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Uche U. Okonkwo

University of Nigeria

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Herbert Macaulay As The Father of Nigeria’s Nationalism: A Historical Misnomer and Misogyny Regarding the Role of Igbo Women in the Decolonization Process

By Uche Uwaezuoke Okonkwo

Abstract

For over six decades of Nigeria's independence, history has continued to place the role of women in the decolonization process in Nigeria in a state of oblivion. Such obloquy on Nigerian women is the primary concern of this research. This paper raises questions on the impositions of Herbert Macaulay as the father of Nigerian nationalism. Historical evidence points to the direction that King Jaja of Opobo, Nana of itshekiri and Oba Ovaranwen, were the pioneer nationalists because of their resistance struggle against British colonial rule. Yet they were not acclaimed fathers of the nationalist movement in Nigeria. With the huge demographic loss of women in the decolonisation process, the activities of Magret Ekpo, Janet Mokelu, Funmilayo Ransom Kuti, there would have been a sense of equity if any of them has been placed as the mother of Nigeria nationalism. This historical loophole is the concern of this paper, to redirect our focus on the decolonization history of Nigeria, by examining the extent of doctored gender imbalance, in pursuing the objectives of securing independence in Nigeria. This paper has been written based on primary data retrieved from the National Archives in Nigeria and secondary materials in journals and books using the historical narrative style of methodology.

Keywords: Herbert Macaulay, Nigeria, Nigerian Nationalism, Misogyny, Igbo, Igbo women, Decolonization,

Introduction

An insight into the early nationalist movement in Nigeria indicates that the much acclaimed Herbert Macaulay was not at the initial scheme of affairs. J.S Coleman in his book Nigeria: Background to Nationalism published in 1965 acknowledges two notable figures, Edward Wilmot Blyden and John Payne Jackson as the founders of Modern Nigerian Nationalism(Coleman,1965:183) Blyden according to Coleman citing Casely Harford, was the father of African nationalism and was identified to be of the Ibo (Eboe) tribe(Coleman,1965) The parameter used in imposing Herbert Macaulay fatherhood of Nigerian nationalism remains very unclear especially when placed side by side with nationalistic spirit of women from Eastern Nigeria.

Herbert Macaulay (1864-1946) needs little or no introduction when it comes to nationalist struggle in Nigeria. Trained as an Engineer in both Fourabay College Sierra Leone and Plymouth in South west England. Macaulay returned to Lagos in 1893. On his return, he became a principal voice against the various colonial policies on land, water and the judicial use of public funds. By 1912 when Lord Lugggard was appointed the Governor General of Nigeria, Macaulay was to lead
a popular protest against colonial authorities land grabbing in Lagos to the imperial government in London. The colonial government quickly arraigned him to court and was sent to prison for the mismanagement of Mary Franklin Estate, a deceased client of Macaulay who handed him over some properties to manage (Sanni, 2006:47).

Macaulay became a popular figure with the introduction of the new constitution in 1922 with four unofficial members to be elected in Lagos and Calabar. The Clifford constitution is the most gender biased constitution ever in Nigeria’s political history because it promoted male adult suffrage and thus relegated women. The constitution stipulated that only male adult who are residents in Calabar and Lagos could nominated for the Legislative Council. Notwithstanding, Herbert Macaulay became the major player in Lagos politics by championing popular course such as peoples land right, and the restoration of Prince Eleko to his throne as the Oba of Lagos (king) after he was thrown out by the colonial government (Cole, 1975:245).

With the opportunity provided by the Clifford constitution, Macaulay formed a political party known as the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) with other activists such as C.C Adeniyi-Jones, E. Shyngle, T.H Jackson, Karimu Kotun, J.J White and others (Okafor, 1981:189).

The NNDP under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay emerged the most powerful group with their candidates emerging victorious in 1923, 1928 and 1933 elections (Coleman, 1965:198). Macaulay before his death in 1946 earned the title of the father of Nigeria’s nationalism from his various anti-colonial struggles.

The indigenous resistance of Athahiru (1906), Jaja of Opobo (1887), Nana of Itshekiri (1884) Oba Ovaranwen (1897) were all nationalist movements and as such were before Herbert Macaulay. Nevertheless, in eastern Nigeria, activities of the Women’s War of 1929 in the view of Falola (1991) and Anyanwu (2003) were all responsible for the demise of the Warrant Chief system in Igbo land. It is on record that women took to the streets of Olokoro, Aba, Ngor Okpala, Ibibio and so many areas of Eastern Nigeria to protect against the obnoxious practices of the Warrant Chiefs appointed by British colonial administration. Women leaders such as Nwanyeruwa, Ikoninia, Nwanedia and Nwugo should have occupied eminence as matriarchs of the nationalist struggle against British imperialism. Even in historical scholarship, a book acclaimed to be a compendium of Nigeria history Ikime (1980) (ed) *Groundwork of Nigeria History* did not provide chapter to highlight women history in Nigeria. This excellent book which is used in teaching Nigerian History across universities in Nigeria ought to include women’s role in nation building.

Reflections on the contributions of Margaret Ekpo and Janet Mokelulu are very vital to our claim of women’s exclusion in the history of nationalistic struggle in Nigeria. Margaret Ekpo was born in the Creek town in Calabar and was educated as a teacher. She later studied at the Bathmine School of Domestic Economy in Dublin the Republic of Ireland. Later she became a Yaba trained medical doctor under the first colonial medical institution in Nigeria and suffered the victimization of receiving a lower salary, unlike her foreign expatriates and colleagues (Attoe and Jaja, 1993:18). Janet Mokelu like her counterpart Margaret Ekpo received training as a nurse. Both women activists challenged the obnoxious policies of the colonial administration more especially the barbaric killings of 22 coal miners at Enugu in 1949.2 Another significant area in which Magaret Ekpo and Janet Mokelulu played an active role was their insistence on adual sex political system which replaced the male adult suffrage. On 22nd September, 1954, Ekpo made the following remarks on the floor of the Eastern House of Assembly as follows:

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2 On November 18 1949 the British colonial government in Nigeria killed 21 coal miners and injured 51 others who were protesting against unfair labour treatment. This incident is referred to as Iva Valley Strike and Massacre at Enugu Colliery.
'I am taking this opportunity to render my sincere appreciation and of our women of Eastern Nigeria and the women of Nigeria to the leader of this government for the introduction of universal adult sufferage (NAE, 1954:391)' 

The emergence of Margaret Ekpo, Janet Mokelu and Mrs. Young as members of the Eastern House of Chiefs in the 1950s was a significant step in destroying male adult suffrage in Southern Nigeria which continued in Northern Nigeria until the coming of the Second Republic in 1979 (Igbokwe, 2013; Okoli and Uroko, 2017:42, Ikpe, 1997:259). In spite of the achievements of these activist nationalist women, the decolonization history of Nigeria grossly omitted them. Furthermore, from onset, the political machinery of the colonial state borrowed a leaf from the British Victorian values. Under this arrangement, the idea behind this Victorian concept imply that women should be seen but not heard. 

This idea began in Europe during the medieval era and was backed by educational policies which trained women for domestic services that will confine them at home thus minimizing their visibility and public recognition (Uchendu, 1993:51) The Victorian thinking was that men should provide for the home, protect women from harsh labour of the industrial era and that women should bear the duty of keeping the home safe for the men who will always escape the vicissitudes of public and working life (Ikpe, 2004:30)

The Concept of Nationalism

Nationalism can be understood in the context of the attempts to build a nation. In nation-building, men and women contribute in one way or the other. Adu Boahen in his book “Topics in West African History” published in 1966 defines nationalism as the consciousness, on the part of individuals or groups of African, or membership of a nation-state either already existing or to which they aspire, and of a desire to achieve political and economic freedom, overall social and economic development as well as the cultural revival of the nation-state (Boahen, 1966:147). However, nationalism has been traced to the nineteenth century, when a number of individuals and groups rose up to defend their traditional independence against the threatening advances of the European powers (Fajana, 1979) Nationalism is an extremely dynamic set of ideologies and practices, and whatever constitutes a nationalist movement at a particular time and place has taken different dimension at another time. Nationalism can either be ethnic or civic as it deals with primordial and western forms of agitations based on rationality, law and democracy. In all, nationalism must have three major components namely historic territory, legal political community, common civic culture and ideology (Sabara, 2007:77)

Thus, Olukoju accounts that cultural nationalism was put to noble and ignoble uses as occasion demanded, by different social groups during the colonial periods (Olukoju, 1997:298). Simply put, nationalism is an instrument of group agitation against ill economic, social and political policies with the aim of achieving indigenous participation in government and decision making. And as such, equal representation of gender makes it more egalitarian and undermines inequity. However, nationalism has been traced to the nineteenth century, when a number of individuals and groups rose up to defend their traditional independence against the threatening advances of the European powers (Oriji, http://www.icaap.org/iuicode? Accessed 15 October 2007)

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agitation against ill economic, social and political policies with the aim of achieving indigenous participation in government and decision making (Olukoju, 1997:298). And as such, equal representation of gender makes it more egalitarian and undermines inequity.

The women of Eastern Nigeria on or after 1918 (end of the First World War) were already politically organized. Their political organization can be equated with the political awareness created by new world Negroes of W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey and Casely Hayford in Ghana of the 1920s. The Eastern Nigeria Women traditionally were armed with fundamental ideas of militancy and resistance. The activities of these women has been categorized as follows for reading convinence:

i. Pre-Second World War resistance and
ii. Post-Second World War resistance. Be that as it may, series of women resistance and militancy listed below will characterize this discussion:
   i. 925 Women’s Dance war
   ii. Aba Women’s War 1929
   iii. The Tax Revolts Beginning from 1938
   iv. Oil Mill Revolts of the 1940s in Owerri and Calabar Province; and;
   v. The Activities of Janet Mokelu and Margaret Ekpo in Partisan Politics

1st Phase: Pre-Second World War

Igbo women revolts drew the attention of the British colonialists on intelligentsia study of the Igbo. The works of Leith Rosss, M. Green, Meek C.K and European ethnographers account of renaissance in Igbo studies. In the same vein, the Igbo traditional humane living advocates the position of the woman in terms of pursuing their fundamental human rights. Examining the Igbo women in this regard, Judith Vallen Allen in describing ‘Sitting on a Man’ had this to say:

A woman could also bring complaints about her husband to the “mikiri” if most of the women agreed that the husband was at fault, they would collectively support her. They might send spokes women to tell the husband to apologize and to give her a present and if he was recalcitrant they might “sit on him” (Allen, 1972:171)

Sitting on a man includes singing, dancing and throwing stones in front of the man’s hut. The episode can reach its climax with the destruction of the man’s building. The emphasis here is that there existed cultural facilities that provided a stepping-stone to women’s agitation deep rooted in culture, prior the advent of the colonialists. In the South eastern area of Nigeria, the British military and administrative officers employed various means against the determined individual opposition of each village. These means involved promises, negotiations, military force, seizure, and deportation of village chiefs etc. By the end of the 19th century, British rule was firmly established only along coastal line and the British “gun boasts (military naval ship). The British imperialists changed the economic scenario of Africans with capitalist oriented ideologies, which have not favoured indigenous Africans. Korieh’s view is that:

Taxation was introduced into the eastern province in 1927, at a time of economic instability. By 1929, the women had began to feel the pinch of this new measure because of the inter-dependent nature of the village economy (Korieh, 1994:28)
This view can be ascertained based on the decline of the palm oil trade in Eastern region. The women in Eastern Nigeria with the advent of colonialism continued to reject British policies. Another version of women’s revolt was the Dance Revolt of 1925. It was pronounced among women in Akpuje and Owelli towns of Awka. In the Onitsha Province of Ihiala, Nnewi and Nobi town: in Ohazara, Okigwe, Bende and Umuahia, the Dance movement was visualized. Women from Owerri province came to Ihiala. From Ihiala, Nnewi was visited and from Nnewi they proceeded to Nobi. The women dancers of these towns came together and placed obstructions on one of the main provincial roads, they then proceeded to Nobi court, burnt market and filled the court with refuse (NAE, M.P No. 18/1926 Memorandum From The District Officer Onitsha To Senior Resident Onitsha Province). The reason for these actions was justified as follows:

‘English money should do away with entirely and that cowries must come more for use; to pay only one bag of cowries of marrying young girls and half bag for marrying a woman, and that man must not go to market but women’ (NAE, M.P No. 18/1926 Memorandum) 

In Akpuje and Owelle towns in Awka District, the women close to 150 in number were found in Achi Native Court area chanting songs for change. They made agitations on the following areas:

i. That they were sent by Chineke (God) to deliver the message and that it would help women to bear children.
ii. Old customs should be observed and not allowed to lapse
iii. Poor men were often punished in native courts at instance of rich men, all cases in which poor men were concerned as defendants should be tried at Chief’s houses and only taken to native court if unsatisfied.
iv. More honestly should be shown in dowry dispute when stating amounts paid or claimed (very desirable) (NAE, No 124/Mp. 62/196 ,1962)

The Women Dance War was indeed a revolutionary song prepared by the Igbo women against the British obnoxious laws, especially as it had to do with taxation. Thus, with the head count and the imposition of tax championed by Chief Okugo in Olokoro district near Aba, what was known and addressed as Aba women war became inevitable. Oriji(2000:4) noted that: Emeruuwa never expected that the task he was asked to perform would trigger a mass fateful day November 18, 1929, he went to late Ojim’s compound, his first place of call and asked his widow, Nwanyeruwa, to count her goats, sheep, and people“. In anger, the woman retorted, “ was your (late) mother counted? In order words, why do you want me to pay tax? Don’t you know that women don’t pay tax in traditional Igbo society? The violent encounter and verbal exchange between the two, infuriated Nwanyeruwa who then rushed to the town square to report the incident to women who were incidentally holding a meeting that day to discuss how they would respond to the tax problem (Oriji,2000).

Nwanyeruwa in Oloko triggered the much-publicized Aba women war of 1929- a town near Aba not even in Aba. It was from Oloko that the war spread to Owerri, Owerrinta, Aba, Umuahia and up to Ebibio land. The speculation of taxation against women in the area was already a rumor before chief Okugo (warrant chief) through his agent Mark Emeriuwa tried to actualize it. On November 18, 1929, Emeriuwa acting on Okugo’s instruction entered the compound of one
Ojim in Oloko whose widow was Nwanyeruwa. He asked Nwayeruwa to count her goats and sheep as prerequisite step of preparing women in the division for tax. She got infuriated and asked Emeriuwa whether his mother was counted. Perham Magrey in her book ‘Native Administration in Nigeria’ opined that “a meeting of women was called and Nwanyeruwa excited story was told as confirmation of the rumor. A palm leaf, which appeared as once a symbol of trouble and a call for help, was sent round to all the women of the neighborhood. From the whole countryside, women poured into Oloko and proceeded according to custom to sit upon the man who had tried to assess Nwanyeruwa”(Magrey,1937:207).

Nwanyeruwa’s protest, quickly moved women into action on the prolonged rumored plan by the colonial government to tax women. The success of Nwanyeruwa’s protest came to fruition with prison gift of three months in custody given to Emeriuwa.Similarly, Chief Okugo on 3rd December 1929 was found guilty of two-count charge. The first reason for the charge was spreading news likely to cause alarm and the second reason was physical assault on women demonstrators for which he sentenced to two years in prison(Oriji,2000).However, from 18th of November 1929 to February 29 1930, the court determined Okugo and Emeriuwa’s cases. Oriji in his paper “Igbo Women from 1929-1960’ recalls that ‘Nwanyeruwa played a major role not only in precipitating the revolt, but emerged as leading advocate of non-violence during the protests marches(Gailey,1971:111) Akpu’s view about Nwanyeruwa in the 1929 Women Revolt reads as follows:

The women leadership in the protest includes: Nwanyeruwa who was the woman mobiliser. She was a native nurse, a spirited, bold and selfless woman. This attitude in her was shown on how she handled the money donated by the women for the entertainment of the delegates and traveling expenses to Port Harcourt, Mbawsi and Umuahia(Akpu,1984)

Similarly, Ikonnia, Nwannedia and Nwugo fromUmuigwu in Oloko Bende Division became public figures by leading the women during the litigation over the assault melted on the women by Warrant Chief Okugo and Mark Emeriuwa. The Commission of enquiry set up to investigate Okugo (Warrant Chief) and his agent Emeriuwa acknowledged the prowess of Ikonnia, Nwanedia and Nwugo led Women Delegation as follow:

The women numbering over 10,000 were shouting and yelling round the office in frenzy. They demanded his cap of office (Okugo), which I threw to them. It met the same fate as a fox’s carcass thrown to a pack of hunds(NAE,Umproof 1/5/5)

Ikoninia Nwannedia and Nwugo led women delegation accused Okugo as incompetent, corrupt and thus they alleged him as follows:

i. He collected money to pay dowry on a woman to let out as a harlot. Later he married her himself but the town paid the dowry.
ii. He collected £100 to build a house he said the district officer had told him to. Having got the money nothing more was done.
iii. Sometime ago he collected yams alleging they were for the district officer. These he planted for himself.
iv. Sometime last year he insisted on all the women in the town rubbing the walls of his house.
v. He brought a cap gun and gave it to a man shoot game for him. Government caught the man confiscated the gun and fined him £5. Okugo not only refused to help him but made him refund 2 for the value of the confiscated gun(NAE,Umproof 1/5/5)

For Oriji, he described Ikonnia, Nwannedia and Nwugo as women of youthful vigor, intelligence and orating. With the resumption of duty on 30th November 1929 by the District officer, the atmosphere of the court was still jam packed by women demanding the prosecution and detention of Warrant Chief Okugo.Furthermore, Oriji accounts further that:

The women continued to follow the D.O. (District Officer) “sitting on him” until his wife got in touch with the two and reached an agreement with them. The two promised to get the women out of the District Officer’s way, then he granted their quest(Oriji,2007)

J. Cook in his response to the women petition issued a warrant arrest to the following;

i. Tribunal member Okugo
ii. Ahakuo
iii. Ejurugoawife of kugo,
iv. Ekpubum a son of Okugo
v. Inokori a servant of okugoand;
vi. and ObonnanyaOrianu.

At the point of arrest, only Okugo, Ejurugo, Ekpuburn and Inkon were arrested as Ahakuo and ObonnanyaOrianu was declared wanted. Thus, on Monday evening (i.e. the 2nd) the two leaders viz Ikonnia and Nwanedia with another woman (Nwugo) brought a letter addressed to Mrs. Hill (wife of the district officer), explaining their grievances(Aba Women Riot: 80 Years of Distorted History, http//www.nairaland.com/1306141/1,2007) On Wednesday 3rd of December, 1929 Warrant Chief Okugo was tried, and was sentenced to two years imprisonment(Hill Umproof 1/5/5)

The control of the women throughout the period of the litigation had Ikonnia, Nwannedia and Nwugo. The District Officer and Commissioner of Police Mr. King commended the actions of these two women with brightest praise and furthermore depended largely upon them to disperse of disorderly bands of women. For instance, on hearing of a disorderly mob in Umuahaia on 4th Dec.1929, Captain Hill sent for the women (Ikonnia and Nwanedia) who promised to quell the disturbance. And that was as good as their words, as on the arrival at Umuahia next day, captain Hill and the Commissioner of Police met crowds of women on the road returning home(Osuji,1955:44).The Umuahia demonstration was triggered by low prices of produce given by the factories.J.N Hill applauds the responsibility of the women as follows:

“Mr. King (Commissioner of Police) endorses my view that the highest praise is due to these two women and one or two of their lieutenants for the wonderful control they exercised over’ what at one time seemed like a raving mob(Hill, Umproof 1/5/5)”
The active roles of Nwanyeruwa, Ikonnia, Nwannya and Nwugo in the anti-colonial struggle have been silent in the Nigerian historians crafts dominated by men. How could nationalist schools of History at Ibadan, Zaria or Darsalem dominated by men include women’s active participation as part of its nationalist history? Parochialism ordinarily has everything to do with one’s state of mind and not necessarily the level of one’s education.

For Akpan and Ekpo observes that: the Women’s Revolts of 1929 were a reaction of a traditionally democratic people to the continued repression by a foreign power and its agents. According to him: “in the absence of due democratic channels and procedures for seeking redress which was customarily available in the Ibibo and Ibo women’s cultures, the uprisings were the only recourse the women had to express pent up grievances and stop unjust practices meted on them, their men folk and their children. It was a nationalist struggle. It was a major revolutionary epoch. It eventually caused fundamental reforms in the format of indirect rule in colonial Nigeria” (Akpan Ekpo, 1988: 18)

Nevertheless, the Aba Women War of 1929 has been misconcepted for a riot. Pellow asserts that the 1929 Women War was part of the traditional method of settling grievances when he opined that:

Riots, the term used by the British, conveys a picture of uncontrolled, irrational action, involving violence to property or person or both…… “Aba Riots” in addition, neatly removed women from the picture…. “women’s war” conveys an action by women that is also an extension of their traditional methods for settling grievances with men who had acted boldly towards them (Deborah, 1977: 119)

The 1929 Women’s Riot had severe impact on the overhauling of the colonial administrative system. The geographic dimension upon which the revolution took place cannot be in actual sense called riot. Ekpo V and Akpan E cited ONabamiro that: “it was not the woman of Aba who rioted. It was women from various parts of Owerri province, who converged on Aba at the time of the riots. In the second place, if a disturbance is to be described by the name of then this particular disturbance would be called the Opobo riots, because the riots at Opobo were far more serious than those which took place at Aba, and the loss in human lives was much heavier, indeed, however, what had happened at Aba was a mild affair compared with the tragic event that occurred in Calabar province.” (Ekwereotu and Ekpo, 1988: 2). Although the 1929 Women Revolution was feminine in outlook, it still did not lack the support of the men. Judith Allen records that “the absence of men from the riots does not indicate lack of support. Men generally approved and only a few older men criticized the women for not being respectful to the government (Allen, 1972: 175).

Nevertheless, the women’s war was targeted to hurt European establishments, but not with the intention to loot. Perham’s view is that “women were far more interested in destroying the native courts and mobbing the warrant chiefs than in looting (Margery, 1937: 208). The achievements of the women in the Aba riot remains a reference point. Rose Acholonu insists “the 1929 Aba Women War has placed the Igbo women on the world map as front liners in the female struggle for actualization and self realization in the political arena (Acholonu, 1993: 291). In appraising developments of the women revolts of the pre-Second World War era, the oil mill tax revolts in Okigwe and Benda Divisions namely Isiuikwuato, Uturu, Nneato, Isuochi, Umuchieze, Otanze, Otachara, Alayi, Item and Unuimenyi are too numerous to buttress. Nevertheless, Oriji’s
paper gave an insight to the nature of the 1938 revolts as follows: ‘Women began a massive anti-tax protests in Okigwe Division from December 5 to 15 and in some places like Isuochi, they destroyed the Native Court house and released prisoners(Oriji,2007:8)The incessant oil mill revolts were imminent in view of the capitalist economy created by the British colonialists especially to cash crops. The decline in palm oil in the 1930s affected the ability of the people to pay tax. Women throughout the Division were economically hard-hit when in December 1938, troops of Royal West African Frontier Force who had become the major consumers of their foodstuffs, were relocated from Okigwe town to Enugu(Oriji,2007).However, the Second-World War created a new dimension in the women resistant struggle.

Post Second World War Resistance

The women resistance struggle in Nigeria can be sub-divided into two namely pre-Second World War era(1929-1944) and post Second World War era(1945-1960). The second category which took place from 1950 – 1960, was associated with educated Urban women.46Notable, is the fact, that Aba Women war of 1929 fought in the South-Eastern Nigeria influenced women participation in subsequent Nigerian politics. With the formation of the political party named Nigerian Union of Young Democrats (N.U.Y.D) in July 1938, TamunoTekena highlights that:

The N.U.Y.D. encouraged women to participate in its activities. Thus Madam AlimotuPelewura, the Alaga (president) of Ereko market, was often a principal speaker at the meetings of the N.U.Y.D. At another meeting of the N.U.Y.D. in July 1938, there were present some representatives of about seven market societies(Tamuno,1979:55)

The presence of women in the political formation of pre-independence Nigeria was bound but was characterized with adult male suffrage; thus women were de-franchised. In the case of Nigeria National Democratic Party (N.N.D.P) Tamuno accounts for adult female de-franchisement as follows:The N.N.D.P derived both moral and material supports from market women associations, though women could neither vote nor be voted for in the legislative council elections of 1923 -1947(Tamuno,1979).

This was the development and scenario in Women decolonialisation history in Nigeria that warranted women in Eastern Nigeria notably MagretEkpo and Janet Mokelu to fight to institute women’s right in voting and political representation. The various women resistance in post-second world war was eminent in 1949 and 1954 respectively. The killing of twenty-two coal miners in which we mentioned earlier in this paper in Enugu, triggered Janet Mokelu demonstration in Enugu and MagretEkpo’s demonstration in Aba respectively. These women felt that men were silent over gross injustice thus they revolted. In November 1949, a labour protest saw the annihilation of twenty two coal miners, which warranted protest led by MagretEkpo alongside Jaja Nwachukwu, S.O. Mazi, Janet Mokelu and others. Attoe and Odini accounts MagretEkpo frown as follows: ‘The colonial government should thank their stars that only men were killed, if any women had been killed, I would have made fire to burn at Aba’(Attoe and Jaja,1993:23)

Onyeka Onwenu accounts that Magret Ekpo was arrested alongside Barrister Jaja Nwachukwu, Mr. Samuel Mazi and Mr. Nwachukwu Abengowe. They were harassed and faced with deportation from the country of their birth. The famous Aba women in retaliation threatened to set the town ablaze should the colonial authorities make good their treats of arresting and
prosecuting the women. That was the end of the matter; Magret Ekpo and the others were promptly set free (Onwenu, 2005). The women resistance struggle in the Eastern region achieved universal adult suffrage, at a period, it was yet to be accomplished in the west and Northern region. Nevertheless, women marginalization continued in the 1950’s, Magret Ekpo was refused nomination on the ground of gender bias, Fumilayo Kuti’s mandate was given to J.A.O. Akande in 1959, in 1954, Adunni Oluwole formed a political party known as the Nigerian Commoners party while Wuraola Esan (Ibadan) and R.T. Brown (Port Harcourt) lost out in 1959 elections.

Nevertheless, the activity of women in 1950’s decolonialisation era was rudimentary to their inclusion as special members in the respective regional House of Assembly in Nigeria. The understanding of the women status quo, organizational ability and numerical strength necessitated their inclusion as special observers of the London Conferences of 1957 and 1959 respectively. Inspite of women’s exclusion in voting rights, they consultatively achieved the dream in south Nigeria especially in the eastern region in 1959 and independence constitution for Western region in 1960’s and lately, 1979 for the northern region. A critical appraisal of women history in Nigeria in post Second World War epoch, must put into cognizance the efforts of women in demanding constitutional changes to most obnoxious laws found in pre-colonial Nigeria. These efforts resulted to the significant role of women as elected legislative members as from the 1960s with the likes of Magret Ekpo, Janet Mokelu, Miss Ekpo Young, Wuraola Esan and Mrs. Fumilayo Ransome Kuti. In southern Nigeria, the agitations of these women granted them franchise but it was in 1979 that women in Northern Nigeria could vote and be voted for.

Notably, the most important under this era was the influence of the Second World War on the Women of the Eastern Nigeria towards their perception of the activities of the colonialists. Having participated in the war, most Nigerian soldiers (especially those from the Eastern region) and some indigenous female nurse that went with the soldiers to the war came back with the true pictures of the Europeans and their culture. Thus, this clarified some contradictions and misconceptions, fear, etc, the Africans (Nigerians) had towards the Europeans, hence breaking some long held barriers of confronting the white adequately. Equally, the power of western education was acknowledged and put into use by women, hence women and girls started to get enrolled into school. Women joined politics, formed political parties, etc, all in the efforts to equip themselves for a proper showdown on the colonialists and their unfavourable politics.

The post-Second World War era launched in a new style and phase of revolutionary agitation (Falola and Paddock 2011, 96-99) Considering the caliber of women that graced this era, it can be rightly asserted that the post-second world war resistance was a period of elites struggle and revolt against the colonialist. Hence women playing their own part in anti-colonial resistance struggle scored their own goal, which of course contributed to the achievement of the political independence of Nigeria in 1960.
**Conclusion**

A critical review of the various colonial legislation namely the 1922 Clifford Constitution, Sir Bourdillon Constitution of 1939, Arthur Richards constitution of 1946, Macpherson Constitution of 1951 and Oliver Lyttelton constitution of 1954, under which colonial rule in Nigeria operated, points to the direction of raising men for leadership and the relegation of women by extension. According to Modupeolu Faseke, such development promoted institutional prejudice (Faseke, 1995:2) Few women who made attempt to challenge this colonial obnoxious institution should be incorporated in teaching of Nigeria’s national history. Unfortunately, as we have shown in this paper, the earlier Nigerian historians such as the Ibadan School of History dominated by men did not consider including women experiences in the pedagogy of teaching Nigerian History in schools.

This paper has shown that women were powers to be reckoned with in the Nigeria decolonization history. It is imperative as measures to ensure gender equity for the contemporary historical scholarship to re-write the trend of patriarchy in national history. In rejecting colonial barbaric ideology, women in Eastern Nigeria pressurized men to recognize them. By implication, we have been able to prove that the pioneer nationalist historians were to a large extent parochial in their attempt to reconstruct the decolonization history of Nigeria.
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