

In Johnson Cheryl's in his article titled, "Grass Root Organizing: Women in Anti-colonial Activity in Southwestern Nigeria", he discussed the Lagos Market Women's Association and their anti-tax response, the Abeokuta Women's Union and their demonstration against colonial policies and also the Nigerian Women's Party and their form of resistance to colonial policies.

Prof. Biko Agozino, in his article titled "Revolutionary African Women: A Review

Essay of the Women's War of 1929",³² by he discussed the women's war in Southeastern Nigeria and how it was an anti-colonial resistance.

Samantha Mallory Kies, in her article entitled, "Matriarchy, the colonial situation, and the Women's War of 1929 in Southeastern Nigeria",³³ the second chapter talks about to the background to the Igbo Women's War, the third chapter discussed the course of the war while the fourth chapter 36 discussed the aftermath of the Women's War.³⁴

From the above literatures, one can conclusively deduce that some analytical work has been done on various events of Women resistance in the World but this study tends to analyze various women uprisings in Southern Nigeria between the years 1929 and 1960.

Methodology

In order to achieve a comprehensive study, narrative and analytical approaches are used in the study data shall be collated from various sources especially secondary sources which may include books, articles, pamphlets, journal and so on. The University of Benin Library other state libraries would be consulted.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN AND NATIONALISM IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA BEFORE 1929

Introduction

The establishment of colonial rule in Nigeria created a new political, economic and social situation demanding great adjustments from people and new roles. Nigerian women adjusted greatly to their new situation, though not in a pleasing manner. Women who played outstanding roles fell into two divisions. The first being a number of women who sought to play prominent roles in political and economic matters more or less in time honored the traditions of their pre-colonial predecessors. They did not consider the need to reform the colonial regime. An instance of those in this category is Madam Tinubu of Lagos which is considered below. The second category was those whose social, political and economic resentment of the colonial regime led them into various kinds of resistance or anti-colonial activity. These were the celebrated group whose life and achievement of Independence were partly responsible for the Nigerian nationalism and Independence. This group also include women who saw colonial policies as change for the worst that resulted in premature death, growing immorality and rising prices. In this category, the Ogidi Palaver of 1914, the Calabar Market Women Protest of 1925 and the Dancing

Women Movement of 1925 would be considered. This examination begins with the first category

Madam Tinubu: Her Contributions to Lagos and Abeokuta

The Madam Tinubu belongs to the group of women who successfully manipulated the economic and political opportunities available to them without getting quite involved in the early anti-colonial movement. Born and educated in trade and commerce in Egba land, she moved to Badagry, a coastal community where she became a lucrative and powerful middle man with Brazilian slave dealers, trading mainly in slaves and tobacco. She became a prominent member of the commercial elites of the town, when she attached herself with the exiled king of Lagos, Oba Akitoye. She used her powerful economic position to build up a faction which was devoted to the restoration of the Oba to the throne. With the restoration of the Oba to the throne in Lagos in 1851, Madam Tinubu transferred her business from Badagry to Lagos and became the power behind the throne.

After the death of Oba Akintoye, Dosumu, his son succeeded him as Oba in 1853 and Madam Tinubu augmented substantially. She was commercially in competition with Sierra Leone and Brazillian emancipadoes who had the interest of dominating the trade between Lagos and the interior. The emancipadoes had the support of the Consul in

charge of the Lagos region. At this time also, the political influence which Madam Tinubu had attained was being resented by a number of Lagos Chiefs. In fact, in 1853 some of these chiefs had risen in rebellion against the influence she had. She was eventually exiled to Abeokuta by Consul Campbell in 1856 by calling in the gunboats as a means of exerting pressure on the vacillating Dosumu.

The exile which could have turned out to be a political or economic eclipse for Madam Tinubu was rather a change of platform for her. She established herself as a leading middle man trader dealing on the sales of weapons of warfare. Her knowledge and manipulations in this trade earned her prominence in Egba political and national life. In 1864, during the war between Egba land and the Dahomeans in which the Dahomeans attacked, she played a vital role in organizing the defense in Egba land and securing the defeat of the aggressors. According to Biobaku;

Her compound was converted into a veritable arsenal From which arms and ammunitions were issued to the Egba forces on their way to the front. Then she took up a position at Aro Gate, nearer the front at which the wounded were nursed by her and her female associates, where soldiers whose power has exhausted in battle replenish their store and from which any would be deserters were sent back with a renewed determination to fight the Dahomey and save the Egba metropolis from destruction"¹

With the Dahomeans defeated at the end of the war Egba land conferred on her the title of Iyalode - first Lady. This augmented her fame that she sought to become one of

the kingmakers of the Egba state. In 1869, she had become a leading member of the faction that sought to install Oyekom as Alake instead of Ademola. Her faction lost to Ademola 1, who later died in 1877 and Oyekan ascended the throne and she once again established herself as the power behind the throne.

Conclusively, Madam Tinubu prominent roles in the politics of both Lagos and Abeokuta using her economic knowledge and influence. She saw to the return of the exiled Oba Akintoye of Lagos in 1851, she augmented the weak character of Dosumu in 1853, she aided the victory of Abeokuta against the Dahomeans in 1864 and she regained her lost title of the power behind the throne in Lagos in Abeokuta by supporting Oyekan in Abeokuta politics in 1877 and becoming the Iyalode - first Lady of Abeokuta.

Ogidi Palaver

The palaver falls within the second category. It took place in 1914 against the social, political and economic policies of the colonial administration in Ogidi. The bone of the contention in this palaver was the movement of the major market in Ogidi called Afo Udo, by Igwe Walter Amobi, from its original location which is considered to hold some spiritual significance to the outskirts of a new high way constructed by the colonial government.

Igwe Amobi was the first monarch of Ogidi who introduced the new era of absolute rule in Ogidi and its environs. The intentions of Igwe Amobi were not only to relocate the market but to strategically place it on the high way to exploit and benefit from the large number of peoples who use the road. However, with his intentions, he provoked his people by not having pre-informed them the Ogidi women who were considered to be the owners of the market. In response to this, the women unleashed their anger through a series of planned demonstrations which they believed had the backing off the deity of the market called Udo. This encouraged them exercise their most efficient and devastating strategy for wrong doing known as "sitting on a man". This was to right the wrong done by Igwe Amobi.

Prior to 1904 when Igwe Amobi was consecrated, Ogidi had no progenitors who were sons of the original founder of Ogidi called Inwelle. Igwe Amobi was an Igbo Warrant Chief and was the only person that understood English. For this reason, he bridged the gap between the colonial masters and the traditional rulers of his town. With time, Amobi Walter seized the power and authority of the four progenitors. He became the colonial government's choice to succeed and govern the four quarters of Ogidi. This seemed to be the reward to Amobi for the service he rendered to the government as interpreter. Amobi accepted this responsibility alongside the Ozo title and name

Kwochaka, then the invented title of the Eze of all of Ogidi was bestowed on him by the British. He also bore the title of Igwe, an office which the people argued he got through "trickery".

During his reign, Igwe Amobi wrought several changes in Ogidi such as the creation of the Onitsha Native Court, the establishment of a hospital in 1907, the founding of a Nursing School and the construction of the Enugu- Onitsha trunk A roads in the first ten years of the twentieth century which caused the Ogidi women's spearheaded palaver of 1914. This road linked Onitsha to Awka. In the process of carrying out his several reforms in Ogidi, Igwe Amobi relocated the main market in Ogidi, Afo Udo from its interior location to the new roads to attract more customers. Unfortunately, he did not follow "due process".

It is believed by the people that the main market, Afo Udo, was owned and protected by an Oracle called Udo. Annually, the women of Ogidi consulted with the Oracle's Chief Priest, Eze Udo, enquiring how trade for that year would be. According to Nwando Achebe:

During their March 23, 1914 consultation, Eze Udo related Udo's stance to the women. Apparently, Udo was angry because his market was moved from its original home.²

Achebe further explained that”

Udo, through his Chief Priest, Eze Udo, Challenged the Umuokpu Ogidi saying, 'how will the year be good when you were All there and the Afo Udo market was Relocated? The year will not be good.'³

Upon hearing this, the Umuokpu Ogidi decided to stop marketing at the new location and sent a delegation made up of four women from the four quarters of Ogidi to Igwe Amobi to inform him about this.

Amongst the women selected was an in-law of Igwe Amobi called Emeghaa who pre-informed the Igwe of the intended mission of the women. The Igwe being armed with this information was able to thwart the mission of the women. "He (Igwe Amobi) was said to have perched himself On the balcony of his palace, yelling in a loud voice to the approaching women not to dare step foot in his palace".⁴

As a result the women returned to the venue where all the Umuokpu Ogidi had previously gathered for a pre-scheduled discussion of the result of the meeting between the Igwe and their representatives. When the remaining three representations informed the other women what happened, the Umuokpu Ogidi reached a decision that the matter would be taken to the District officer in Onitsha, who was higher than Igwe Amobi in authority for hearing. The next day, the women moved early on foot to Onitsha but

unknown to them, Igwe Amobi also moved that same day to Onitsha on a wagon to see the District Officer also. He falsely informed the District Officer that "the Umuokpu Ogidi were disturbing the peace in Ogidi".⁵

When the women arrived Onitsha and heard the false allegation against them, they were angry and said to have carried out their anger on the Kotmas (court messenger) and police men on duty by fighting them. For this reason, fourteen of them were arrested and jailed in Asaba prison.

In Asaba prison these women had their heads shaved. This was considered a taboo because only widows ever shaved their hairs in Ogidi. The remaining women back at Ogidi upon hearing of the arrest and shaving of their representatives hair marched about six miles to Onitsha where they carried out a massive "sit in" at the district Officer's Court. This was done in a very organized manner that only women who had just given birth and were recuperating from child birth were permitted to stay behind at Ogidi while others including those who had little children went to Onitsha for this course. They arrived the court yard singing aloud that Igwe Amobi had no right to move their market. This continued for seven days with the women singing and dancing until nightfall. The women from Ogidi had the support of the women in Onitsha who had organized shelter

for the Ogidi women to sleep at night and also food and whenever the women's food supplies were low, a group of them would return to Ogidi to take food and money from their supportive husbands to Onitsha. This brought Ogidi to a halt. The markets, both old and new had been isolated and the families of these women were left uncared for.

After fourteen days, the women attempted to break into the prison and rescue their comrades. This attempt was unsuccessful and it took place on the 29th of April. Nwando Achebe holds that this action was documented by the Assistant District Officer of Onitsha, H. Rayner Eaton, in an April 30, 1914 hand written note. With the failure of this attempt the women had to reside in Onitsha until their leaders were released.

On the day the women were to be released the Umuokpu Ogidi bought a very expensive masquerade called Ifele and sang and dance in its company causing Igwe Amobi and Emeghaa to the hearing of everyone saying;

Okwa maka ofu ego na sisi Igba ogo ka Emeghaa ji welia uno enu Igba ogo` -`Is it because of 1 shilling and 6 pence; And because Emeghaa is trying to be a Good in-law, that she was able to climb The palace stairs and betray us.⁶

If the magnitude of this action by the women was to be considered without a full understanding of the culture of the Igbos, it may look irrelevant and small. But in consideration with the knowledge of Igbo culture, this is no little action. First, the fact

that the women bought the most expensive masquerade that does not come out only during important events, Ijele, portrays a very extreme and because women in Igbo land is not allowed to buy or create masquerades or masked spirits. This meant that things are no longer in order and that things are no longer in order and that this palaver was an extraordinary event which demands extraordinary actions.

Another thing to consider about the action of these women was the song they sang being an insult. They voiced aloud that Emeghaa had betrayed them because of the little bribe her in-law, the Igwe, offered her; and that it was because of this bribe that she permitted to step into the palace where her (Emeghaa) comrade were not permitted to step into.

Upon their return to Ogidi, the women mocked Igwe Amobi's red chieftaincy cap and marched to his palace. They then sent young Ogidi boys to clear, Afor Udo's original location and they assembled there with commodities for trade and weapons for war because they suspected that Igwe Amobi would send colonial police after them and the Igwe did as the women had suspected. In the midst of the policemen was the District Officer who happened to be visiting the palace. Igwe Amobi instructed the police escorts secretly to take the District Officer through another route which was longer than the

normal route so that he would think that the original market location was in fact farther and more remote than it actually was.

Afo Udo was filled with women trading when the District Officer arrived. He sent for Eze Udo the Udo priest, who he asked to find out the reason for the market palaver and he was told that Udo, their god, would kill anyone that tampered with his market, including the Whiteman. The District Officer invited the Ogidi people to his court for the resolution of the case. An indigene, Nwasike, took the District Officer on his bicycle to the court but through the normal route which led to the Afo Udo market so that the District Officer could see how close the market was to the court thereby exposing Amobi's craftiness.

The people of Ogidi gathered at the colonial court at the time scheduled by the District Officer, including the Igwe who had offered bribes to Ogbunike and Nkpor people so that they could support him if there was to be the need to vote. But this plan by the Igwe was tarnished by Anyafulu Kuja Okpegbulu, and Umuokpu Ogidi woman who boldly told the District Officer that the men did not know what the palaver with the Igwe was about, that only women were affected because it was the women who earned monies in the Afo Udo market with which they feed their children. She further explained that the

men were always busy in their farmlands and therefore could not know about their palaver with the Igwe. She further accused the Igwe of moving the market so that their children would die of hunger and that all of Ogidi refused to take this that was the reason they had gathered in the District Officer's court.

When Anyafulu was through with her argument, the District Officer asked the people to vote by raising their hands if they wanted the Afo Udo to remain in its original location. Ogidi women and men and the people of Nkpor and Ogbunike peoples supported the Ogidi women because they enjoyed trade at Afo Udo. When the District Officer asked for these in favour of the market being moved to its new location, only the Igwe and his family raised their hands. The verdict of the District Officer was in favour of the Ogidi women. This put an end to the course of the palaver.

In considering the measures which the Ogidi women employed in their market protest, it can be seen as the expression of the ways in which Igbo women took care of their interests in pre-colonial society. They employed the tactics of negotiations, striking, boycotting, sitting in and turned to war making when everything else failed. Their first action against Igwe Amobi's decision was to request the move of the market back to its original location. This was when they employed their negotiative tactics. Igwe Amobi did

not grant the women listening ears, therefore the women decided to boycott the market and also staged a "sit in" at the District Officer's Court.

This move by the women was also thwarted by the Igwe and the peaceful "sit in" intended by the women was disrupted. This vexed the women whose aim was changed upon hearing the misrepresentation of their cause that Igwe Amobi had told the Onitsha Court which led to physical protest that is, beating up police men and court messengers. This action of the women led to the conviction of their representatives in Asaba prison. "Making war on a man" was their most extreme sanction which permits the women to destroy the properties of an identified offender and cause their animals to be released as punishment for their crimes. After the arrest of their comrades, they used non-violent measures which involved singing songs that outlined their grievances. All through the women's stay in Onitsha, they were undoubtedly on strike from their household and community responsibilities and on their return home they all wore the replica of the Igwe's chieftaincy cap. This was a form of mocking the Igwe's office and outlining their grievances. In conclusion, having examined the Ogidi palaver of 1914, it can be seen that the Umuokpu Ogidi employed five measures- negotiations, strikes, boycotts, "sit in" and war making, in changing the colonial policy instigated by their Warrant Chief.

The Nwaobiara Dance

The Nwaobiara Dance also called the "Dancing Women Movement" took place in parts of Owerri, Onitsha and Ogoja provinces in 1925. By nature it was non-violent but was against the colonial regime, serving as a request to the British for their withdrawal from their land.

The background and origin of this protest according to Afigbo is obscure.

According to him:

The administrative records are silent on it, while oral traditions will not go beyond The assertion that it came as a result of divine inspiration and was anti-British. Nor is there any precise information on How and when it started.⁸

These oral records according to Afigbo hold that the last week of October and the first week of November 1925 witnessed the occurrence of a "miraculous birth" on the boundary of Umuahia - Okigwi area. This birth led to the need to consult an oracle or a dinner for explanations. The diviner or oracle consulted utilized this opportunity by crediting the "miraculous birth" or "monstrous birth" to the intrusion of new ways of thought and deed, immediately urging the people to return to the confrontation of the British administration.

The administration was confronted with an all- women movement which spread throughout the greater parts of Owerri, Onitsha and Ogoja provinces. This all- women movement took the Warrant Chief by surprise because prior to that time, there was no form of warning given. The women arrived at his premises, swept his compound and preformed a special dance. This caused a stir in the village visited and the women rallied round a huge crowd. This made the message that was being delivered to be regarded with seriousness and adequate ceremony. The message the women bore holds that Chineke (Almighty God) had appeared at Okigwi and ordered that all should return to the old customs and shun English ways. They claimed that he ordered the people to stop the use of English currency, boycott the Native Courts, stop giving wives to Christians reopen the old roads and routes and use them in place of the new ones that all girls should go about nude until they had had their first babies, that the bride price should be reduced to the old rates and also the prices of foodstuff too. They also ordered that all prominent men who had brought it, ten shillings.

According to Afigbo the Acting Divisional Officer at Agwu (Onitsha Province reported that:

The dance and the chant created a strong impression in the Division

through which it spread in three days... so great was the awe with which it was regarded - this song from the unknown, with its preremply demand demand to be passed on and its personal expense to the chief - that in the Owelli (Court) district the chiefs absolutely ignored the order of the Divisional Officer not to pass it on, subsequently excusing themselves by saying they were afraid and hastened to pass it on as they were bid. The spirit was universal.⁹

Individuals who adhered to the message of the movement were promised that the British would be exterminated from the Ogoja province. In some places, like Nkalagu and Izzi clans of Abakaliki, there was serious breaches of peace in which men even took part of when the Divisional Officer tried to hold a meeting with the Izzi at Inyimagu to counteract the influences of the revolt but an armed mob expelled him.

The all - women movement which tried to expel colonial administration in Owerri, Onitsha and Ogoja collapsed by the beginning of 1926 due to insufficient coordination amongst the villages involved. Even with its collapse, it left an impression in the minds of those who witnessed it.

The Calabar Market Women Protest

Having considered the palaver at Ogidi in 1914, and the Nwaobiara Dance of 1925, the Calabar Market Women Protest of 1925 also needs to be considered. In Calabar, the indigenes like various other places in Nigeria were hostile to colonialism and considered it to be an evil intrusion into their territory. Women in the Cross River area reacted to colonial policies through peaceful and violent demonstrations. The norm for colonial administration was to ignore women and these women resented it and felt it right to be accorded their rightful positions like their male counterparts in government. The government set up a commission to look into the causes of the women disturbances and make recommendations. The colonial government in formulating most of their policies had to be guided by the imperial needs. To realize it set economic objectives, they had to put a number of legal enactments to force, one of which was the Road and Creeks (Rivers) Ordinance of 1903. There were several causes of the women's vexations which include the introduction of forced labour, colonial attitude towards the men of Cross River who refused to be recruited, the exploitation of their human and material resources and the intentions of the colonial government to take over the market administrations.

The roads and Creeks Ordinance of 1903 holds that:

...the High Commissioner could at any time declare that a water-way or road was to be maintained by chiefs of the village through which it ran, and the chiefs would have the power to call any man or woman of specified ages, residing in their areas of authority to work on the water-way or road for any length of time not exceeding six days in a quarter.¹⁰

This enactment initiated the use of forced labour and carrier system to provide cheap labour for most projects of the colonial government. It conscripted able-bodied men in Cross River to do odd jobs such as the building of courts and rest houses, the construction of roads, bridges and carrying of heavy loads for colonial officials to distant places. These made the women assume the responsibilities of the men both at home and in their farmlands because the men were usually away from home for several days due to these jobs which gave them very little or no pay at all. The women hated the added responsibility.

The women's distaste for the 1903 Ordinance was elevated by the punitive measures carried out on men who refused to turn out for recruitment. They were arrested, prosecuted by the Native Courts and jailed or fined. The women of Cross-River

sometimes hinder the execution of the Ordinance through sabotage. Due to this, many men hid in the bush during recruitment seasons and were supplied with food and other necessities by the women. Sometimes, tax invaders and those who ran away from colonial agents hide in the hills where no colonial officer would come to look for them, for the fear of being crushed to death by huge stones which men could roll down the hill. There are times that colonial officers who were resident at Umon or passing through to Arochukwu commanded these able-bodied men to take them to distant places without giving them any prior notice.

One of the ways the women hindered colonial activities at this time was by withdrawing their activities on streams from inter-localities to intra-localities. According to Erim and Imbua:

...on sensing the arrival of any white man, the women would withdraw their canoes to some streams within the locality. thus, by the time the white colonial officials arrived the beach, there would be no cause available to ferry them across the river.¹¹

This was an effective way through which the women expressed their dislike of the colonial system which exploits both their human and material resources. The grievance of the women was not only about what has been mentioned above. There was also an attempt by the colonial government to interfere in the women's market administration

through the Market Ordinance of 1924. The seventh rule of this Ordinance demanded for the payment of tolls in the main markets in Calabar such as the Beach (Marina) and the Watt Markets, the use of the stalls built by the Local Authority had a fixed payment of one shilling and six pence each month while casual traders were to pay one penny per month while casual traders were to pay one penny per month.

However, the Native Authority was yet to build lock-up shops and open sheds where the women can display their items for sale in the market. The women were exempted from any form of administrative and political activity in these markets, thereby seizing the responsibility of the women organization. The women thought it unjustifiable to demand for tolls for amenities which were not in place therefore, they refused to pay. They also felt that they were not adequately consulted. They tried to make a representation on the issue to the District Officer but this failed and resulted in the riot of April 1, 1925.

The riot was a consequence of the implementation of the 1924 Ordinance by Colonial Officials. It was carried out by over 3000 women of different organizations which were under the Calabar Market Women's Organization. It was peacefully demonstrated at first but turned out to become violent when some women attempted to

snatch the rifles of the police. These angry women forcefully entered European factories along the Marina and closed down the factories. According to Mba Nina Eke:

Among those affected (factories) were the Cobham factory and G. B. Ollivant's trading stores. The Women subsequently boycotted both the Beach and Wall Markets and with the help of their husbands, created their own market at a separate site.¹²

This greatly troubled the government because it caused food scarcity in the region and the government also feared the spread of the revolt to other areas. The government called a meeting on the 3rd of April, 1925 between those resident in Calabar Province, indigenes (the Obong- Traditional ruler and the market women) and F. N. Ashley, the government representative. During the meeting, an enquiry was made about the brutal action of the police towards unarmed protesting women, and also a petition was sent to the Governor on the 11th of April 1925 containing several demands like the building of proper shed with zinc roofs before the tolls would be enforced and the appointment of a new Advisory Board for Calabar with increased representation. This made the Governor of Nigeria visit Calabar alongside the acting Lieutenant Governor for the Southern Province to see things for themselves. A memorandum from the secretary, 1925, directing that stalls be built in the markets, rules be promulgated through traditional ruler's council, and the District Officer be transferred out of Calabar. This brought an end to the issue.

Conclusively, the Calabar Market Women Organization achieved the aims of their protest. These aims include; the modification of their market policy, improvement of market conditions, increased participation of traditional authorities in administration and so on. Their demand for justice and fair-play was granted because they had refused to pay tolls for the facilities that were not available and according to Erim and Imbua, "the revolt sowed the seed of Nigerian nationalism, and also gave rise to another women's revolt took place in 1929" ¹³The examination of the role played by Madam Tinubu in Lagos and Abeokuta from 1851, the Ogidi Palaver of 1914, the Nwaobiara Dance (the Dancing Women's Movement) of 1925 and the Calabar Market Women Protest of 1925 has shown the various strategies through which women objected colonial rule and its policies either made directly or through the Native authorities. These women were persistent and continuously changed their strategies until the desired changes were achieved.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER THREE

WOMEN AND NATIONALIST STRUGGLE IN EASTERN NIGERIA

Introduction

Having considered in the chapter that precedes this, the roles women played as individuals and groups in various parts of Southern Nigeria before 1929, this chapter focuses on the role women of the south eastern part of Nigeria played in the struggle for nationalism, how they organized themselves in their protest directed towards changing colonial policies that were unfavorable to them and also how they began to get involved in politics of their day. The women's war in 1929 was considered in this chapter, the misconception held by people that it was an Aba or an all Igbo women's war, the British tag of the event as a 'riot', the background to the event (which include the causes), the course of the war and its impact. Also, the role Margaret Ekpo played in uniting and educating women in Southern Nigeria towards fighting for their rights and fighting for the independence of Nigeria is considered.

The Women's War of 1929

The women's war of 1929 is an event that took place in the south eastern part of

Nigeria. This event has often been described as an Aba and an all Igbos war. The role of the Ibibios, the Andoni, Ogoni, Bonny and Opobo women has either been merged with the dominant Igbo groups or neglected. This event has also been considered as a 'riot', erroneously, by the British. this was an attempt to downplay its impact on future history.

According to F.I Abaraonye:

The British acknowledge that refused it systematically organised was to a socio- economic protest movement which cut across six ethnic groups of South-eastern Nigeria comprising women motivated by specific grievances, directed at achieving certain clear-cut social, economic and political goals"¹

But it contrast with the term 'riot', the event has also been termed as a war because it is aimed at a definite goal, but it did not demand the involvement of the whole populace and the use of the weapons of warfare by these women. Abaraonye further explained that the women chose to carry on with this act in Ikof Ekpene, Utu Etim Ekpo, Abak and Opobo being resolved to die while making their point. This decision was made by the women only after the colonial government's agents used violence to try to suppress the women at Aba. This was the reason this action by the women was termed a 'revolt'.²

Some European scholars propagates the British official view of the event being a riot aimed at overriding the political status quo. Scholars in this category include C.K Meek, Sylvia, Leith Ross and Harry Gaitey. While prominent among the Nigerian scholars is

A.E Afigbo who considers this view by the European scholars, a misnomer, expressing in his book, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southern Nigeria 1891-1929*:

This is a misleading misnomer and at times has created the impression that the episode was centered at Aba. The riot did not start at Aba and did not reach its peak there. The women did not refer to it as the Aba Riot. They called it the *Ogu umunwanyị* (in Igbo) meaning Women's War.³

Other Nigerian scholars who consider the European view as a misnomer include J.E.N Nwabara, Akpan and Ekpo and Chike Dike. They hold that the women's protest movement was a nationalistic motive, a form of traditional nationalism. Afigbo further argues that the women's war was another manifestation of anti-colonialism expressed by the *Nwobiala* in 1925 which advocated for the return to the old political and moral order while calling for the exodus of the British.

The introduction of direct taxation in 1928 came at a period of economic hardship and desperation among Nigerians generally and the palm-belt zone in particular because government needed more funds to support its policies in the southern provinces. The years 1927-1928 witnessed a number of preliminary discussions between the senior district officers, the warrant chiefs and members of the native court on the introduction of native administration as a form of indirect rule. Direct taxation was to be introduced after the introduction of native administration. Rates for income and trade were introduced

from Lagos to southern Nigeria.

With the cooperation of the warrant chiefs, colonial government carefully assessed adult males in a given area and conducted census. Head count of adult men, women, boys, girls and livestock and to avoid being counted, people often ran into the bush. In Ibibio land, as well as in other parts of south-eastern Nigeria, head count and regular taxation was unknown. What was known was occasional levies for specific purposes.

Fines on a collective basis were imposed during war time by the victorious party. The Ibibios saw white rule as an imposition of authority and therefore, if they should be forced to pay direct taxation, it was tantamount to the paying of tribute by vassals to their masters and conquerors.

The intention of the white man was not explained to the people by the assessment officers and court interpreters. The people were informed that the collected sum would be used in the development of their various towns. This led to the successful collation in Ibibio land without break-outs. The Kwa and Ekot area were taxed 5s (five shillings) per head of an adult male; Opobo-Ibekwie district, 8s (eight shillings) per head, while the other parts of Ibibio land and the Calabar provinces 7s (seven shillings) per adult male."

There were resistance in parts of eastern and western provinces by both men and women N.E. Mba explained that towns of Aboh, Ogula and Warri promptly responded by contributing money to send delegates to meet the Lagos based nationalist, Herbert

Macauley and leader of the Nigerian Nationalist Democratic Party, to seek his help in avoiding taxation. In Aboh, a man named Obi Opeta reported to the district officer about his action, the elderly women of the town "kidnapped him and forced him to sing all over the town"?

Indigenes of the Ogoja province, the Afikpo people refused to pay tax until they that the people of Calabar and Lagos had paid. Also payment in Calabar had been delayed for two weeks. When the government officials attempted to hold propaganda meetings there, they were met by the fierce demonstrations of angry women who were brought under by stern measures. Similar "riotous mobs" uprisings occurred in several parts such as Nko and Ugep in May 1928, Ikot Abasi in April 1928.

There are several causes of the women's war of 1929. These include the intention of the women's privacy by introducing direct taxation in causes 1928 accompanied by repeated assessments, the government's failure to recognize the women's organizations or associations, also there was no platform provided to the women to air their grievances. The 1929 women's war is termed Ekong Iban (Women's War) in Ibibio.' 10

The main cause of the resistance was that the local people were afraid that the counting and measuring of their farms would lead to a government take-over of their

farmlands and palm forest, while women would also have to pay tax." Marilyn French in her work expressed the view that one of the grievances of the women was the disregard of women in politics and government of the society.

When the British took over Nigeria, they recognized only the Obi and gave him a salary, making the Omu subordinate: she no longer made policies but took orders from the Obi. Her medicine and rites were replaced by clinics and drugs and the cases she had mediated went to a British appointed colonial magistrate, and goods were imported, ending her price fixing in the market... women thought the British were draining their land and bodies of fertility. Indeed, the British did destroy women's traditional roles... Girls were not educated and women were increasingly barred from public life.¹²

The grievance of the women in 1929 include the conception and arrogance of warrant chiefs, Native court clerks and messengers, the poor prices of palm products which could no longer aid the payment of children's education, feeding and clothing, the threatening, fining and imprisonment of their men folks which aid the enforcement of the colonial administration's unceasing demands, the introduction of direct taxation, the forceful recruitment of the men for labour, their persecution for evading taxes which placed additional responsibilities on the women, by providing for the extending family's welfare in the absence of their husbands and sons and when the men were imprisoned they had the responsibility to bail them or to ensure their freedom through bribing court messenger and clerks.

The situation got out of hand by afternoon of the next day and Mr. .E.N. Falk had to send policemen from Calabar against the Essence women this later spread to almost all the towns in the area and the surrounding countryside. Eventually, order was restored with the traditional police reinforcement. Therefore by 1928, the Ibibio women were now suspicious against the colonial government's motive for further tax assessment activities and were waiting for the time when the enumeration of women and property would be renewed (which was regarded by them as tantamount to taxation on women) to tell the government that they had taken enough. It was under these circumstances that they had taken enough. It was under these circumstances that the Ibibio women entered the 1929 women's war.

The Ibibio women who resided in the Abasi areas, keenly felt the unbearable burden of taxation on men and their families at large because though the tax was mainly imposed on men, women aided their husbands with their earnings while some sons who were of the age of 16 and above, were given the money to pay by their widowed mothers.

There were also economic resentments which aided their hatred for taxation. At this time according to F.I. Abaraonye, trade in agricultural produce experienced a slump;

... a four gallon tin of palm oil which had been sold for 7s (seven shillings) at Aba and 6s: 10d (six shillings and ten pence) at Umuahia in 1928, was

being sold for 5s: 10d (five shillings ten pence) and 5s:8d (five shillings and eight pence) respectively in 1929”¹³

Other economic produce such as palm kernel in places such as Aba and Opobo experienced the slump in prices but imported commodities experienced increase in prices.

The suspicion of women were aroused by the measurement of farm and enumeration of their economic crops and livestock and personal properties such as their cooking utensils, the number of wrappers and trinkets a woman possessed in 1928. The women of Ibibio land enjoyed the rights to plant their many crops in their husband's farmlands. The women also were involved and animal farming such as rearing of sheep, dogs, ducks, chickens and so on, their husband had no right to them without their approval. This was also applicable to the women's properties such as pots, clothes and ornaments. Women protected their rights through their established female institutions.

The arousal of the suspicion of women was due to the fact that the re- assessment of properties by colonial officials included women and their property. Prior to this time, men had been assessed in this manner and what followed was taxation. This led to the rumour followed by actual news that there was an attempt to enumerate women at Oloku in Umuahia. This made the Ibibio women rise against what they termed "injustice" and encroachment on their rights as women. The women considered confronting the colonial

authorities in 1929 as justifiable because it was in keeping with their material and protective function and to protest against the increasing hardship and frustration caused by the loss of economic control, the oppressive and corrupt alien administrative system, and its enforcement by threats, fines and imprisonment of their men folks. Though this, the women tried to assert their customary rights. A method the women used was effective communication and organization. They discussed in market and village associations. The women were able to confirm their suspicion according to Abaraonye, "...when Nwanyeruwa clashed with Chief Okugo's enumerator at Ojim's compound at Oloko, Chief Okugo's enumerator Mbok Emeruwa, a school teacher had demanded to know from Nwanyeruwa the number of goats and sheep she possessed.

The argument that ensued led to a physical confrontation between the two and the death of Nwayeruwa's daughter-in-law who was pregnant and vulnerable" 14. A meeting was called in which Nwayeruwa excited story was told to confirm the rumour. The women then passed palm leaves around, summoning other women of the neighbourhood. They first 'sat' on Emeruwa and later besieged Okugo's house, leading to a serious clash with members of the chief's household, in which several women were wounded. The scene soon shifted to the district officer, Captain Hill, tried and imprisoned Okugo for two years on a charge of "assault and spreading wild rumour. The surging women, in

addition demanded and received his cap of office indicating Okugo's disposition from office. With these, the Oloko and Bende women were satisfied. The news of this spread about 6,000 square miles of the area.

Several women from various parts of Igbo land such as Oloko, Owerrinta, Agaba, Okpala and Nguru invaded the Owerrinta native court which was in session on the 9th of December, 1929, seized court records and demanded the caps of chiefs, assaulted the chiefs and chased them into the bush. Clerks and 15 messengers quarters were looted and prisoners from the guardrooms." In the second week of December several women from Ngwaland, riverine Ndoki and Asa communities and Ikot Ekpene community of Ibibio converged at Aba, dressed in green leaves and carrying sticks, chanting mournful dirge and singing solidarity songs against warrant chiefs, court messengers and clerks.¹⁶ The number of these women that had congregated at Aba numbered about ten thousand, according to Abaraonye, two of them were knocked down by Dr Hunter, a colonial medical officer and this infuriated the women and fuelled the tempo of the revolt.

Women from Annang in Ikot-Ekpene division joined demonstrations at Oloko and Bende from November 23, 1929, while the district officer was unaware of these events until December 9, 1929. Azumini, women from Opobo, Bonny and Ibibio partook in the

punitive fines imposed on that town, despite the massive loss of lives at the Opobo beach on the 16th of December 1929. At the Etim, a town in Annang - Ibibio, Igbo and Ibibio women converged for a protest and many of them were shot to death.

The district officer at Ikot-Ekpene stood as a mediator in his district, assuring the women from fifty-nine towns that they would not be taxed by providing several copies of the officially typed documents. About ten thousand women took part in the Aba demonstrations, about three to four thousand at Ikot Asudua on their way to Ikot-Ekpene along the Ugo road and about one thousand marched on the government hall at Itu. It is said that elderly women were always at the front row of the re-grouping crowds at Abak and in Ibibio land and Native courts were burnt. Once women gathered, a leader emerged and their orders were promptly obeyed and negotiations were not carried out with the second party without the leaders or spokes women.

Marilyn French captures the conduct of the "Ogu Umumwanyi", "Women's War", in her own words;

In November 1929, tens of thousands of Igbo women from Calabar and Owerri provinces in Nigeria converged on the Native Administration center (which housed the head-quarters and residence of district colonial officers, a court, jail, bank and trader's store). The women chanted, danced, sang mocking songs and demanded official insignia as Warrant Chiefs (Igbo chosen from each village by the British to sit on the Native Court).

They broke into prisons and freed prisoners, they stormed sixteen Native Courts, wrecking or burning most of them. Twice the British summoned troops or police who killed fifty and wounded fifty. The protest nevertheless went on for a month. The Igbo call it "Ogu Umunwanyi" (the women's war) but the British, the "Aba riots". They never understood that the women had noted out of distress as women.¹⁷

Margaret Ekpo: Her Role in Nigerian Nationalism

A giant in politics and a pioneer activist in the 20th century, and an icon, Margaret Ekpo was born in 1914 in Creek town located in the Southern part of Nigeria- present day Cross River State to Obiaulor Okoroafor, a native of Agulu- Uzo-Igbo in Anambra state and Inyang Eyo Aniemewue from the royal stock of the king Eyo Honesty II of Creek town. Born into a family of nine as the fifth child, her educational life was first halted, she obtained her School Leaving Certificate after the death of her father in 1934. This dashed her dreams of attending a Teachers Training College but this did not stop her teaching dreams. She taught as a "pupil-teacher" at various elementary school until she married Dr John Udo Ekpo a Yaba High School trained medical practitioner in 1938. She later advanced her education by obtaining a Diploma in Domestic Economics in 1948 in Dublin Ireland. She established a Domestic Science Institute, upon her return, where she trained young girls in dress making and home economics.

The political career of Margaret Ekpo could be described to have happened by

chance. Her husband Dr Ekpo, had taken great exception to the discriminatory practices of the colonial administrators of Aba General Hospital in 1945 but being a civil servant, he could not attend the meetings organized by Nigerians to protest against these policies, he sent Margaret Ekpo instead. Margaret Ekpo readily became her husband's eyes and ears at the meetings. She was in attendance when the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun (N.C.N.C) addressed the rally at Aba. She was the only woman in attendance and many wondered what she was doing there when she should be at home attending to her family. But being undeterred, she keenly listened to the speeches of Herbert Macaulay, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe and Mazi Mbonu Ojoke who urged Nigerians to claim their independence from Great Britain. This stirred her passion for political activism. She became discontented with being the only woman who could attend political meetings. She, therefore, devised a participation in Aba in 1945. means to encourage women

After the Second World War, there was a general scarcity of essential commodities such as salt, Margaret Ekpo went round the shops, bought all the available bags of salt and controlled the sales to members of her Aba Market Women Association and those who were not registered members of the association were denied access to salt. The association became the platform through which she related the information she heard in political meetings.

Through her relationship with Mrs Flora Azikiwe, wife of Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, with whom Margaret Ekpo formed the women's wing of the N.C.N.C, and often campaigned with on behalf of the party candidates in various parts of Nigeria even under hostile circumstances. Following her knowledge of Mrs Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Margaret Ekpo left Aba for Abeokuta to discuss with her (Mrs Ransome Kuti) on the need to boost the participation of Nigerian women in politics. Mrs Ransome Kuti conceded to tour the South-eastern region for one month and stir the political consciousness of women.

In 1945, Margaret Ekpo was nominated to be a special member of the Eastern House of Chiefs in Enugu to represent the interest of women. This was initiated by Sir Louis Ojukwu who was impressed with Margaret Ekpo's attendance at the House of Chiefs proceedings, though her appointment was controversial. While carrying out this responsibility, she was nominated to be one of the delegates to the constitutional conference held in Lancaster House in London in 1958. It was at the conference that she discovered that the Special membership of the legislator would be abolished in the new Nigerian constitution. Margaret Ekpo kicked against this because women in Nigeria at that time were not allowed to vote, it was through Special members such as Margaret Ekpo that their voices could be heard. Margaret Ekpo brought this to the attention of Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, her party leader noting its implications to him. He explained to her that

this decision was made to checkmate all negative votes likely to be cast by Colonial Government Officials who wants to maintain the status quo. However, he ensured that after the election in which the N.C.N.C emerged victorious, the constitution was amended and Universal Adult Suffrage was introduced in the Lyttleton's constitution in 1954. Margaret Ekpo made it her primary responsibility to protect the interest of the Nigerian woman. For this course, she made many sacrifices and scored many firsts. In 1962, she received an award for her loyalty to the N.C.N.C alongside a nomination to contest the election in the Eastern House of Assembly, representing the Aba Urban North Constituency, which she won becoming the first woman to be elected in Aba. She occupied this position until 1967 when the Nigerian Civil War began.

In a demonstration in 1949, Margaret Ekpo was almost deported from Nigeria along with three men because she had threatened to kill the British women in Aba, if a woman had been among those killed in the coal miners request for a wage increase in which their leaders were shot by colonial administrators for daring to ask for their rights. Margaret Ekpo had made contact with other women groups in the country and declared that day, a day of National mourning for the Colliery shooting victims. The threat of deportation made by the colonial administrators was brought to not by the Aba women who in retaliation, threatened to set the town ablaze if colonial masters implemented their threat.

Margaret Ekpo and those arrested with her were promptly released.

Another instance of her political activism in colonial times occurred in the early 1950s when a prison officer, Mrs. Onyia was murdered by a colleague for rejecting his love advances. The authorities tried to cover this and avoid a controversy but Margaret Ekpo and the Aba women stormed the Enugu Prisons Department and demanded to be shown where Mrs Onyia was buried. The Superintendent of prison did not concede until the women sent word to him giving him ten minutes to let them in or break the gate and force themselves in. This made him let them in. They also demanded that the body of Mrs Onyia be exhumed for autopsy, which was granted. The evidence showed the woman's skull was with a 6 inch nail when the murder was being tried in the High court. The case was decided and the murderer, a warder, was executed.¹⁹

Another achievement of Margaret Ekpo was the assumption of the office of the president of the Women's wing of the N.C.N.C when Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe became President and Mrs Flora Nnamdi Azikiwe became the first lady in 1960. As President, Margaret Ekpo continuously led the women in campaigns for party candidates across the country. She was also sometimes called upon to resolve intra-party disputes. Margaret Ekpo and Mrs Flora Azikiwe were very influential that they could settle high level

dispute between men, commit their party to their decisions and have the decisions respected and carried out. But this is no longer the preserve of women in Nigerian politics today.

Margaret Ekpo was a Nigerian representative in the Inter Parliamentary Union Conference in 1964, she represented Nigeria in the World Women's International Domestic Federation Conference in 1963, she was also a member of the National Parliament from 1960-1966 and women interest representatives, Nigerian Constitutional Conference in 1960. She was also a delegate to the Nigerian Constitutional Conference in 1953, 1957, and 1959 and a women's interest representative (Eastern House of Chiefs) 1954 1958, and a member (Eastern House of Chiefs) 1948-1966. In 2001 the Calabar airport was named after her. Her name graces the Ekpo Refectory at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and various other buildings and structures across Nigeria.

The political career of Margaret Ekpo ended with the commencement of the Nigerian Civil War. She was detained during the war by the Biafran authorities for three years.²⁰ The reason for her detention was not known. While in prison she remained unbowed but never bitter.

In concluding this Chapter, it can be seen from the above that during colonial times,

Igbo women took bold steps to represent their views in government. They organized themselves to confront the injustices of colonial rule. The Aba women war of 1929 was an offshoot of their protest. This was a protest against British administration and policies and imposition of taxes on women, several women lost their lives. The fall in the prices of palm produce infuriated the women the more. This led to the immortalization of Madam Chinyere Nwanyiriwa and Madam Ikonna Nwanyiwu Enyi, both of Oloko in present Ikwano Local Government Area of Abia state.²¹ Also the instance of Chief Mrs. Margaret Ekpo and her effective participation in politics has proven that women played crucial and effective roles in Nigerian Nationalism and the attainment of her independence. She effectively participated in politics by becoming a member of the N.C.N.C, calling upon and educating the Aba women and in the East at large about politics in Nigeria, the roles women could play and the effectiveness of their participation in the attainment of Nigeria's independence. Due to her achievements, several places in eastern Nigeria are named after her - the Airport in Calabar, a Women Educational Centre and a Hall of Residence in the University of Nigeria Nsukka to mention a few.

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CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN AND NATIONALIST STRUGGLE IN WESTERN NIGERIA

Introduction

In examining women history, their contributions to colonial era, an important area to consider is the South-western Nigeria. Women in this area were traders who trade in agricultural products. This made them important in the distributive sector and gave them a sense of unity based on mutual interests and needs. The economic wealth of certain women of the South western region aided their political influence and office. Their economic importance also gave them certain rights to representation on decision-making bodies, the right to discuss public policies and the right to property and inheritance. However, the incursion of colonial rule altered the position of women in their ability to participate in their local government. Women perceived this threat and regrouped to withstand and promote their interest in this Lagos Market Women's Association.

Lagos Market Women's Associate (LMWA)

This association can be said to be the first women's interest group to organize the power of collective action in guarding and promoting women's right in South-western

Nigeria during the colonial era. The date it was founded is unknown but it became actively known in the mid-1920s. Some scholars believe that the leading spirit behind its foundation was Herbert Macaulay, the Nigerian Nationalist leader,' because the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) and the LMWA worked closely in cooperation. However, since other scholars hold that elderly market women informants have described the NNDP leader and the LMWA leader as working hand in hand- equals.²

Behind the formation of the LMWA is Madam Alimotu Pelewura, a Yoruba born in Lagos who took after her mother by becoming a fish trader by 1900. By 1910, she was recognized as an important leader by the Eleko Eshugbayi, the ruler of Lagos. She was elected the head of market women. She was elected Alaga- head of Lagos market women, the largest and prosperous meat market in Lagos- the Ereko market in the 1920s. Traders in the Ereko market contributed weekly three pence to a fund which was used to employ lawyers and clerks to write letters and interpret interviews with colonial officials and other individuals. The skills Madam Alimotu Pelewura gained in organizing in Ereko aided her being literate was not surmountable. She ensured that she harnessed the skills and advice of both her supporters and the employees for the good of the market.

In 1932, there were rumours that the colonial government in Lagos intended to tax

the women in Lagos. This was challenging to the LMWA because it was relatively new to them. This served as the first test of the association though Abeokuta women and women in other places in the western region had been taxed since 1918. The market women tried to change this by first forming a committee, with Pelewura as a member, which visited the Government House to discuss the issue with the Administrator of the Colony, C.T. Lawrence. C.T. Lawrence assured the women that government had no intention of taxing the women of Lagos. But in 1940, government made attempts to tax the women and at this time, Madam Pelewura was at the forefront of the opposition to the taxation.

Prior to 1940, Madam Pelewura was made a member of the Ilu Committee (a component of the traditional government in Lagos under the Oba). A representative of the market women always sat with the committee to ensure that the concerns of the women were considered.³ Madam Alimotu Pelewura served as the spokesperson for eighty-four women representatives for sixteen markets. While serving in the Ilu Committee, she put a stop to the government's move to relocate the Ereko market. She was also given, in 1938, a position on the executive committee of the newly founded Nigerian Union of Young Democrats (NUYD), a more radical extension of the NNDP. She joined this affiliation but despite it, she maintained her association with Herbert Macauley and the NNDP and with all her political engagements. She never intended to transform the LMWA into a

political party but she chose to allow it remain as a pressure group.

In 1939, the economy of Nigeria imposed on the women war-time regulations, enactment of an Income Tax Ordinance where women who earn fifty pounds or more annually, were taxed to raise funds for war expenditure. The government were empowered by law to formally demand certain supplies for the Armed Forces and also regulated the prices of certain commodities which are essential for war. Certain individuals and organizations capitalize on these new laws in order to increase their profit and establish a monopoly in the market. These individuals and organizations include dishonest chiefs and rulers and also European firms. But associations like the Lagos Market Women Association protected the economic interest of women. They organized mass protest challenging the income tax law.

On the 16th of December 1940, over one hundred women gathered at the entrance of the office of the colonial commissioner in Lagos. When the commissioner came to attend to them, the Iyalods of Lagos, Rabiatu Alaso Oke, spoke on behalf of the women that they received "return of income" forms, and also reminded him that the government had promised prior to that time not to tax women. But the commissioner responded that only women who are well-to-do are to be taxed. The women were unsatisfied with his

response that they drafted a petition against the ordinance and with the help of Herbert Macaulay's son, Oged Macaulay, the women went about getting endorsements of over two thousand market women who placed their thumb prints on the document. Female taxation was contrary to custom and its imposition was undesirable though it be connected to war.

Madam Alimotu Pelewura led the women to close the market and marched towards the office of the commissioner. The commissioner came again to repeat what he told the women the previous day but has evidences that prove that once female taxation is initiated, all women would then include to pay tax under the law. The women were still unmovable on their decision of not paying the tax and were prepared to suffer any punishment the government meted out. They marched to the government house to complain but they were resisted by soldiers who only permitted Madam Pelewura and one other woman were permitted inside to meet with Governor Bourditton, who refused to rescind the tax law. The women proceeded from there to the house of Herbert Macaulay to inform him of their ordeal and plan how on to oppose taxation.

A mass meeting was held on 18th of December at Glover Memorial Hall attended by about 1000 to 7000 people.⁵ Present at the meeting was the women leader, Alimotu

Pelewura and the commissioner, basically restating their earlier position in an unpleasing manner. The commissioner stated that English woman paid tax but Madam Alimotu retorted that England was where the money was made further explaining that Africans were poor due to factors they could not control, one of which was that the women assisted their husbands to pay income tax to avoid them being sent to prison for defaulting. She concluded by demanding no taxation without representation. The women were so strong-willed that the government had to not completely abolish the law to revise it. Annual taxable income was raised for the women by the commissioner from 50 pounds to 200 pounds, an amount very few market women realized. This was a limited victory achieved by the women.

The economic impact of the Second World War was beginning to take its toll on the system of market in Nigeria. Men were enlisted in the armed forces, some other men migrated to the cities to take advantage of the opportunities for wage labour due to the demand for defense construction; food production was reduced due to migration, so did food yields. Demand for food supplies to feed soldiers increased. All these increased the price of food with Lagos having continuous inflation and food shortages. Price control was set for essential food items, and distribution of these items was almost taken over by the government. A food price control scheme was enacted in February 1941 known as the

Pullen price control scheme. This scheme weakened the economic position of the Nigerian market women because women traditionally controlled the distribution of foodstuffs using efficient system of marketing pricing. The women were made to trade with a narrow profit margin. The scheme failed to take into consideration the costs of transportation and storage.

This led to the development of black market in which market women European firms and the producers participated. The government had limited success in enforcing price control because Africans worked against it. The LMWA organized women resistance to price controls. Colonial government called for meetings with the women leaders to discuss a means of corporation in 1944 because the controls were not effective but they could not reach a common ground. The colonial authorities tried to get traditional elite (the Oba and his assembled chiefs) to influence the decision of the women. About 3000 women attended the meeting and in unity refused to comply with the government on price controls. A Lagos chief, Chief Oluwa, to intervene on the government's behalf clearly stated that "the women must abide by the decision of their leader, Madam Alimotu Pelewura".⁸

Madam Pelewura went directly to the commissioner of the colony after a few days of

the meeting with the traditional elites, and threatened to shut down all market in Lagos if the price controls were not lifted. She also publicly confronted Pullen Company Life during World War II to what she remembered of World War I when no white man sold garri in Lagos. Pullen tried to cajole her by offering to pay her a monthly allowance of 7 pounds 70 shillings and also appoint her as the head of the garri sellers of Lagos if she supported him but she obliged saying that not even 100 pounds a month would make her concede. This made Pullen withdraw from interfering with the women's source of supply, promising to obtain government's source of supply directly from the farmers. The supply government received was insufficient to meet the demands for food. This worsened the economic situation in Lagos. Long queues noticeably formed outside government sale centers and many times violence broke out due to the struggle to get a place in the queue. Pullen blamed the situation on "deliberate sabotage by the agents of Madam Pelewura", but market women informant hold that neither Pelewura nor any other market woman control the behavior of the crowds clamouring for food supplies at the centers because the long queues moved extremely slowly and the government ran out of stocks. The black market was better organized and better stocked than the official government markets.

During the period when the Pullen price control was on force, market women maintained militant protest continuously petitioning the government and when the

women ran into trouble with the law, they obtained legal assistance. A lot of women were arrested for going against the law sons were imprisoned. Poor women were dealt with more harshly by the court than prosperous European firms. This made Madam Pelewura seek assistance from the Western trained lawyers and nationalist leaders like Herbert Macaulay and his son. The LMWA sent letters protesting the discriminatory practices of colonial courts to the commissioner of the colony and the legislative town councils. The women also called upon the men for public support.

The end of the World War II brought the end of Pullen price controls and market scheme. Madam Pelewura was the central figure in the women's protest over political and economic grievances. She was also very important during the general strike which began in 1945 and lasted for thirty-seven days. This strike transformed Nigerian politics. During this time, Madam Pelewura and the LMWA organized the market women to support the strikers. Keeping the selling price of foodstuffs low as a means of demonstrating the women's solidarity with the sticker and collated donations from the market women for the Worker's Relief Fund. Prices was decontrolled in 1945 by the government. The colonial government had little reasons to keep the price controls in place hut the LMWA resisted it. This proves that the women were aware of the acute frustrations of the colonial period and the need to accept responsibility to fight against them.

The LMWA represented an advanced form of the traditional type of women's organization, an important step in Nigerian women's attempt to preserve their rights under the changing conditions of the colonial system. The female educated elite took this a step further and created a new political entity called the Nigerian Women's Party, organizing women in a western-style association, but building upon traditional structures and utilizing both traditional and western protest tactics.

The Abeokuta Women's Union (A.W.U.)

The Abeokuta Women's Union was formed in 1946 by Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti with the aim of uniting women in order to defend, protect, preserve and promote their social, economic and political rights. Its members included many educated women but an important factor in the Organization's success was the commitment it made to the market women and their involvement in modern politics. The organization sought to incorporate them into its organizational structure and membership and the executive committee had on it many influential market women leaders, illiterate sometimes as well as women from the western - oriented educated elite. Rank and file membership was mostly made up of market women. The Union had a very large membership, some scholars believe that the Union's membership was between eighty and a hundred

thousand.

In precolonial Abeokuta society, women were actively involved in politics, they were duly represented with the most important, the Iyalode, on state councils whose duty was to protect and promote women's interest. But under colonial rule the position and participation of women began to wane. The advent of indirect rule brought about changes in government which were inimical to women and the democratic character of leadership. Indirect rule never made provision for women's participation in government.

The AWU protest of 1946 was as a result of several grievances. These grievances are the confiscation of trader's rice by the Alake, who diverted them to his own stores, sold them and kept the profits, the misappropriation of lands and wrongful leasing of it to European firms and agents by Alake Alaiye Ademola II in the early 1930s, his method of tax collection, the road blocks set up by the Alake during the war for the "examination" and seizure of food items such as chickens, yams, garri and rice from producers, distributors and traders, dismissing their protest with the statement that until food enough to feed the soldiers have been collected, nobody should eat. This was done without compensation. The most important grievance of the women was taxation. With its institution in Abeokuta, women were required to pay income tax from the age of fifteen

while their male counterparts begin payment at the age of seventeen. Through taxation women provided half of the districts total revenue.¹⁰With this, women were not directly represented in the Sole Native Authority (SNA). Also, the manner with which the taxes were collected were violent and insulting. Women were being chased, beaten and young girls were being stripped in the bid to assess their age. These made the women employ a more militant approach to redressing their grievances.

In 1946, the AWU launched a campaign which protested the Sole Native Authority's system of government. This was led by Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome- Kuti. It began by employing the women but later the men joined. They presented a petition in June to the SNA demanding that the government pay salaries of the market supervisors and that the women receive representation. They also protested against double taxation arguing that they paid income tax, water rates and still had to provide the money for the market supervisors. They demanded that the entire community pay for the cost of running the market since the entire community both buyers and sellers used market facilities. Instead of a positive response to their petition, the women received not what they expected. The Alake had retaliated by increasing the tax rates for women late in 1946. The women went to the palace to protest but the Alake's decision remained unchanged. The women resorted to contesting the tax levies in court but the court's resolution was in favour of the

government.

After their attempt in court, Mrs. Ransome-Kuti and the AWU put in more effort to gaining support for an all-out protest movement with these objectives; the abdication of the Alake, the abolition of the SNA and replacing it with a more representative government and the abolition of flat rate taxation of women. Mrs. Ransome-Kuti wrote several letters outlining the grievances of the women to the newspapers in Lagos and Abeokuta. The AWU hired an account auditor to audit the SNA accounts. The auditor presented an alternative budget to the SNA for consideration. It presented more petitions and sponsored a number of court cases when the evidence suggested a good opportunity for illustrating women's grievances because the British administration tended to exonerate its agents, either British or African even their complaints were not justified.

When going through the right means- petitions test cases in court and press publicity, the AWU employed more radical methods - sit ins, mass protest administrations, and outright refusal to pay tax. These new approach began in 1947 when Mrs. Ransome-Kuti refused to pay taxes and was arrested. She pleaded not guilty at her arraignment in court and present at the court to show their solidarity were eight thousand women. The following week, five thousand women conducted a protest demonstrating outside the

court. She was fined three pounds or one month imprisonment and she decided to pay the fine because she was due to attend a constitutional conference in Britain with the N.C.N.C. delegation. She thought that the meeting would be an excellent opportunity to take the women's cause before the British public.

In England, Mrs. Ransome-Kuti wasted no time in voicing the grievances of the women. She argued her case with the Secretary of the State for the Colonies, Arthur Creech Jones. She also had the support of Madam Pelewura and the LMWA in Nigeria, who held meetings to support her statements she made and to pass a vote of confidence in her leadership. After the constitutional conference, Mrs. Ransome-Kuti returned to Abeokuta more firmly resolved than ever to mobilize the women. The first major demonstration occurred in 1947, Nov. 29 and 30, involving over ten thousand women. They marched to the Alake's palace, kept vigil there and sang abusive songs. The women were dedicated, well organized and disciplined. None withdrew. No violence occurred and no weapons were carried. They ensured that they did not allow the authorities attack them.

After this demonstration on November, the AWU claimed that the Egba General Council promised to suspend taxation while their grievances were investigated. Women

were being invited to answer questions and that other women would be consulted in the near future. Instead, these women were imprisoned for defaulting in tax payments. The AWU's response to this was the staging of another protest demonstration from December 8 to December 10 equally as the one organized in November and were determined to remain outside until the prisoned women were released. The women were released on the 10th of December and this ended the vigil.

These demonstrations had great effects. Mrs. Ransome-Kuti was banned from the palace because she aided the organization of the demonstrations. The Alake was forced to reconsider his stand. In January and February, he announced that women would be appointed to positions in government, two women chiefs and representatives to the finance committee. These appointments would be made as soon as good candidates were found. The British resident on February 27 1946, read a prepared statement before the Egba Central Council declared his support for the decision to ban Mrs. Ransome-Kuti from the palace and regretting the insult of the Alake and other recent activities of individuals who had disturbed the peace of Abeokuta. He refused to change the government's stand on taxation and warned against further demonstrations would be treated like criminal acts.

The AWU executives were almost lured through the divide and rule tactics but it did not work. The executives were invited to a meeting of the central council by the district officer in order to present its grievances to the government but they intentionally exempted Mrs. Ransomr-Kuti from attending, but the letter was mistakenly address to her. When this was noticed, the District Council noted that she could still be present since the central council had banned her from the palace. The executives of the AWU refused to attend the meeting and organized a demonstration before the palace which disrupted movement from the palace. By April, Mrs. Ransome-Kuti refused to pay her taxes and had been scheduled to appear in court but before the due day, an anonymous individual paid her taxes. The AWU then presented the residents' their grievances and petitions which also included the request to remove the Alake. They followed this petition with a five- hour march chanting their demands. The men had a mass meeting on Dec. 20, 1947 at Sapon Market Square expressing their endorsement of the efforts of the Egba women.

The Alake left Egband for holiday in June hoping to gain time and that things would have calmed. Before he left for holiday, he appointed a special committee made of both men and women to investigate the grievances of the AWU women. Also, he suspended taxes and agreed to women representation but the AWU refused to accept anything less than abdication therefore they continued their demonstrations. Seeing that

the situation was not negotiable, the Alake was abdicated on January 3rd, 1949. This made the women's protest a success. An interim council was created to replace the SNA. The interim council is made up of four men - all members of the AWU including Mrs. Ransome - Kuti. Female taxation was abolished.

After attaining this success, the AWU decided to expand its organizational structure on a trans-regional basis. The organization changed its name to Nigerian Women's Union(NWU) and branch were established in several parts of Nigeria- Calabar, Aba, Benin, Lagos, Ibadan and Enugu. By the 1950s, its many members had become actively involved in the struggle for Nigeria's independence, but however it remained a special interest group and did not attempt to delve into political action on a national scale. Some of its members later joined the Action Group (A.G.) or the N.C.N.C. but Mrs. Ransome-Kuti remained with the N.C.N.C. until the party broke in 1959.

Conclusively, the AWU and the LMWA, extremely organized and vocal groups were able to achieve its objectives using strategies such as sit ins, mass protest administration and the refusal to pay tax and presenting the plight of the women in international conferences. These brought about their desired change, boost women participation in governance and politics and also aided nationalism and the attainment of independence in

Nigeria.

Endnotes

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2. C. Johnson, "Grass Roots Organizing: Women in Anti-colonial Activity in Southwestern Nigeria", *African Studies Review*, Vol. 25, No 2/3, June -Sept. 1982, p.138.
3. *Ibid.*, p.139.
4. C. Johnson, "Madam Alimotu Pelewura and the Lagos Market Women", *Tarikh*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1981, p.3.
5. *Daily Times*, Dec. 18, 1940.
6. C. Johnson, " Grass Root Organizing", p.141.
7. *Ibid.*, p.142.
8. *Ibid.*, p.142.
9. Papers Relating to the Lagos Market Women Association, 1945, Com. Col. 4037/s.44/c.9, National Archives, Ibadan.
10. C. Johnson, "Grass Root Organizing", p.150.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In contemporary times, women function at almost the same level as their male counterparts, compared to the pre-colonial and colonial times. They make up part of the decision-making body and are accorded an almost equal respect. However, there is a misconception in Nigeria that women lack dependability. Some scholars believe that this lack of dependability is the reason their male counterparts attribute their poor selection and slow promotion to top hierarchy, occupational status in organization which are largely based on the male model of leadership that emphasizes reliability and risk-taking. With this misconception and shortcoming of living up to expectations, there is the need to restructure women's orientation and that of the public at large.

Before independence, Nigerian women played significant roles, contributing meaningfully to societal development though they had no right to participate in the political activities of their society, they contributed socially and economically. With the reign of the British colonial power in Nigeria, women were still not given any formal recognition but the status of men were advanced, contributing to why the first set of Nigerian nationalist and political elites were men. Notwithstanding this, some notable

women personalities emerged and major women protests occurred during colonial times.

The Aba women riots of 1929 represented one of the earliest major anti-colonial struggles in modern Nigeria, planned and executed by women to protest against the taxation of women by colonial authorities in Eastern Nigeria. This riot was only one of the several women protests which occurred. There was the Ogidi Palaver, the Nwaobiara Dance, the Calabar Market Women's Protest, the Lagos Market Women riot, the Abeokuta Women's riot and more.

These revolts by women adopted several strategies such as "sitting on a man", peaceful protest, refusal to pay tax, refusal to use colonial established facilities, chants and songs sang against whoever their vexation was directed towards and when violence was used on them, they resulted to violence, destroying factories, courts and so on remaining relentless until their goal is achieved. These proved the determination, strength and bravery of Nigerian women to protect and defend their interests. Also during colonial times, several individual women stood out. Notable amongst them are Madam Alimotu Pelewura of Lagos, who was a major force in the nationalist activities of NNNDP, leading the Lagos Market Women in their protest against policies of colonial government from the 1920 to 1951; Mrs Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti who established the Abeokuta Women's

in 1948 and later became a leading member of the NCNC, she masterminded the 1948 Egba Women's riot against colonial taxation and was the brain behind the exile of Oba Ademola- the Alake of Egbaland; and Mrs. Margaret Ekpo of Southeastern Nigeria who was part of the three Nigerian women elected into the House of Chiefs in the 1950s, one of Nigeria's foremost nationalists who educated Southeastern women on politics and encouraged their gradual participation aiding Nigeria's independence struggle.

Since Independence, the discussion of women in politics has been a topical issue in Nigeria. During the pre-colonial and colonial era, women never enjoyed parity with men in leadership positions. These happenings have, in some way, been replicated in post-colonial times. It is evident that women participation on Nigerian nationalism were necessary and important, notwithstanding the patriarchal nature of Nigeria. Her exploits of women are documented and can be viewed in the contributions mentioned above when colonialism inhibited women's participation in politics. After the attainment of independence, Nigeria's political arena was still largely dominated by men with few women occupying public offices that are not very significant. The military was also exclusively for men.

The low participation of women, in the past, in Nigerian politics, is a result of several

factors. These factors include patriarchy, women's perception of politics, lack of financial backing, discriminatory customs and laws, inadequate knowledge of unwritten and written laws protecting women's political right, religious doctrines, underrepresentation of women in governance, unhealthy political environment, political party discrimination, wrong perception of women in politics, lack of family, fellow women and media support and also indigenization of women political aspirants. With these, political participation and democracy cannot thrive because women, which constitute half of Nigeria's population, are exempted.

The quest for women's participation in governance can be premised on the fact that women in Nigeria represent half of the country's population and therefore ought to be given a fair share in decision-making and governance. Also, that all women are equal and possess the same rights as men to participate in governance and public affairs because this is a right given by law, to all citizens, in the 1999 constitution.

Since 1999, women representation and participation in leadership and governance has continually increased. Some have been noted to have performed creditably. These women include Prof. (Mrs.) Grace Alele-Williams in the field of Mathematics Education, who became the Vice Chancellor of the University of Benin- the first female Nigerian

academic, Late Prof. Dora Akunyili, the former Director of NAFDAC (National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control), who reduced the incidence of fake drugs from about 90% to 68% in 2001, Mrs. Ruqayyatu Ahmed Rufai, Dr. Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala among others. These given examples attest to the fact that women would be able to perform when saddled with responsibilities at any level but not without flaws at all times. In Nigeria, when the topic of corruption is raised, gender is no issue. There are women who have been recorded to be involved in corrupt practices, the likes of Mrs. Patricia O. Etteh, Dr. Ndidi Okereke, Mrs. Cecilia Ibru and several others.

However, the role of women's participation in politics have been encouraged by women empowerment programmes which dismantles traditional, cultural and social norms and accords women the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to societal development. Also the activities of the United Nations and other international organizations that are both governmental and nongovernmental are contributing factors. The United Nations fostered several Declarations and Conventions aimed at ending all forms of political discrimination among women. Examples of the United Nation's documents and Conventions that prohibit women discrimination are the International Convention and Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights. Quotas are also being allocated to women to aid and promote gender balances in public affairs. Most of these quotas are formulated under neutral basis. Nigerian law provides a maximum of 60% and a minimum of 30% representation for both men and women. This was implemented as a result of the Beijing Conference. The Conference agreed that 30% of public seats and positions should be reserved for women. From 1999-2007, Nigeria has recorded an increase of 78% in women's election into public offices.

In the 4th Republic, women have emerged as Chairpersons of Local Government Councils, Deputy Governor, Senators and Honorable of the House of Representatives. Some women have also been appointed to serve in the Federal Executive Council in past administrations from 1999. All these were made possible through the quota allocation system approved by the United Nations.

There should also be the review of discriminatory practices to educate people to be gender sensitive and be encouraged to protect women's political and other rights and ensure the support of their political ambitions.

Women should be economically empowered. They should be granted equal access to facilities which aid production so as to enhance their output and income generation. The

economic empowerment of women could lead to their political and social relevance in the society.

Women political aspirants should be given the relevant consent and support to venture into governance and politics. Women should also be informed of their political right to participate in politics through the organization of campaigns and voters education programmes not only as voters education programmes, not only as voter but also as one to be voted for. The Media should also support women by emphasizing their important roles and contributions to national development and deploring discriminations against them. Gender stereotypes in the media should be discouraged.

The negative labelling and perception of women in politics and the abusive expressions used to describe them should be discouraged through the sensitization of the public by organizing public enlightenment campaigns in Nigeria. Male political opponents should be discouraged from portraying female politicians as acting against Nigerian cultures of not accepting leadership roles of women just to marginalize them.

Women in Nigerian politics should be properly perceived as partners of their male counterparts in politics and governance. They can be effective leaders and are able to foster the further development of Nigeria politically, socially and economically as they

have done in the past through indigenous nationalism.

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