

Editorial: A NONAGENARY TRIBUTE TO THE HEROINES OF THE 1929 ANTICOLONIAL WOMEN RESISTANCE IN EASTERN NIGERIA

It is certain that something notable happened in colonial Nigeria in 1929. It was the 1929 Anticolonial Women Resistance in Eastern Nigeria. Essentially a post-amalgamation anti-colonial women's protest and a co-ordinated movement against British colonial policy in Nigeria, it affected the Eastern part of the country. The event has variously been called 'Aba Women Riot of 1929', 'Aba Riots' or 'The Disturbances' by the colonial authorities and their apologists; and also known as *Ekong Iban* [Ibibio], *Ogu Umunwanyi* [Igbo] meaning Women's War or Aba Women's War. The notion of 'war' appears to be largely a loose translation of war as a synonym of contestation rather than war as *agha* [Igbo] fatality laden conflictual relation. On the other hand, it may be described as war on account of the fact that firearms were used by the colonialists and many lives were lost too.

The lives that were lost were the lives of unarmed women protesters who were confronted and shot at by heavily armed colonial soldiers. Expectedly, the colonial regime at the time was a heavily repressive regime. Altogether, the women lost 55 of their members, with about the same number wounded, in the end, they achieved many of their objectives. The Warrant Chief of Oloko, near Umuahia, where the protests started was dethroned and sentenced to two years in prison. The warrant chief system was also substantially modified and the native court system was replaced with the native authority system. Very importantly, with many women appointed to positions in the administration - a feat that was unprecedented at the time - the status and position of women was greatly improved.

The theme of this thematic edition of *Socialscientia Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities* is "Commemorating Aba Women 'Riot' of 1929: Ninety Years After". Although a colloquium on the same was initially intended, the idea of an edition that focuses and celebrates the resistance was a resort to plan B. The edition has seven papers: this editorial, six articles and a book review, authored by a galaxy of scholars, encapsulating academics and practitioners. The first four papers are directly on aspects of the 1929 Anti-Colonial Women Resistance in Eastern Nigeria. While the fifth paper is on the "Prevalence, Forms and Factors of Gender-Based Violence and Violence Against Women and Girls in Calabar,

Nigeria”; the focus of the sixth paper is on “Subaltern Theory and the Organizational Structure of the National Council of Women Societies, NCWS – Nigeria”. The last paper in this thematic edition is on “Changing Patterns in the Roles of *Umuada* in Igbo Social Formations” As can be discerned, the aim of the edition is not only to sensitize our audience on how and why the women of Eastern Nigeria organised the resistance, but also to appreciate their courage and gallantry as heroines past. The edition also underlines the import and significance of their activism in the context of pluralism and identity management vis-à-vis the dialectics of contemporary political participation in Third World social formations such as Nigeria.

The 1929 Anti-Colonial Women Resistance in Eastern Nigeria was so organized that the extent of their solidarity perplexed the colonial administration. This was such that the British reasonably suspected that they must have had secret male sponsors. Yet every available evidence indicate that the protest was conceived and executed by over ten thousand women in the old Owerri and Calabar provinces most of who were ethnic Andoni, Bonny, Efik, Igbo, Ibibio, Ogoni and Opobo.

Today, ninety years after, *Socialscientia Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities* salutes the courage and bravery of every woman that participated in the resistance, particularly those who laid their lives or were wounded in the course of the struggle. We pay profuse tribute to both the sung and unsung heroines of the resistance. In this light, *Socialscientia* singles out Nwanyeruwa, a woman of Ngwa sub-ethnic group but married to Ojim of Oloko, and a widower at the time. Her activism on the morning of 18 November 1929 gave direction to the content and tempo of the entire resistance. We also salute the three leaders of the protest in Oloko, often referred to as Oloko Trio: Ikonnia, Nwannedia and Nwugo. The three were known for their persuasion, intelligence and passion; as well as their sagacity in preventing violence even in the face of provocation. Worthy of mention is also Madam Mary Okezie, a teacher by profession, who though did not participate in the resistance was very sympathetic to the cause. We salute her for submitting a memo that properly articulated the grievances of the protesting women when the commission of inquiry was constituted in early 1930.

For their individual and group roles in the 1929 Anti-Colonial Women Resistance in Eastern Nigeria, there is no doubt they made enormous sacrifices to see the struggle through. They may have in fact, been castigated or cajoled, by the authorities and groups that were. For us at *Socialscientia* however, it is tumps up for the activists for making history by standing up for their inalienable rights as homo sapiens. The feat that they achieved in this regard is a cherished heritage that make us proud. We are proud of them, and they will ever remain our heroines past.

We seize the opportunity of nonagenary commemoration, to first, call on relevant authorities - particularly, though not restricted to authorities in the old Owerri and Calabar provinces - to rise to the occasion by immortalizing the resistance and activists in the 1929 Anti-Colonial Women Resistance in Eastern Nigeria. Given the worthiness of their course, and in appreciation of same, it is not out of place if public facilities and institutions such as

roads, schools, markets, etc are named after what happened or those who made it happen. Any or some of Nwanyeruwa Ojim Street, Nwanyeruwa Ojim Memorial Secondary School, Nwanyeruwa Ojim Market, November 18 Avenue, Ekong Ibang Avenue, Ekong Ibang High School, Ekong Ibang Market, Ogu-umunwanyi Boulevard, Heroines of Aba Avenue, Oloko Trio Street, IN&N Avenue, Ikonnia Road, etc will be eloquent testimony of the fact that ninety years after, we reckon and hail our women, as heroines past.

More still, we join in the clarion calls for the study of history, particularly political history, to be treated as a very important integer of popular knowledge system and consciousness in today's Africa, particularly Nigeria. The quest for development or better tomorrow needs to be anchored or based on informed understanding and assessment of the interface between the past, present and the future.

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