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RIOT AND REBELLION AMONG AFRICAN WOMEN:  
THREE EXAMPLES OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL CLOUT

by

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Abstract: This paper presents three cases in which African women, although lacking formal political power in their societies, organized in defiance of male and colonial authority. The three cases are: the Harry Thuku Disturbances in Kanyah in 1922; the Anlu Uprising in the British Cameroons in 1958-59; and the Women's War or Aba Riots in Nigeria in 1929. Although the three examples presented are from different parts of Africa and from different time periods, there are several commonalities including: 1) the adaptation of a traditional form of sanction; 2) relatively egalitarian social structure with emphasis on achieved status; 3) traditionally well-established rights and areas of jurisdiction for women; 4) traditions of collective action; and 5) the failure of male leadership to confront an unpopular colonial government.

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## RIOT AND REBELLION AMONG AFRICAN WOMEN: THREE EXAMPLES OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL CLOUT

African men, like men everywhere, dominate the public sphere, holding the official positions of power and authority. In traditional African societies, women were formally subordinate to male authority, and male dominance was buttressed by an ideology of male superiority and a status system where women showed deference to men. But formal systems, ideologies, and codes of etiquette are not "realities." In some traditional (precolonial) societies, women wielded considerable influence and authority, in fact, so much that these systems have been characterized as dual-sex political systems with each sex managing its own affairs (Okonjo 1976).

In this paper I will examine the collective activity of African women in three British colonial societies that resulted in riots, clashes with the authorities, and the loss of life and property: The Harry Thuku Disturbances in Kenya, 1922; the Anlu uprising in the British Cameroons, 1958-59; and the Women's War or Aba Riots in Nigeria, 1929. In all of these incidents, women, despite their formal subordination to men, challenged, sometimes successfully, not only male authority but also colonial authority. This is not to imply that women in these societies wielded power or authority equal to that of men, but only to show that, in certain circumstances, women did achieve a powerful political voice.

We will examine these three manifestations of female militancy to see whether they can throw any light on the general conditions that promote it. Are there any factors common to these three cases? Do these cases permit us to draw any generalizations, even tentative, about the characteristics of female militancy or about the nature of the societies that produce it? In examining these events I will ask: what did the women do; how and why did they do it? I will conclude by suggesting several uniformities that appear to be common to these cases.

These examples of female militancy are interesting in themselves since women are not usually seen as playing leading roles in riots and political struggles. These occasions provide an intriguing view of the clash between formal and informal roles and of the tactics those occupying subordinate positions employ to deal with those in superordinate positions. It behooves us to know more about situations of friction and conflict, when people break with the codes and publicly challenge formal authority.

This study of female militancy may help dispel the stereotype of women as bound to home and hearth, submissive to male authority, politically passive and, hence, politically irrelevant. There was nothing servile about these women who acted in ways associated more with male than with female behavior. It shows them taking the initiative politically, being aggressive, both verbally and physically, engaging in ribald, vulgar, and insulting behavior, and at times using violence and coercion to obtain their goals.

Given space constraints, only the bare outlines of the events and the societies that produced them are presented. The sources are documented, however, so that the interested reader can seek more detail.

## THE HARRY THUKU DISTURBANCES, 1922<sup>2</sup>

In this first example of female militancy, the Harry Thuku movement is examined from the women's perspective. Since this is the least known of the three cases, since data on these demonstrations remain largely in archives, and since these events have never before been examined from this perspective, I present some of the empirical evidence in order to further our understanding of just what the women did and why they did it. This discussion is, therefore, longer than the discussions of the better-known Anlu Uprising and the Women's War.

This is the most difficult of the three examples to research partly due to the nature of crowd behavior. Crowds (demonstrations, riots, and panics) tend to be short-lived, volatile collectivities of large numbers of people marked by strong emotions, ephemeral leadership, and shifting memberships. The Thuku demonstrations had little social structure compared with Anlu or the Women's War and involved the smallest number of women.

Furthermore, at the time of the Harry Thuku disturbances, women were not seen as political actors by those doing the talking and the writing; consequently, their political actions received little attention. Given the absence of data in many areas and a paucity of data in others, the explanation here should be seen as a set of working hypotheses rather than a full-blown explanation.

### Multiple Grievances and Thuku's Protest

Harry Thuku, a young Kikuyu clerk who worked in the Treasury of Nairobi, was one of the founders in the early 1920s of Nairobi's first political association, the East African Association. Despite the Association's name, its members and core leaders were predominantly young, urban, male Kikuyu, members of the country's largest tribe. Harry Thuku, its secretary, was its driving force.

Thuku toured the rural areas speaking to large and enthusiastic gatherings of Kikuyu and later to members of the Luo and Kamba tribes. He articulated their grievances against the colonial government, mobilized support, and sent cables and resolutions to the Colonial Secretary in Britain. Protest centered on several major grievances: the kipande (see below): the government's doubling of the hut and poll taxes while at the same time reducing wages; and forced labor particularly of women and girls (Bennett 1963:451; Leys 1024:311-324; Ross 1927:108, 153; Mungeam 1970:141-142).

The kipande was a labor registration scheme, adopted from South Africa at the insistence of the white settlers, wherein African adult males were compelled to carry cards with their fingerprints to enable the settlers to keep track of their laborers. Only Africans had to register, not Europeans and Asians. The kipande was sorely resented by Africans as a mark of their second, even third, class citizenship.

In mid-1921 during an economic depression, European farmers enforced a one-third cut in Africans' already paltry wages. Wages for unskilled

laborers, for example, dropped to six or seven shillings from ten shillings for a month's work of 30 nine-hour days. Commenting on the settlers who campaigned for lower wages, William McGregor Ross stated: "They were resolute and impatient men: in deadly earnest as to exacting the same work for less pay from a working class that was unrepresented, unorganized and voiceless." He opposed it because "nothing had happened to reduce the natives' cost of living, taxation or shop prices so as to justify a one-third cut of pay" (1927:221-222).<sup>3</sup>

By the end of 1921, Thuku was addressing audiences of 3,000 to 5,000. On November 29th he held a mass meeting at Thika where the following resolutions were passed.

That the government is respectfully requested to repeal the Native Registration Ordinance [the kipande] or to suspend its operation for a period of five years. That the government is requested to repeal the Hut tax and to charge only Poll Tax as is done in the case of Europeans and Asiatics. That the Government is requested to allow natives to purchase land throughout their country. That if no satisfaction is obtained from the Local Government, the Chairman is authorized to make further representations to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, (The Leader of British East Africa, Nairobi, Dec. 17, 1921, p. 126. Henceforth referred to as Leader).

The subjugation of Africans in East Africa probably reached its zenith in the years 1919-1921, following Chief Native Commissioner John Ainsworth's issuing of Labor Circular No. 1, dated October 23, 1919. Under the heading "Native Labour required for non-Native Farms and other Private Undertakings" the circular stated:

- 1) All Government officials in charge of native areas must exercise every possible lawful influence to induce able-bodied natives to go into the labor field. Where farms are situated in the vicinity of a native area, women and children should be encouraged to go out for such as they can perform. . . .
- 3) District Commissioners will keep a record of the names of those Chiefs and Headmen who are helpful and of those who are not helpful, and will make reports to me from time to time for the information of His Excellency. The nature of these reports will be communicated to the Chiefs. In cases where there is evidence that any Government Headman is impervious to His Excellency's wishes, the fact should be reported to me for His Excellency's information together with any recommendations you may desire to make. . . .
- 5) Employers or their agents requiring native labor will be invited and encouraged to enter freely any Native Reserve and there get in touch with the Chiefs, Headmen, and Natives.  
(Ross 1924:104-105, emphasis mine)

This circular obviously gave the "go ahead" to zealous chiefs, headmen, and settlers to liberally interpret the words "induce" and "encourage." The only person to publicly repudiate this directive in East Africa was the Right Reverend Frank Weston, Bishop of Zanzibar (Ross 1924:106-107).

The issue of using pressure to obtain laborers caused an uproar in England, was debated in the Commons and in the House of Lords, and resulted in the Governor of Kenya, General Edward Northey, sending an amending circular to his officials that women and children should be allowed to return to their homes every night and that care should be taken that the chiefs did not use favoritism or oppression in sending laborers away to work for wages (Ross 1927:107). This failed to mollify the critics and, when Churchill became Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1921, he sent out a circular revising Kenya's labor policy. It forbade government officials to take part in recruiting labor for private employment (White Paper, Cd 1509, 1021).<sup>4</sup>

The forced labor of women was mentioned in the Fort Hall District Annual Report 1920/21: "Within a fortnight it was clear from further instructions received that there had been no intention of reviving the affiliation scheme and that as regards women labor all suspicion of coercion must be stopped immediately." (emphasis mine)<sup>5</sup>

An item in the East African Standard July 15, 1921, makes clear the Government's position on women and suggests that it may well have been aware of the problem of their sexual exploitation:

#### FORCING OF WOMEN AND GIRLS TO WORK ON PLANTATIONS

The Chief's and Elders asserted in strong terms that this practice was still in vogue.

The Chief Native Commissioner replied that the Government was not responsible for this, and, moreover, would not countenance it.

The Government had certainly informed Chiefs that it was advisable that their women and children should work on farms close to their homes so that they could return home to sleep at night.

He asked for specific instances of women and children being forced to work by instructions from the government. . . .

He [Chief Mukui] further stated that a tribal policeman had recently been convicted before him of ordering women to work on plantations and had been severely punished and dismissed.

The Chiefs intimated that they had further instances of this compulsory labor by women and children. . . .

The District Commissioner stated that any cases of this description brought to his notice would be fully investigated and the guilty persons punished. (As reported in Leys, 1924:219, emphasis mine.)

The African staff on these work projects appears to have taken advantage of the vulnerability of women and, especially, young girls.

Ross recounts the following incident as evidence of the kinds of practices that "flourished with the full knowledge of Government in the years 1919 to 1921" and were not stopped with the issuing of government directives.

An official and his wife, on safari by car, roll into a small Government station in the late afternoon. The Assistant District Commissioner is away in the Reserve. During a leisurely tea . . . they notice a string of young women and girls passing up the hill upon which the station bungalow stands. Each girl carries a kibuyu, or gourd, of capacity varying from a pint to half a gallon. They are carrying water up to a tank at the officer's house . . . The swift tropical dusk at length settles down and work is discontinued - but the girls do not return from their last trip up to the bungalow. The visitors go up to inquire, and find the girls sitting in a huddled group near the servants' quarters behind the bungalow looking scared. Inquiring from one of the "station hands" who is in charge while the Bwana [master] is away, they are told that the girls are to sleep in one of the outhouses, as the work is to be resumed in the morning, the tank being not yet full . . . The visitors . . . make for the doctor's bungalow - the only other European habitation in the station. Ascertaining from him that he knows nothing about the alleged order for the detention of the girls, the visitors decide to take the law into their own hands and dismiss them home for the night. On getting back to the bungalow, it is found that the girls have been locked in one of the outhouses in charge of a cowed old man who had come with them from their village. The door being opened, the girls, in their daytime lack of costume, without blankets or food for the night, are found crouching before a tiny fire. It is the same huddled group - only more scared now. They are undoubtedly afraid as to what may happen to them before morning. One thing may be taken as quite certain - that the trembling old man in charge of the party would have similarly opened the door to any of the station staff, porters or askaris, who might have told him to do so. The girls are ordered out and told to hurry home. After a moment of apparent incredulity, they tear off down hill into the darkness to a diminuendo of joyful cries. (Danger averted for that one night.)

It is satisfactory to be able to relate that, when shown the photograph of this water-party . . . and told of this incident, the Chief Native Commissioner was incredulous. Was it possible, after the Circulars he had sent out, that these hoary malpractices were still going on? Where and when was the photograph taken? . . .

Shortly afterwards, a further definite prohibition of the detention of girls away from their homes was published for general information in the Official Gazette. [Government Notice No. 93, O.G. 1923, p. 294] The particular example that has been quoted took place at a Government station. Multitudes of girls similarly experienced forcible detention in these dismal years on

plantations and in labor camps, and few were as fortunate as the "water-fatigue" at this bush station on the evening when the touring official with his wife, rolled in by car (Ross 1927:110-111, emphasis mine).

The date on the above-mentioned Government Notice of 1923, indicates that the detention of girls away from their homes on work projects continued long after it had officially been banned. Ross notes that "old sins die hard." Compulsory labor was still going on and still being debated in 1926 although most administrative officials attempted to put an end to it despite opposition and even harrassment from some settlers (1927:112-114).

Thuku and members of his Young Kikuyu Association (a short-lived association formed by him) raised these issues and, at a meeting with senior government officials, missionaries, Kikuyu chiefs and their attendants at Dagoretti (on the outskirts of Nairobi) on June 23, 1921, provided documentation of the sexual abuse of women.

The young men acted and spoke with a composure and self-confidence that grated upon the paid chiefs. These young men were partially educated. They had attended mission schools (the only ones in existence) for the sake of getting some education . . . To the paid chiefs they were anathema. Nobody wanted them or wanted to meet them. And here they were, forcing a hearing . . .

They complained of forced labor of girls and young women. Their District Commissioner (so they reported - and he was present) ordered fathers and elders to send their girls out to work on European plantations. If objection was made, it was treated with detention at the Government station, a fine of goats - and the girls were taken. In the previous month 60 girls had been taken to a European estate (named). They were still there. A list was produced of the names of girls who had been violated while so out at work on farms and were pregnant, with the names of their native seducers in some cases. The native employees at the Government station were apparently somewhat more licentious than Claverhouse's dragoons had been among another far-distant and sullen people). Headmen who did not produce the requisite groups of girls were subjected to public indignities - made to carry loads, for instance . . .

Harry Thuku was present. He asked pointedly if Government would abstain from reducing the pay of laborers in its employ. Why could they not be given as secure a title to their land as all Europeans demanded and got for theirs? (Ross 1927:225-226)

Thuku was highly critical of the chiefs, and opposition to them in the early 1920s centered in his movement. Kikuyu society had traditionally been chiefless so, to many Kikuyu, chiefs were a travesty of traditional norms. As local agents of the colonial government, they wielded extensive power and were seen by many as only too willing to enforce the government's unpopular programs on the people.

Many chiefs lived far beyond their means. Though most were paid only a few pounds a month, they built European-style homes and acquired large tracts of land and many wives; in 1924 two chiefs in the Fort Hall area were the first in the district to acquire automobiles.<sup>6</sup> Much of their wealth was acquired illegally. For instance, they had enormous judicial power and willingly accepted bribes in the settling of disputes.

The so-called chiefs soon became local 'tin gods' and a law unto themselves, more so because very little control was exercised over them. According to all accounts, the hammering that the Kikuyu had experienced at the hands of the punitive expeditions was nothing compared to the constant harassment inflicted upon them by the mercenaries now christened 'chiefs.' Many of these local rulers used their new power to enrich themselves, while their hangers-on, the njama, flouted the traditional code of behavior by harassing all and sundry, and in particular the girls who had to sleep in the newly established bomas. (Muriuki 1974:167, emphasis mine)

Muriuki's informants said that the chiefs were no better than their hangers-on; they even took other men's wives and property by force (1974:168-169).<sup>7</sup>

The chiefs, because of a paucity of government funds, had to create their own para-administrative and military bodies to solidify their power and to do the bidding of their colonial rulers. They surrounded themselves with young men called tribal retainers whose principal purpose was to implement their will. These men forced people out in a press-gang fashion for unpaid communal labor and to work for the settlers and the administration.

Taxes and communal labor were supposed to fall equally on every member of the community, but in practice, this was not so. Chiefs favored their own people and those wealthy enough to bribe them at the expense of the others. The result was that the onerous chores fell on the vulnerable people -- those not connected with the ruling elite or not wealthy enough to bribe the chiefs. This meant that young men and women lacking in economic and political power were among those, along with the poor and the old, who shouldered the heaviest burdens (Tignor 1971:354-355). A constant complaint of the missionaries in the 1920s was that chiefs discriminated against Christian converts by making them do extra road work.

Although chiefs and their assistants exploited weak Kikuyu in general, women who were not rich and powerful probably suffered most of all since they were also sexually exploited. It is not difficult to see, then, why rural women would support Thuku since he was probably the first African male in the colonial period to speak out publicly on their exploitation. And it is not difficult to see why the chiefs hated Thuku since he strongly criticized their misgovernment, corruption, and illegal use of office. In short, the colonial government was unpopular with the Kikuyu.

Indeed, in African opinion the Government has no redeeming feature. It is always interfering, they think, and it has an insatiable appetite for money. The fact is that the system of taxation leaves less than nothing over when both what are strictly necessary to be done - justice, police, tax collection - are provided for and the demands of the European colony are satisfied (Leys 1924:278).

### The "Riot"

The British government, concerned about Thuku's growing support, arrested him on March 14, 1922. He was confined in the police station, Nairobi. On March 15th the East African Association called a general strike. A crowd of several thousand workers marched to the police station to secure Thuku's release. After fifteen minutes of prayer for his safety, most of the strikers returned home at their leaders' request.

The next morning, March 16th, the gathering at the police station rapidly grew until around noon there were 7,000 to 8,000 people. A deputation of six leading African men went to see Sir Charles Bowering, the Colonial Secretary. Sir Charles assured them that Thuku would be given a full hearing by the Government before any decision was taken as to what was to be done with him; he was in no danger and was only being detained. He urged them to return to the police station and to disperse the crowd. They tried but failed. Members of the crowd accused them of being bribed.

The following accounts of the demonstration are given in the subsequent government inquiry and published in Papers Relating to Native Disturbances in Kenya. (Because the quotations are lengthy, I have emphasized the most relevant sentences.) General Northey, the governor, in a letter to the Secretary of State, dated April 11, 1922, wrote:

The repeated warnings and orders to disperse, not only from government officers but also from their own leaders, had been disregarded, and the excitations of agitators and the taunts of the women had by then raised the ugliest passions . . . The attempt to disperse the mob through their own leaders was undoubtedly the wisest and most humane method, though it was unhappily frustrated by the inflammatory speeches of irresponsible natives [one man in particular is mentioned] and jeers of the women, who as always with African troubles, prevented a peaceful termination of the episode. (Native Disturbances, 1922:7)

The Acting Commissioner of the Kenya Police, J.C. Bentley, reported in a similar vein:

I called on the crowd to select six of their men which they did; these I sent up to the Secretariat, and proceeded there myself, where they were interviewed by Sir Charles Bowering, who instructed them to inform the crowd to disperse, which they said they would do. I returned to the lines and found that the crowd had

considerably increased, there being from 7,000 to 8,000 Kikuyu intermixed with a few Indians, and a large party of native women had arrived, probably 150 . . . When the deputation of six eventually arrived from the Secretariat two of the members went amongst the crowd and called on them to disperse; after some considerable talking there was a tendency on the part of the crowd to disperse, but the women present shouted to the men in aggravating tones which made them apparently change their minds, and they pressured up to the gates and corrugated iron walls round the lines; . . .

As far as I am aware, 16 men and 2 women have been killed, and 22 men and women have been wounded. (Native Disturbances, 1922:10-11)

B.A. Cream, the Nairobi Resident Magistrate, at the inquest into the deaths of the Africans testified on March 16, 1922 as follows:

The Acting Commissioner of Police arrived back at the lines from this interview with Sir Charles Bowring about 10:45 a.m., and found that the crowd had considerably increased and that the members of it had changed and become quite hostile. This change of attitude is attributed to the fact that certain natives were making inflammatory and seditious speeches to them, and at this time the crowd was increasing in numbers quickly by the arrival of natives from all directions to join it . . . After the Commissioner spoke to them, three of the deputation addressed the crowd and called upon them to disperse. In response to this address, a large number of the crowd stood up and looked as if they were going to move off, when, unfortunately, some women who had been in the crowd all the morning called the men who were going to move off "cowards" and some other names, which had apparently the effect of enraging them. The result of these remarks by the women was that the crowd surged immediately up to a fence at the South Gate where there were 40 askaris (native police) "at ease"; the askaris were then ordered by Captain Carey, Superintendent of Police, to bring their rifles to the "engage" position, and Captain Lumley, Acting Assistant Commissioner to Police, immediately put 20 men at the danger point on boxes, so that they could see over the corrugated iron fence, and he issued to the men 20 more rounds of ammunition . . . Captain Carey took hold of this person [a male agitator who was inciting the crowd] and threw him amongst the men, but in doing so Captain Carey fell, and as he fell the crowd shouted, threw stones, and rushed toward the corrugated iron fence at the South Gate, and in this rushing by the crowd, a rifle went off, and it was followed immediately by a fusillade by the askaris guarding the gate into the oncoming crowd, and the firing was taken up by the askaris at Government Rd. side. This firing by askaris lasted between one and two minutes. . .

What might seem rather remarkable is that there is no evidence given that the askaris were ordered to fire on the crowd

by their officers; but when it is considered that the askaris were on duty for practically 18 hours continuously, that they were subjected to the taunts and jeers of the crowd the entire morning, and that the officer in charge of them was on the ground at the time the first shot was fired in a scuffle with one of the most aggressive ringleaders, it appears to me their action is not to be wondered at or criticised. . . . As the crowd at 9 a.m. on the 16th was perfectly quiet, the plan of sending six of the leaders as a deputation to the Governor's deputy appears to me to have been a well conceived one, in fact, I consider the wisdom of it is proved by the fact that the crowd had got up to move off after being addressed by the deputation, and I have no doubt would have done so had it not been for the unfortunate interference by the women of the crowd. (Native Disturbances, 1922:17-18).

According to the Reverend W.J. Wright, Vicar of All Saints Anglican Church, who was in the crowd:

The crowd was mostly seated in groups and very orderly. He [Wright] walked through most of the groups and was struck by their apparent peacefulness. It had reminded him more of a Sunday School treat . . . several times they had prayers . . . there were fully 200 women collected there. The women made a great noise . . . very slowly the women made towards the corrugated fence. They come to within a yard of the bayonets. The askaris in front of the actual gate knelt down and appeared to raise their rifles, probably at what was termed the 'engage' (Leader, 1922:19).

Job Muchuchu, a prominent Kikuyu politician from Fort Hall, who was present recalled the scene in detail many years later.<sup>8</sup>

Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru (from Weithaga in Location 10 of Fort Hall District) leapt to her feet, pulled her dress right up over her shoulders and shouted to the men: "You men are cowards. What are you waiting for? Our leader is in there. Let's get him." Hundreds of women trilled their ngemi [a high pitched cry] in approbation and from that moment trouble was probably inevitable. Mary and the others pushed on until the bayonets of the rifles were pricking at their throats, and then the firing started. Mary was one of the first to die. My companion, Huran Mikono, was badly wounded in the right leg. (From an interview with Job Muchuchu, Mary, 1964, quoted in Rosberg and Nottingham 1966:51-52.)

The Director of Public Works, W. McGregor Ross, reported as follows:

The Director of Public Works had motored to the Secretariat and asked to see Sir Charles Bowring. It had appeared to him that if complete passivity on the part of the police forces were ordered, and if they abstained from reprisals, under exasperation by the few women in the crowd, the bulk of it, as the lunch-hour approached, would cease to be interested in the situation and would disperse . . .

The English Chaplain of Nairobi, the Rev. W.J. Wright had been in the crowd most of the morning . . . He was convinced that the women were the cause of the immediate agitation. (Ross 1927:231, 233)

The official figures given at the inquest were 21 Africans killed, among them four women, as well as 28 wounded.

An official inquiry exonerated the police who had been on duty for more than 18 hours. Thuku was shipped off to Kismayu on the coast near the Somali border. Both the government and the Europeans were seriously alarmed at this episode as there had been nothing like it in Kenya before. African grievances were given some frank discussion and the tax was reduced from 16 to 12 shillings. With the collapse of the Thuku movement, however, any talk about further reforms ended (Leys 1924:197, 325).

#### Women Take Over Crowd "Leadership"

What conclusions can be drawn from this evidence? There is unanimity that the women's intervention changed the course of crowd activity and gave it a new direction. The African deputation and the British authorities had agreed that it was best for the crowd to disperse and the crowd was about to follow their leaders' orders when the women, defying both their leaders and the colonial authorities, taunted the men, apparently shaming them into staying. The women, it appears, became angry because they felt the men had capitulated to the British. Their aim even on the previous day had been to rescue Thuku. Following Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru they pushed their way right up to the police lines. "Suddenly a section of them [the crowd] made a rush for the prison door" (Leys 1924:197). Then the firing started.

The Reverend Wright, Job Muchuchu, and W.M. Ross, who were all present, depicted the women as taking the initiative. Governor Northey, no present but having access to his officials' reports, agreed and blamed the women for preventing a peaceful settlement.

These observations were made by both African and British men in a setting where, if Africans were consulted at all, it was African men getting together with British men about what should be done. It is noteworthy that the Acting Commissioner of Police told the crowd to select six men to form a deputation, that it was the Colonial Secretary and the male deputation who reached agreement that the crowd should disperse, and that Governor Northey felt the crowd would have dispersed peacefully had it not been for the women's "interference." The fact that there was agreement among African and British men on what the women did suggests that the women must have acted concertedly otherwise the dominant male perspective that sees only men as political actors would never have been penetrated.

Many witnesses at the inquest testified to being very much impressed with the women's unity and courage. That the women were seen as heroines in African eyes is evident from the Kikuyu political song, the Kanyegenuri, which commemorates their deeds, especially the bravery of Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966:54-55).

This interpretation does not deny men a role in the final stage of demonstration. The majority of demonstrators killed and wounded were men. One African male in particular played an important role in stirring up the crowd. But it was the women's activities as a group that were repeatedly mentioned.

### Use of a Traditional Insult?

Although what the women did has been noted, there has been no explanation of how they took over crowd leadership other than Ross' contention that they were mainly excitable Nairobi prostitutes who aroused the crowd and that the police hoses should have been turned on them in order to relieve the mounting tension (Ross 1927:230). Nor has there been any explanation of Mary Nyanjiru's strange behavior of pulling her skirt up above her shoulders while at the same time heaping scorn on the men.

Nyanjiru's action bears a striking resemblance to the strongest insult at the disposal of a Kikuyu woman, the gutura ng'ania, the displaying of one's genitals toward the person or thing cursed. Quarrelling women use it once in a while when they are furious with each other, though Kikuyu generally find it disgusting. It was also used as a group curse. Women of one ridge showed their disapproval of women of another ridge or of some domineering person who had aroused their ire in the following way. They removed their undergarments, should in a line with their backs towards the offender, bent forward and lifted their skirts in unison. That gesture indicated the end of social intercourse with the people thus insulted, or, in the case of a man, the women's refusal to recognize his authority (Lambert 1956:99).

At the Thuku demonstration, the women did not form a line and raise their skirts in unison but, given the circumstances, that would hardly have been possible. Nyanjiru's gesture and the women's response appear, however, to have signalled a repudiation of men's authority over women, at least temporarily. Henceforth women would take the lead.

The women's behavior, far from being idiosyncratic, appears to have followed a traditional practice and to have had group backing since the women trilled their ngemi which indicated their approval and followed Nyanjiru's lead as she advanced toward the row of armed police guarding the station.

Not content to employ the gesture alone, Nyanjiru and the other women taunted the men, and Nyanjiru suggested that the women would now do what the men should have done. She shouted: "You men are cowards. What are you waiting for? Our leader is in there. Let's get him." (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966:17). This role reversal theme is brought out even more clearly in another account in which she reportedly said: "You men take my skirt and I'll take your trousers."<sup>9</sup>

### Who Were These Women?

Little is known about who the women were and why they were at the demonstration. The only woman mentioned by name is Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru.

All that I can find out about her is that she came from Weithaga in Location 10 of the Fort Hall District, an area of strong support for Thuku especially among the young Christian converts who were solidly behind him. She was probably a member of the Church Mission Society at Weithaga or the American Mission Station since almost all Thuku's adherents were followers of these missions.<sup>10</sup> There was no mention of any delegation of women going to the Thuku demonstration in the Fort Hall District Annual Report 1922. Since Nyanjiru took the lead, employed a traditional insult, and women followed her, she probably came with some other rural women. There is considerable evidence, to be discussed in the next section, that rural women were not at all adverse to collective protest and, given Thuku's support for issues of concern to them, there was ample reason for their presence.

Ross, an astute observer of the Kenyan scene, refers to the women as "mostly town prostitutes." Since there were few other jobs for African women at the time in Nairobi and, since prostitution flourished, there is no reason to doubt his observation (Bujra 1975; White 1980). We can assume that at least some of the women at the demonstration were prostitutes.

An article by Janet Bujra provides considerable information on the prostitutes of that era (1975). The women at the riot were probably Kikuyu since the majority of women who came to Nairobi in the first two decades of the century were either Kikuyu, whose homeland adjoins Nairobi, or Kalenjin, whose homeland lies some 100 to 150 miles away from Nairobi. Many came to escape from wife-beating, arranged marriages, and parental and marital quarrels or because of childlessness, widowhood, elopements that failed to work out, or being orphaned. Some women were brought by female relatives already living on their own in the city. The motives of many seem connected to the old maxim, "Town air makes free" (1975:217-220). They appear to be women willing to rely on their own resources and unafraid of breaking with tribal traditions. By migrating to Nairobi, they had escaped from the orbit of customary law and were no longer subject to male authority.

In this early period, the law of supply and demand worked in the prostitute's favor. There was an abundance of customers, rooms were cheap, and she could rely on the goodwill of the community in which she was an active participant for protection against violent customers. Hence there was no need for middlemen, the pimps and brothel owners, who exploit prostitutes. Each woman organized her business and lived on her own (Bujra 1975:221-222).

The women achieved high incomes from prostitution, combined, for some, with beer-brewing. They invested their money in building and buying homes; quite a few owned two houses in Nairobi. Some bought urban property outside of Nairobi but not in their villages of birth, and some branched out into other enterprises. Their money-making ability equalled or surpassed that of men, and even today women own almost half of the houses in Pumwani, Nairobi's oldest existing African location (Bujra 1975:213, 233).

These women were responsible only to themselves. They married when and whom they chose, and they took full responsibility for the raising of their children since they could not rely on men. Prostitution "within the limits

of an exploitive colonial context [allowed women] to gain an unusual measure of equality with men" (Bujra 1975:215).

The women's issues that Thuku championed were of little concern to urban women. But there were two other issues that were of vital concern to them. The brewing and selling of beer, usually an adjunct of prostitution rather than a separate occupation, was a profitable part of some women's income. In 1921 the Nairobi City Council forbade beer-brewing by Africans. It set up a municipal brewery in Pumwani and was soon doing a thriving business though it was noted that "drunken natives" were about who were getting beer from "other sources" (Bujra 1975:222-223). Women continued to brew and sell beer though now they were subjected to harassment, arrest, imprisonment, and fines. Many resorted to paying the police to turn a blind eye to their activities though this took money and probably sexual favors. Hence, beer-brewing in 1922 was not nearly as attractive as it had previously been.

The other issue that likely angered Nairobi's prostitutes was the city's plan to demolish their homes and banish them from the city streets. One European argument for the demolition of "native villages" and the building of a new and sanitary municipal location for Africans was that venereal disease was becoming a serious problem in Nairobi. Pumwani, the native location, was built in 1921-22 on the outskirts of Nairobi, and one of the first buildings erected was a venereal disease clinic (Bujra 1975:220). The campaign to rid Nairobi proper of prostitutes was probably well underway in 1921 and early 1922 when the Thuku massacre occurred; if it was not actually underway, rumors about the impending dislocation were probably rampant.

. . . Their [prostitutes] appearance in Nairobi's streets was short-lived because their residency in Asian areas coincided with the Medical Department's stated purpose of 'taking action against unsanitary premises,' and demolitions were commonplace. In late 1923 the medical officer of health wrote to the chief native commissioner about brothels and prostitutes in Nairobi announcing the transformation his office had brought about in Canal Rd.: 'You will note that there would appear to be no longer brothels in Canal Rd., which, owing now to the improvements which have been carried out . . . to many premises, has become a desirable residential area' (White 1980:8)<sup>11</sup>

By 1924, the prostitutes had been driven off Nairobi's streets into Pumwani and Pangani locations or had returned to their homelands (White 1980:8).

Prostitutes then had two reasons, both important to their livelihood, to be disgruntled with the city authorities. They probably took advantage of the Thuku demonstration to show their dislike of the authorities and the police. Since they had already broken with customary law, they would feel little compunction about defying male authority at the riot. It was entirely in keeping with their independent lifestyle.<sup>12</sup>

We are told that 150 women arrived as a "party" at the Thuku demonstration (Native Disturbances 1922:10-11). Their ability to change the crowd from one course of action to another and their presence in the front

lines of the demonstrators suggest some kind of unity. In accounts of the demonstration,<sup>13</sup> however, there was no mention of the women belonging to any specific women's groups although, given the little interest there was in women's organizations at the time these accounts were written, this is not surprising.<sup>14</sup>

Lambert (1956), writing about Kikuyu social and political institutions, is typically vague. "Whether there are formally constituted women's lodges it is impossible to say with any certainty. Men sometimes talk of a kiama kia aka (women's lodge) but generally mean an ndundu ya atumia ('secret meeting of dames'). Even Kikuyu men say they are not sure whether women's gatherings are merely called for specific purposes or whether they are adhoc meetings of organized chiama" (1956:95-96). He concludes that "whether or not the women have lodges they certainly have the means and will to mobilize themselves with speed over a wide area for concerted action when they feel that their rights have been disregarded or their sphere invaded" (1956:100).

Only recently has this lack of knowledge about women's groups been partially corrected. Research has shown that there were indeed on-going women's organizations with social, economic, and judicial functions (Stamp 1975-76:25; Kershaw 1973:55; Clark 1980:363-68). These groups often served wide political and social purposes, providing women with a base from which to pursue a variety of goals. One group, the ndunda or nyumba, composed of women who married into a particular lineage, would sanction women who did not conform to regulations or participate in communal functions such as initiation ceremonies. Women who failed in their communal duties were fined by having to provide cooked food for the older women. If the offense was more serious, the penalty was ejection from the group and, hence, from the benefits of ngwatio, the custom whereby women cultivated each other's farms (Stamp 1975-76:24-25). Certainly the many cooperative ventures organized by Kikuyu women in postcolonial Kenya, some based on traditional modes of cooperation, suggest that collective activity was, and is, well understood and practised (Wachtel 1975-76:69-80).

From this later research, we know too that Kikuyu prostitutes did not organize mutual aid associations in the 1920s like other African prostitutes. Many Nairobi prostitutes had converted to Islam and were active in a variety of Muslim welfare societies. There is no mention, however, of women from one of these groups going to the demonstration. What in all likelihood occurred was that women from the same area of the town met informally to walk the several miles to the demonstration together.

#### A Tradition of Collective Even Militant Action

We lack the data to ascertain whether the women acted spontaneously or accordingly to some preconceived plan. Their effort to rescue Thuku probably developed on-the-spot, as much crowd interaction does, when they were told to disperse. In their eyes, the male leadership had failed them and Thuku, and they simply employed the tools (the sexual insult, jeers, and the shrill cry) with which all women were familiar.

Was their endeavor highly unusual or was it commonplace for women to defy men? Given male dominance of public offices and an ideology that enshrined male superiority, female insubordination and insults would appear to be out of keeping with Kikuyu practices. However, Governor Northey's remark about African women, albeit somewhat exaggerated, [". . . who as always with African troubles prevented a peaceful termination of the episode," see p. 8] indicates that their behavior was not so unusual and even followed a predictable pattern. Furthermore, there is evidence that women frequently came together to protect their interests, even challenging male authority or intervening directly to right an alleged wrong, bypassing the authorities concerned.

Lambert (1956) cites several such instances. In 1934 thousands of Kikuyu women marched on the Meru administration station and demanded that corpses that had been ordered buried under the Native Authority Ordinance be exhumed because the burial had caused a drought. In 1938, a number of Kikuyu women went to Nairobi to object to the planting of grass "wash-stops." And in 1939 a group of women looted an Indian shop because they felt that the owner was not giving them a fair price for their agricultural produce. In the same year, another group of women demanded the sacrifice of a sheep from an old man whose son had killed a man, allegedly causing the women a poor harvest (1956:100).

Yet another case of Kikuyu women protesting occurred in 1947-48 and is known as "the revolt of the women." It involved the women of Fort Hall, an area that had strongly supported Thuku, and concerned the government's soil conservation scheme. The women who had been doing the bulk of the terracing work refused to participate any longer and their boycott brought the project to a virtual standstill. Their resistance showed clearly that a large number of women could be mobilized and that their strength lay in their unity. These women defied male authority, both African and European. Their behavior - singing, dancing, and voicing their grievances at the district station - bore a resemblance to the Anlu and "sitting on a man" rituals, to be discussed. The District Commissioner found it impossible to believe that the women had acted on their own and concluded that they must have been spurred on by a clique of young urban men intent on sabotaging the administration's progressive measures.<sup>15</sup> His position was a common one for Europeans.

These protests suggest that women had rights which they resolutely protected. Rosberg and Nottingham, in concluding their account of the Thuku demonstration, state that over the next few decades there would be more evidence of "the power and strength of Kikuyu women when politically aroused" (1966:55).

The women's short venture into the political arena, as witnessed in the Thuku "Riot," was all the more remarkable when it is realized that women, unlike men, had been excluded from education and from participating in the political system. They met an informal coalition of male attitudes, African and British, which were largely unspoken since there was so much agreement. Their attitudes are typified in the remarks of the District Commissioner of Fort Hall and of Jomo Kenyatta. The District Commissioner wrote in 1924:

The women of the tribe [Kikuyu] are more untouched by social progress than the men, and this must of necessity be so for the women are bound to their homes and gardens in the Reserves: They are also by nature more cautious and conservative.<sup>16</sup>

Kenyatta, in discussing the three types of oathing which were the most important in controlling court procedures, wrote:

Women were excluded from taking any of these oaths. Their husband or sons took the responsibility, for the women were not considered fit mentally and bodily to stand the ordeal which involved not only the individual going through it but the whole family group (Kenyatta 1961:225).

#### Women Control Valuable Resources and have a Relatively High Status

Other factors that probably abetted the women's independent spirit and their willingness to defy the authorities was the society's emphasis on achievement and the women's considerable bargaining power and relatively high status vis-a-vis men. Responsibility for the most of the day-to-day farming fell on women. They undertook the planting, harvesting, and processing of food and had a significant say in its disposal. Performing these tasks, as well as her other family duties, efficiently brought a woman much respect not only from her own group but from the entire community (Kenyatta 1962:63). Women also engaged in long-distance trading and kept their own livestock. Thus, they controlled valuable resources that were essential to male power. A wife's contribution of cooked food and beer facilitated a "big man's" entertaining and gift-giving through which he recruited followers, increased his influence, and built up alliances. A plentiful supply of food and beer was also important in rewarding work parties that cleared bush and permitted a man to expand his land-holdings. Women, by withholding these needed resources, could hinder men from developing their power base. Carolyn Clark demonstrates in a well-argued paper that women's subsistence activities were an integral part of the political economy (1980:357-69).

Within women's organizations and through their roles as wives and mothers Kikuyu women had authority to make certain decisions, including the allocation of the harvest. The power they had to secure compliance was based on their spiritual powers, strength of character, ability to use kin lines of influence to their advantage, and the knowledge of the indispensability of their household services (p. 367).

Women's control of important resources and their valued contribution to a man's status and power lessened the distance that separated men's and women's statuses. The gap was not unbridgeable and women would question, and, on occasion even challenge, male authority.

The presence of women's organizations is particularly important because in these groups women learn to cooperate toward attaining common goals and, through discussion, acquire a knowledge of, and a means to protect, their rights (Clark 1980:367). Women in such a milieu are more likely than women acting alone to evaluate male action, and, if they disagree with it, reject it.

Even though women did have their own associations that, in some ways, paralleled the men's, the Kikuyu had only a limited dual-sex organization (Clark 1980:360). The basis of power lay in men's councils from which women were excluded.<sup>17</sup> These councils made decisions considered binding for both men and women (Kenyatta 1961:194-195). Women's council meetings, on the other hand, dealt with decisions that affected only women, the circumcision of girls, birth, and religious activities.

#### THE ANLU UPRISING, 1958-59

Another example of female militancy is the Anlu or Women's Uprising, as it is known, in which 7,000 Kom women staged a series of mass demonstrations and seized control of tribal affairs in Bamenda Province of the British Cameroons, now Cameroon. By mid-1958 the women were strong enough to take the political initiative. Using Anlu, a traditional practice, revamped into a tightly organized, well-disciplined association, they rendered the paramount chief and his executive council impotent, unseated the ruling party (the Kamerun National Congress-KNC) in the 1959 election, and helped get the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) into power.

#### Traditional Anlu

Anlu was a sanctioning device employed by women to punish people who committed crimes that insulted women or crimes that were against the "social and natural order" (Nkwi 1976:131). Such crimes included beating or insulting a parent, beating a pregnant woman, incest, causing the pregnancy of a nursing mother within two years of a previous birth, abusing old and sick people, and seizing a person's genitals in a fight. An offended woman would summon other women with a high pitched call, or "war-cry." (This call sounds strikingly similar to the Kikuyu ngemi). Upon hearing the call, women would echo it, leave whatever they were doing, and go to the aid of the woman who had initiated the call. A crowd would gather quickly, followed by a wild dance during which the offended woman would inform the gathering about the offense. The accused would state his case to the head woman of the compound who would discuss the matter with the older women and they would decide on a course of action. If they decided the accused was guilty, they might accept his apologies and payment of a goat and fowl or fees, and this would settle the case. If he was a habitual offender, a more drastic sanction was meted out.

On a set day, the women dressed in pieces of men's clothing, painted their faces, covered themselves in leafy vines (perhaps to commemorate their warrior tradition, see p. 24) and paraded to the offender's home around 5 a.m. There they danced, sang obscene and mocking songs, and defiled his compound by defecating and urinating in the water storage vessels. "Vulgar

parts" of the body were exhibited (Ardener 1973:438). If the man was present, the women pelted him with stones or a type of wild fruit called "garden eggs." Then they shed their vines and "garden eggs" in his compound leaving some of each on the threshold as the Anlu sign that the compound was off-limits. Sometimes they would prohibit the offender from visiting other compounds as well as forbidding people to visit him. If he fled to another compound or even to another village, Anlu activity continued.

An offender could seldom endure this kind of treatment for more than two months. When he capitulated, he put the Anlu vines around his neck and went to the women to plead for their pardon. If his pleas and the goods he offered were accepted, the women took him naked to a stream and bathed him in a purification ritual. If his cooking pots had been contaminated with "garden eggs" (contact with this fruit was believed to cause one to become sick and thin), they, too, were washed in the stream. Then the man was led back to his compound, rubbed with powdered canwood and palm oil, and given food. After this, the incident was never mentioned again.

Anlu was greatly feared for there was no appeal against its rulings. If pardon was refused, the culprit was forced to leave the country. Since the invoking of Anlu was such a serious affair it was used sparingly. One of Ritzenthaler's informants (1972), about 35 years of age, said he had seen it used only four times in his lifetime.

### The New Anlu

Anlu persisted in its traditional form until near the end of 1957 when its conversion into a political organization began. The new Anlu developed a hierarchical structure with officers, weekly meetings, and dues. It was based on local chapters or cells located in every quarter.<sup>19</sup> Each chapter had a "quarter head," a leader who conducted the meetings and transmitted orders from central headquarters. At the head of the organization was the Queen chosen by the women to represent them. The leadership hierarchy, in descending order of importance, consisted of the Spokeswoman or District Officer who made most of the speeches and acted as Anlu's official speaker. Dressed in men's attire, she represented the women in any dealings with the district officer. Next in importance were the Quarterheads, followed by the Spies, the Messengers, the Scribes and the Clowns. Male clowns appeared at many rituals but this is the sole instance known in which women used clowns. It is interesting that a number of these offices were adopted from men's groups and the colonial system and that some women officers wore male clothing appropriate for the rank, obviously indicating the patterning of their behavior upon that of higher-status men.

Elements from old Anlu that were retained included: the name; women's right to join together to punish those who broke important rules; dancing demonstrations; the singing of mocking songs; bedecking offenders with vines; the warcry; the use of "garden eggs" for stigmatization; and the tactics of boycott, ostracism, and harassment to the point of intimidation.

## Multiple Grievances

It appears that, even before the Anlu Uprising of 1958-59, the women were angry with the authorities, both local and national, over grievances that had been accumulating for years. These grievances centered upon their rights and tasks as the food producers.

The Chief was considered too lenient with the Fulani herdsmen whose cattle wandered on to the women's land, ruining their crops, and too slow in expediting their claims of crop damage. False rumors circulated that the government was about to sell the women's land and that the Paramount Chief was selling it to the Premier who was selling it to the hated Ibos. Since land is regarded as almost sacred among the Kom and the women are the farmers, this was a particularly serious grievance. Also, the government's contour farming regulation, introduced to prevent further soil erosion in this mountainous terrain, was taken as added proof that their land was to be sold. This regulation specified that ridges should be built horizontally instead of vertically as the women had been doing. Because it meant considerable extra work, the regulation was ignored by the women, some of whom were fined for its infraction--another irritant. A zealous agricultural assistant tried to enforce the policy by uprooting some "incorrectly" planted crops, an offense among the Kom because it deprived the soil of some of its productivity (Nkwi 1976:179). In a similar vein, a sanitary inspector attempted to improve hygiene in the market place by destroying some bad food and tainted liquor.

At the national level, the government party, the Kameruns National Congress (KNC), led by Dr. Endeley was disliked for its modernizing policies that had caused the destruction of food and for some unpopular measures like contour farming.<sup>20</sup> Thus, shared dissatisfactions led most women to join Anlu whose membership, at its height, was estimated to include 99% of Kom women.

## The Uprising

July 4, 1958. Long festering tensions erupted when the all-male local government council met to discuss fining women for farming offences and to organize a welcoming party for the visit of the premier, Dr. Endeley. A council member, Mr. Chia, was advocating both. Mamma Abula stepped out from the spectators, performed a few dance steps, walked up to Chia and spat in his face. Francis Nkwain, the son of one of the women involved in the uprising, provides the following account of the incident that set it off:

A women from Tinifoinbi sprinted up to Chia and also spat. Then a third woman, Mamma Thecia Neng, doubled over and shrilled the 'Anlu' war cry which was echoed and re-echoed in a widening circle beginning with the women who had been in attendance at the Council. Fright gripped Chia and he started for his bicycle only to find it covered with twines, around which a growing number of women were dancing and singing. Women started to pick up bits of stones to throw them at him cursing him as they did so. He ran to the Mission House and made for the Father's latrine. The Rev.

Father bolted that door and stood with his back to it. The women gathered in dance, and vines and branches were cut and heaped in front of the latrine. Efforts to disperse the women were of no avail. The women sang and danced and, as emotions grew, told the world Mr. Chia belonged nowhere--'He is excreta.' And they would shrill out 'U-li-li-li . . .' Then they turned and left the Mission and went up the Yongmbang Hill overlooking the Njinikom market, there to set up their [own] demonstration farm, with the ridges running down the hill in a challenge to the new Agricultural Department's directive. No broadcasting station could surpass the Yongmbang Hill and soon this hill was black with teeming thousands of women. When they came down that hill planning had already been fixed. 'Anlu' had started . . . The next day, Saturday, 5th July, saw the women in Bobe Andreas Ngong's compound where fighting ensued. Jerome Ngong used a cutlass on one of the women and sticks flew here and there battlewise. After ruining much property the 'Anlu' marched on the market beating and driving away such men as had dared to put up wares . . . 'The men can't have their fun while we are suffering' (Ardener 1973:429-30).

July 7. Some women from Njinikom tried to enter a school where three KNC leaders were teaching. They arrived at the school singing mocking and obscene songs and threatened staff and pupils but were prevented from entering the school compound by teachers and missionaries. Nearly 80 percent of the children stayed away from classes that day (Nkwi 1976:180).

July 8. A demonstration of 2,000 women dressed in men's clothing and vines and carrying seven-foot wooden staffs marched to the Belo market, so crowding it that business was halted. The Paramount Chief's representative tried to give his usual news announcement in the marketplace but the women seized his staff of authority and would not permit him to speak. With their staffs, they pounded the zinc roofs of the market, denting them, and tore off a piece of roofing. Their leaders laid down the following ultimatum:

1. That from now on Anlu would be in control.
2. That any people who did not follow Anlu would be exiled.
3. That any woman who did not follow Anlu would not be allowed to farm.
4. That there would be no more use of courts, schools, churches, and hospitals, and that any woman who sent her child to school would be exiled.
5. That the Fon [paramount chief] and ju-ju men were no longer in authority.
6. That no strangers would be allowed to stay in the Kom area; all Hausa, Fulani, and Europeans should leave. (To demonstrate what they would do, they tore off part of the thatching of a nearby house owned by a man from the Bafut tribe.)
7. That the four mission teachers at Njinikom must leave the Kom area.  
(Ritzenthaler 1972:402)

Anlu's leaders, disgusted with the courts that were considering fining the women, set up their own courts and insisted on dealing with all land claims, defying both the Chief and the administration (Ardener 1975:39).

July 11. The Premier, escorted by the District Officer, encountered a number of road blocks on his visit. His party cleared away the blocks and proceeded. The women boycotted his speech and only a few men were present. They kept their children away from the Roman Catholic school because the school had planned to have the children line the Premier's route. Later the Roman Catholic authorities acquiesced to the women's demand and transferred several of the unpopular teachers.

July 14. The District Officer together with the Paramount Chief went to an Anlu gathering at Njinikom of some 5,000 to 6,000 women who were dressed in men's clothing and covered with vines. The women presented their grievances, and the District Officer assured them that a number of their complaints would be acted upon. He dispelled the rumor that their land was being sold and told them the contour farming regulation would be held in abeyance. The cases of women who had already paid fines because of this rule would be reviewed. He stated that law and order, however, must be maintained, that no further demonstrations, assaults, damage to markets, uprooting of crops, blocking of roads, harrassment of non-Anlu women, or prevention of children other than their own from attending school would be tolerated. The women appeared satisfied and there were no more outbreaks for some time.

November 22.<sup>21</sup> Two thousand vine-decked women set out on a 38-mile march to Bamenda to protest the summoning for interrogation of four of their leaders. They were accompanied by two men. During the march, they were forbidden to speak to any men along the way and were to eat only Kom food and drink, only Kom water which they carried with them. After a day and a half, they arrived at the settlement just outside of Bamenda where they spent the night. Some, having never before hiked such a distance, arrived exhausted and with swollen feet. They spent the night singing their songs. The next day they marched to the government station in Bamenda where their leader made a lengthy statement to the police. The police decided to take no further action and the women returned home in triumph, transported part of the way in two trucks loaned by the police. Four thousand women, including the elderly and the nursing mothers, waited at Njinikom market for their return. This show of solidarity undoubtedly impressed the authorities.

The most important element in the movement, according to Ritzenthaler and Nkwi, was the political one. The women were strongly antigovernment as embodied in the KNC. This anti-KNC feeling did not subside with the victory of the KNDP in the January 1959 election. The KNDP stressed traditional values and institutions and reflected regional and ethnic groupings. Harassment of KNC supporters continued and even increased. It was impossible to be neutral in the women's eyes. A non-Anlu woman was considered to be against Anlu and, as such, was forbidden to attend any public function, even a funeral, although she was permitted to attend the weekly market. Non-Anlu women's gardens were levelled and their crops uprooted. This was a distinctly New Anlu activity; the Old Anlu would never have approved the uprooting of crops. Some farms were even confiscated. The problem of destroying crops took Anlu into court where thirty-five members were fined 170 pounds plus 186 pounds for lawyers' fees. It seems that Anlu members thought that, since their party had won, the government,

police, and courts were theirs. The court case apparently ended crop destruction (Ritzenthaler 1972:403).

These are the only events reported. Just how and when the uprising ended is not known.<sup>22</sup> Ardener writes that eventually peace was made and things settled down, although to a new order. The Anlu leader sat on the local council. The Roman Catholics and Anlu became reconciled, indeed they teamed up against the American Baptists who were said to have referred to the women as 'anlu-nuts' (Ardener 1973:431). Anlu's two top leaders, the Queen (Fuam) and the Spokeswoman (Muana) were in time decorated by the President of Camerouns, probably on the recommendation of KNDP leaders, for their role in the events of 1953 (Nkwi 1976:183). The women's defiance of the chiefs helped to erode chiefly authority, and the chiefs lost considerable prestige and power in this struggle (Nkwi 1976:183). Other costs were a reduction in the food supply since women did not have time for their regular farming and domestic chores and the loss of a school year for many children (Nkwi 1976:180-181).

#### Women Manipulated by Men?

Anlu's political element bears closer scrutiny. Ritzenthaler and Nkwi take the initiative away from the women and give it to KNDP politicians whom they say used the women and reorganized traditional Anlu for their own ends. "It began to dawn on many women that they had been used as political tools. The evolution of events in 1958 left no shadow of doubt that Anlu was a KNDP brain-child" (Nkwi 1976:178, 182). "The fact that perhaps 99% plus of these women are illiterate made the introduction of falsehoods relatively easy" (Ritzenthaler 1972:400).

This explanation, however, is not well supported. First, the assumption that people who cannot read or write are, as a group, any more gullible than other sectors of the populace is unwarranted. Second, since one of Anlu's leaders, the District Officer, was a person of "rare intelligence" (Nkwi 1976:183) who later became a judge in the Customary Court, it is unlikely that she would stand by and let several men use women in disadvantageous ways.

Ardener's (1973) account places the initiative for the uprising with the women. Her interpretation "rings truer" for a number of reasons. Her main source of data was Francis Nkwain, the son of one of the leaders, who had access to firsthand data from the women's perspective. Nkwi's study, on the other hand, is of the predominantly male Kom political institutions, and the uprising, a minor part of the study, is interpreted from a male political perspective.

Furthermore, the movement had the overwhelming support of Kom women. To suggest that a few men working behind-the-scenes could mobilize thousands of women had there not been deeply felt grievances seems highly unlikely. Thus, even if the KNDP started the false rumor about the selling of land, there were other grievances such as the extra work involved in contour farming that aroused the women. They were also angry with the Chief over Fulani cattle destroying their crops. And, although it is mentioned, they

probably harbored long-standing resentment towards the chieftainship. The previous chief had suppressed the office of Queen, their most important political office with roots in ancient history. The Queen had wielded considerable authority and even had her own stool, symbolizing chiefly rank. On the other side, there obviously was a close link between Anlu's top leaders and one or two KNDP politicians. Anlu reportedly sent the Kom KNDP leader, who won the election and became a minister, a gift of 83 pounds sterling, a motherly gesture no doubt towards the "son" they had helped to power. And, as already mentioned, a KNDP government later publicly recognized the contribution of Anlu's two leaders (Nkwi 1976:183). But the question of who used whom is another matter. Perhaps it was a case of working together for mutual benefit. Anlu's leaders may have felt it was in their own and the women's best interests to take advice from KNDP politicians to get rid of a government they both disliked.

Neither Ritzenthaler nor Nkwi present any concrete evidence showing that Anlu's leaders were duped or co-opted by the KNDP, although they assert it many times. Their perspective fits a male conspiracy theory that finds it hard to conceive of women taking the lead because, in Nkwi's words, "Man is usually the being that conceives plans, decides and leads as well as executes" (1976:1929). The same allegation, it will be recalled, was made by the administration about the Kikuyu revolt of the women in 1948 (p. 30). It was also made about the 1982 women's tax revolt in eastern Zaire (Newbury 1984:35, 46-48). And colonial administrators repeatedly tried to find evidence of male direction behind the women's protest movements in southeastern Nigeria from 1925-1950 although they were eventually forced to concede that the women acted independently (Mba 1982:104-105, 292).

Let us now examine some structural factors that may be associated with the women's militancy.

### Militant Tradition and Women's Associations

Kom women have a history of militant action. There is a story that long ago when all the active males in the community had been killed through the enemy's treachery, the women took their place. They donned warrior garb, camouflaged themselves with vines, armed, and successfully repelled the enemy's attack (Ardener 1973:428).

According to another version of this legend, the Kom were required to pay yearly tribute to the Mejang chief by building a house in his palace compound. They resented having to pay tribute and one day refused to perform the required services. Mejang warriors set out to quell this rebellion when all the Kom men were away on a hunting expedition. Their plan was to capture the women and use them as hostages to suppress the rebellion. The Queen-mother, on learning of this plan, organized the women. Camouflaged in male clothing and armed with spears and sticks, they went on the offensive. Many died in the struggle. The Mejang were defeated and took to their heels. The women sent a message to the Mejang that they were no longer to ask for tribute. When the men returned and the women told them what had happened, their deeds were greatly admired (Nkwi 1976:131-132).

This militant tradition, seen in the wearing of men's clothing and covering the body with vines, appears to have been kept alive through the traditional practice of Anlu and in the 1958 marches and demonstrations.

There are several women's associations of varying importance that serve as a basis for collective action (Kaberry 1952:97-101). The most prestigious is the afaf, many of whose office-bearers are the wives and daughters of village heads and important lineage heads. Entry is gained by contributions of food and drink, and, to obtain the highest rank, a woman must be able to provide a number of feasts. This gives the skillful and energetic farmer an advantage over her less skillful and less diligent sisters. Status within afaf societies is widely recognized. Kinsmen, both male and female, will cooperate to secure the means needed for a woman's advancement. Thus, these societies provide women with positions of prestige and authority outside the kin groups and serve as an incentive for them to produce more than is needed for bare subsistence. And while ascribed position gives women an advantage in obtaining high rank, the afaf society provides ambitious, energetic, and talented women with an avenue to acquire prestige and leadership positions.

### Land Tenure System

The Kom system of land tenure forms part of a wider network within the kinship and political organization in which ownership of land is inseparable from moral responsibilities. Arable tracts are held in trust, administered, and allocated by lineage heads for the benefit of their dependents (Kaberry 1952: 47).<sup>23</sup> The lineage head is bound by a set of traditional obligations to his dependents, which sharply limits his scope for arbitrary action. While respect and obedience is given to him by his tenants, "there is also a strong sense of their own rights and of his corresponding obligations" (Kaberry 1952:39).

Although women are not eligible because of their sex for the headship of kin or political groups, they enjoy the same rights as men to usufruct (Kaberry 1952:48). The allocation of land to a member of a lineage, male or female, carries the implicit assurance of security of tenure. If a change must be made, the lineage head attempts to obtain the consent of the person farming the land. Women regard the plots as their own, carefully safeguard their boundaries, and rest secure in the knowledge that, under ordinary circumstances, the plots will be their during their lifetimes.

Once a woman no longer requires a certain plot, she can usually decide to whom it should go, the choice being restricted to members of the compound or members of the lineage living elsewhere (Kaberry 1952:48-49). A daughter is given land by her mother which she regards as her own and for which, by the age of 14 or 15, she is directly responsible. After marriage her rights remain, and these, together with her farming skills, give her considerable economic independence. Even when her husband belongs to another village where there is plenty of land, she is reluctant to abandon plots she has farmed for several years and leave the companionship of her mother, sisters, and friends. She may live in her husband's village but return several times a week, sometimes staying overnight, to tend her plots (Kaberry 1952:40).

Should she leave her husband or leave his compound upon widowhood, she is able to obtain land from the lineages of either of her parents and grow crops to support herself and her children.

The main factors determining the acreage farmed by a woman, provided she resides in the village of her husband's lineage and there are friendly relations between him and his lineage head, are her age, size of family, state of health, and energy. High rank is not especially important in determining the size of plots a woman cultivates. Certainly a senior wife or a wife who is a daughter or granddaughter or a lineage head derives some benefit from rank; this is seen not so much in the size of the plots as in their location and fertility. Hence, the land tenure system gives women considerable room for individual initiative and decision-making as well as entrenched rights and responsibilities.

#### Women Manage their Farms and Control their Produce

There is a saying among the Kom, "Men own the land, women own the crops." Women assume full responsibility for the management of their farms and the control of their crops (Kaberry 1952:35). In fact, most agricultural activities are their concern. Men clear the trees and heavy bush but it is doubtful whether they spend more than 10 days a year on such tasks. Often the women have to cut away tall grasses and low undergrowth.

The woman decides when and what to plant and the period of grass fallow. If she decides not to farm a particular plot, she is free to lend it to a friend or kinsman. "The practice indicates the confidence which the men repose in the judgment of the women, in their recognition that the women as farmers should in most cases be left to decide the use to which the land is put." Even if the plot was given to the woman by her husband, she does not have to consult him first and he generally supports her in the case of a dispute (Kaberry 1952:44).

Women dispose of their crops as they see fit. They have, of course, obligations to their lineage heads and their husbands and children whom they feed. A woman has full rights to any tubers, gourds, greens, and legumes that she has grown. The lineage head takes the best of the maize and sometimes the best of the guinea corn and finger millet. The remainder is at her disposal. She can decide to whom to make gifts of food, and a husband has no right to take food for gifts from his wife's store (Kaberry 1952:95).

Along with wide areas of decision-making in agriculture, women have considerable self-government. The crop rizza is planted on high hill-tops where other crops do not flourish. The plots are small and the lineage head does not bother to demarcate the boundaries. On a set day the women of the compound climb the hill where each pegs out a piece of ground sufficient for her needs. If there is any squabbling, the senior wife of the lineage head steps in and settles the dispute.

Women's responsibility for agriculture is not regarded by them or by men as a sign of inferior status. In fact, just the opposite. It confers

status and is an integral part of female self-respect and dignity. The industrious, skillful farmer is much admired.

Women's rank is based largely on achievement. Energy and skill in farming are important to success as they provide the means by which a woman can gain entrance to, and rank in, a prestige conferring society such as the afaf (Kaberry 1952:48).

To conclude, women's rights to land and crops, recognized and respected by men, gave them security and important areas of decision-making. The freedom they enjoyed in the running of their farms, the granting of temporary loans of land to kin and friends, the transmitting of their land rights to close kin, and the allocating and disposing of their produce gave them leverage and status. This kind of milieu undoubtedly helped to develop self-reliant, tough individuals, well aware of their rights and obligations, who were used to making their own decisions and defending their rights. An organization of such women with shared grievances is a force to be reckoned with.

#### THE WOMEN'S WAR, 1929

My third example of female militancy, by far the best known and the largest in terms of women involved, is the Women's War or Aba Riots, as the British called them, of southeastern Nigeria.<sup>24</sup> Here for about a month, tens of thousands of Igbo and Ibibio women rebelled against colonial authority by demonstrating, destroying government buildings, and harassing and even assaulting government agents, primarily the warrant chiefs. More than 100 women were killed or wounded in the clashes and property damage was estimated at more than 60,000 pounds.

#### The Uprising

The riots commenced at Oloko when Warrant Chief Okugo, under instructions from the District Officer, tried to assess the taxable wealth of the people by having the women, children, and domestic animals counted. Since domestic animals were often owned by the women, a rumor spread that the women were soon to be taxed like the men. It could scarcely have come at a worst time as the people were experiencing a rise in the cost of living coupled with declining profits from the palm-products trade. On November 23, 1929, an agent of Chief Okugo entered the compound of a married woman, Nwanyeruwa, and told her to count her sheep and goats. She retorted angrily: "Was your mother counted?" Thereupon "they closed, seizing each other by the throat" (Perham 1937:207).<sup>25</sup>

Nwanyeruwa's story convinced other women that they were all soon to be taxed. Word went out far and wide through the market and kinship networks and women converged from all over Warri Province to "make war on" Chief Okugo. (This form of punishment will be discussed later.) They demanded his cap of office (the official insignia) meaning his resignation. After several days of mass meetings at the district office the women were given written assurances that they would not be taxed. They also succeeded in getting Okugo arrested and convicted of "spreading news likely to cause

alarm" and of physical assault against women. He was sentenced to two years imprisonment. Nwanyeruwa became a heroine for resisting what was viewed as an arbitrary attempt by the warrant chiefs to impose taxes.

News of this victory spread and thousands of women in Calabar and Owerri Provinces tried to get rid of their warrant chiefs and the native administration.

Demonstrations in front of the chiefs' houses, the seizure of chiefs' caps, and the rough treatment of their persons, resulted from a belief that the chiefs had betrayed them to the Government. The lesser Native Administration employees, court messengers, and the clerks, were also singled out for obloquy . . . When the women were called upon to give evidence, [at the subsequent investigation] they uttered a flood of criticism against the corruption and injustice of chiefs and courts . . . (Perham 1937:216-217).

Native courts in 16 administrative centers were attacked and most destroyed or burned. Among the buildings burned were those of Aba, a major administration center, hence the name of the riots. A few jails were broken into and the prisoners released. European stores and trading centers, Barclays Bank, buildings at the railway stations, and court clerks' homes were attacked and a few looted.

An English lieutenant, who led a platoon of 30 Hausa soldiers into Opobo, an important entrepot on the Niger delta, said of the women:

Some were naked wearing only wreaths of grass round their heads, waist and knees and some were wearing tails made of grass [perhaps symbolizing the "vultures" of a male Ibibio dance]. The District Officer began to speak to the crowd. Only a few could hear him owing to the noise the others were making. During all this time reinforcements of women were continuing to arrive both by river and land. Some of these were carrying machetes . . . During this time when I was standing with the District Officer I moved up and down the fence (which marked off the administrative offices) telling the women not to make a noise. They took no notice and told me that I was the son of a pig and not a woman . . . The court clerk and policeman were interpreting for me and told me the women, speaking in native language, were calling the soldiers pigs and were telling the soldiers that they knew they wouldn't fire but they didn't care whether the soldiers but their throats. (Minutes of Evidence by a Commission of Inquiry into Certain Incidents at Opoko, Abak and Utu-Etim-Ekpo in December 1929, 1930:7. Quoted in Ifeka-Moller 1975:129, 143).

Clashes between the women and troops on two occasions (one being the above mentioned Opobo) left more than 50 women dead and 50 wounded from gunfire. No man, either African or British, was seriously wounded (Van Allen 1972:174).

All the male witnesses, Europeans who had been long in the country as well as Africans, insisted that they had never seen anything like this happen before. "I'm an old man, and have been chief for a long time . . . In all my life I never saw women carrying on in this fashion before. I never before saw the women flinging sand at their chiefs or white men or attacking them with sticks" (Perham 1937:211-212).

These disturbances disrupted an area of 5,000 square miles and continued into December, but by December 20th the worst was over. A few sporadic outbreaks occurred in 1930. The rest of December was taken up with pacification. Punitive expeditions demolished compounds, provisions were taken from the people to feed the troops, and property was confiscated to pay the fines levelled against villages for damages (Gailey 1970:135-37).

### Multiple Grievances

According to the Aba Commission of Inquiry, which made an exhaustive examination of the disturbances taking evidence from 485 witnesses, the main cause of the rioting was the widespread belief that the government was about to tax women. The previous imposition of taxes on men had met widespread opposition.

He [an administrative officer detailed to travel around and discuss the proposed taxation with the people] was received everywhere with the most pessimistic calculations of their resources and the gloomiest forebodings as to the effects of taxation. The Warrant Chiefs prophesied their demise at the hands of their angry people, and even offered up their caps of office: the people asked if the Government would not withdraw its objections to the sale of their children . . .

During 1928 direct taxes were for the first time collected throughout the South-eastern Provinces, not without difficulty, but without any of the serious disturbances in anticipation of which 500 additional police had been enrolled (Perham 1937:204-205).

Discontent with the system of native authority, the Commission concluded, was an important contributory cause. The women no longer wanted cases to be heard in the native courts or, at the very least, wanted women to serve on native courts and to have a woman appointed a district officer.

Warrant chiefs, the link between the colonial regime and the people, carried out the district officers' orders in the villages. The women had long harbored deeply felt grievances against the warrant chiefs whose rule was seen as corrupt and arbitrary. Some chiefs helped themselves to the women's agricultural produce and domestic animals. It was said that they married women without giving them the traditional right to refuse a suitor and without paying the full brideprice (Ifeka-Moller 1975:129; Van Allan 1972:172). One woman wrote of "the tyrannical ruling of the chiefs over their subjects" and pleaded for the warrants to be taken away from "the roguish and cruel chiefs until such time when we will be ready by your favorable aid to make choice of those we will like to rule over us" (Mbsa 1982:87).

Not only did the women oppose the warrant chiefs' rule but they also opposed the way the chiefs were selected and their lifelong tenure of office. The warrant chiefs had usurped the place of the traditional rulers, the ezeala. Some women favored the election of chiefs for a definite period of time. One woman at the Aba Commission of Inquiry put it this way:

Even women are taken as wives on probation in order to test them. If they prove satisfactory during the probation period they are retained as wives. If not they are sent away. We want a similar principle based in connection with the appointment of the chiefs of the court (Mba 1982:41-42).

Another woman complained: "We don't want chiefs . . . Instead of coming home to consult women, they generally agree with the District Officer straight away" (ibid.: 88).

Margery Perham discusses the reasons for the administration's unpopularity.

Had these courts been really native; had they had any roots in the past or been in harmony with existing institutions and social groupings, the removal of their white presidents, [the district officers] might have produced the healthy development which was doubtless expected. The real condition only revealed itself by stages, as the continuing pathological condition of these provinces demanded repeated attempts at investigation and reform . . . Attention was called to the position of the so-called Warrant Chiefs.<sup>26</sup> Chiefs in the sense used in the north and in the south-west did not exist, and the word here used for those men who for various reasons had been picked out by the Administration and given warrants as judges in the Native Courts. These men were often of recognized authority in their own small unit but not . . . outside that unit. Sometimes they were clever, pushing men who knew how to catch the eye of the European officer. Sometimes they were rich enough to bribe a mass meeting into choosing them. In relation to the people they were often unrepresentative and unpopular . . . Between this artificial court and the busy district officer, who no longer sat upon it, responsibility was lost, or rather fell into the hands of the semi-literate Court Clerk . . . He was in charge of the uniformed court-messengers, who abused their position so much that this report stigmatized them as 'licensed libertines.' (On one occasion when, in company with an officer, I entered a compound in the Obo 'bush,' two children ran, crying in terror, to their grandfather. He comforted them by saying, 'Don't be frightened children. These are not Court Messengers.') . . . The Report asserted 'that we are administering these provinces through a junior political service composed of semi-educated Africans who in many cases are alien to the people they control (Perham 1937:201-202).

It is not at all surprising that warrant chiefs, unable to call upon traditional obedience or wield any of the accepted sanctions, should resort

to supporting their positions by drawing on the strong, alien authority of the colonial government. Nor is it surprising that the warrant chiefs became corrupt and overbearing as the people showed their disrespect and resentment towards them as agents of the white rulers (Perham 1937:234).

Precolonial Igbo and Ibibio societies were relatively democratic in the sense that power and authority were widely distributed among individuals and groups and between men and women to such an extent that the system was labelled a "dual-sex" political system with men and women having their own kinship institutions, age grades, and secret and title societies that governed their own affairs as well as an area of shared responsibilities (Okonjo 1976). Individual autocratic authority was virtually unknown since individuals could not exercise authority outside the limitations imposed by their position in small groups, and there were many groups. Leaders' authority was based on shared beliefs and answered to common needs. In such a system, although women were not equal in power to men, power was widely dispersed between the sexes and local groupings, and women had a significant role in the political life of the village. Their influence, informal and indirect, was made effective by their collective action.

When the British took over government, they created specialized political institutions that took into account traditional male institutions but ignored female institutions, resulting in women being shut out of participation in local government. Only men became warrant chiefs, members of native councils, court clerks, interpreters, messengers, etc. Women's associations were forbidden to discipline their members. Their title societies and age grades lost their executive and judicial responsibilities which were taken over by warrant chiefs and the native courts.

Since the women had been accustomed to considerable self-government, rulings handed down by African men on matters that they had previously handled themselves were particularly galling. Their testimonies at the Inquiry following the Aba Riots make it clear that they saw themselves victimized by the chiefs and the native courts, particularly in matters of major concern to them, marriage and divorce. Hence, the women's determination to rid themselves of the warrant chiefs and native courts or, at least, to reform the courts by having women serve on them. Since the courts were the problem, they felt they had no way to voice their grievances other than through extra-constitutional channels such as mass demonstrations.

Mba's contention that the women were not against the colonial regime but only against the chiefs challenges the Aba Commission's conclusion that the riots were against all constitutional authority and is not supported by all the evidence. In their testimonies, she states, the women drew a sharp distinction between the warrant chiefs and the "white man's government." One witness stated: "We did not come to fight but simply to tell government that the chiefs have been oppressing us." On a number of occasions, the women protected white officers and did not want them to leave because they felt their interests had been served by colonialism.

The change it brought about in their economic activities and their increased legal rights under the native courts system, despite the

abuses of the chiefs, were to the advantage of women. Therefore the women did not demand the elimination of the courts but merely a return to the system of administrative officers presiding over the courts . . . Another witness, Ejiatu, explained: "Why we ask that our cases be heard by white men is that we have been oppressed a great deal as regards court cases" (Mba 1982:90-91).

On the other hand, Mba suggests that the women were attempting to manipulate the British officials. Since their attempt to get rid of the warrant chiefs and taxation had been arrested by the government, their last hope of achieving these goals lay with the government's goodwill. Hence, they made an effort to please the government.

If, however, the women did not want to abolish the colonial system or the native courts but to reform them, why did they destroy so many native courts, so much government and European property, and issue an ultimatum that all strangers were to leave (Perham 1937:209, 212)? It must be granted that in riots and demonstrations small groups of activists can act in ways that would not meet the majority's approval.

What probably occurred was that in a heterogeneous movement that brought women of different ethnic groups temporarily together from over a wide area, there was limited agreement on goals. Beyond their dislike of taxation and warrant chiefs, some women probably wanted to reform the colonial system, while others wanted to abolish it.

#### "Making War" or "Sitting on a Man"

An intriguing question is how did the women effect so rapid and so massive a mobilization? It seems that messages were sent out via village-based associations and age groups and through the women's market and kinship networks to other villages calling women to a meeting (mikiri) to decide what to do. A palm leaf, which was both a symbol of trouble and a call for help, was sent around (Perham 1937:207). Women met all over the countryside in various market squares, the common place for large meetings. Once on a march "their resolution was extraordinary." They repeatedly said they were prepared to die. In at least one instance, they marched on even though they had been fired upon and lives had been lost (Perham 1937:212).

In precolonial Igboland, women's base of political power lay in their own groups of which there were many kinds. Of the variety of women's associations, which performed a wide range of social, economic and political functions, the only ones to be discussed here are the mikiri since they played a prominent role in mobilizing women in the events of 1929. These village-wide gatherings of all adult women based on common residence were originally called inyemedi (wives of the lineage) and, under colonialism came to be called mikiri or mitiri (from meeting) (Van Allen 1972:169-170). These groups established rules that applied to both men and women in areas of special concern to women such as crops, livestock, and markets.

Mikiri played an important role in women's daily self-rule, serving as a forum where women could air complaints about people breaking the rules.

Women were accustomed to protecting their own interests as farmers, traders, wives, and mothers, and if their requests for compliance with the rules were ignored they resorted to a number of tactics to punish the offender and bring him/her back into line. The offender was first warned and asked to mend his/her ways. If compliance was not forthcoming, then other tactics such as strikes, boycotts, force, and "making war" were brought into action.

To "make war" or to "sit on a man" the women gathered at his compound, usually at night. They bound their heads with ferns symbolizing war; they smeared their faces with ashes; they wore short loincloths; and they carried sticks wreathed with young palm fronds. The sticks supposedly invoked the power of the female ancestors. At the compound the women danced, sang derisive songs outlining their complaints against the offender, banged on his hut with their pestles, covered it with mud, and in extreme cases, destroyed the hut and "roughed up" the man. They continued this raucous behavior until the man repented and promised to mend his ways. "Making war" was the strongest sanction women had for punishing wrongdoers and for enforcing conformity to their rules and judgements. It was regarded by the community as a legitimate institution. Its likeness to the Kom's Anlu is apparent.

During the rebellion, the women dressed in the same way and their behavior during November and December of 1929 can be seen as an extension of their traditional method of punishment only carried out on a much broader and more destructive scale.<sup>27</sup>

There were no particularly outstanding leaders of the rebellion but rather a consensual leadership drawn from the local level. Each village selected its own leaders who held no authority beyond their own group. This helps to explain some of the contradictions in goals and tactics. The movement eschewed hierarchy, emphasizing rather the equality of all women. One "leader" when asked whether she was a leader, replied: "We have no special leaders. If any woman has anything to say in connection with the disturbances, she comes forward and says it." Another said: "I was not the head amongst the women of Azumini, but I was elected to be their spokeswoman." Some "leaders" had been the village headwomen but many had held no previous positions of leadership. They tended to be literate and middle-aged and, like the women who selected them, farmers and traders. Intelligent, bold, and articulate, they commanded strong loyalty from their supporters (Mba 1982:81-85, 293).

### The Outcome

The Women's War was not an isolated event but the culmination of a decade of increasingly militant protest on the part of women who felt their interests, both economic and political, threatened. Their protest included several riots, the Dancing Women Movement of 1925, and the Spirit Movement of 1927 which disturbed many Igbo villages (Ardener 1975:141).

With the publication of the Aba Commission of Inquiry Report in 1930, it became clear that the women had achieved what they wanted on several issues. They were successful in getting the government not to tax them.

Many warrant chiefs were dismissed and others prosecuted for corruption. The courts were to be reorganized along the lines the women had recommended. For example, chiefs were to be appointed for definite terms; people and, in particular, women were to be consulted about their appointment; and some younger "enlightened" men were to be appointed along with the traditional rulers, the ezeala. A few women were made members of the native courts. The women must have been particularly gratified with the new regulations concerning chiefs. For example, the Owerri Province Annual Report 1930 notes that "Practically no new chief has been selected without the consent of the women of his town, and he is in their hands if he wishes to keep their goodwill."

Mba concludes that, while the Women's War was the most massive and effective of the women's movements, it did not "provide permanent solutions to the problems of social and economic change, induced by colonialism, which affected women" (p. 97). Viewed from the perspective of several decades, it achieved a mixture of successes and failures. It succeeded in getting the system of warrant chiefs dismantled but did not win greater long-term representation for women in local government. And the taxation of women was eventually imposed despite the women's strong and sustained opposition.

After the 1929 disturbances, women from all areas of southeastern Nigeria continued to be concerned about matters that affected them such as the amount of taxes paid by men, economic encroachments by government, the workings of the native councils, and the prices of agricultural products. In the years 1932 to 1964 they staged a number of forceful mass movements, based on their traditional communal associations, that displayed the same coordination and control as in 1929 and aimed at promoting both their particular interests of their communities. Nor did their campaigns abate with the gaining of independence. Whenever they felt government policies were inimical to their interests, be it the colonial government or independent administrations, they took action (Mba 1982:98-134).

### Achievement Valued

Igbo society valued achievement for both men and women. A "big woman" and a "big man" combined good character, wisdom and common sense with wealth, generosity, articulateness, and persuasiveness. Wealth in itself did not bring prestige; wealth spent to benefit the community did. Age and wisdom brought respect where age alone carried little influence. Since the qualities of wisdom, articulateness, common sense, and generosity were valued more than birth and wealth, Igbo society provided conditions that supported leadership coming to the fore among women suddenly thrust together. This helps to explain the grassroots leadership in the Women's War.

Writing about the character of these women, Perham notes:

Such a movement is almost unthinkable among the more docile stay-at-home women of the greater part of eastern and southern Africa, but the West Coast women, at least in those parts where neither strong measures of conquest nor Islam have tamed them,

seem to be made of sterner stuff. The traveller from East Africa must be struck at once on his arrival in Igbo country by the huge crowd of strenuous, excited women who fill the markets and stream along the roads in pursuit of trade, and whose manner is markedly free both towards himself and their fellows (1937:211).

### Strong Economic Position But Denied Political Participation

The women's prominent position in the precolonial society was in part due to their strong economic position. They, like the Kom women, cultivated gardens and were entitled to the money from the same of their surplus crops.

An illuminating analysis by Caroline Ifeka-Moller points to several factors in accounting for the Women's Revolt (Ardener 1975:127-157). Igbo and Ibibio women by the late 1920s had achieved a strong economic position through their involvement in the production and distribution of palm oil and cassava. Beginning in the early 1900s and up to the 1930s, women played an increasingly important role in these industries. A large number of farmers had turned to cash crop production and a new generation of traders had emerged, among whom many were women. Men and women from the Igbo- and Ibibio-speaking Ngwa-Ohuhu clans of the Aba area became managers of large-scale palm-oil corporations and, significantly, it was women from these clans who led the early riots in the Women's War (Ardener 1975:137, 139).

The growing and selling of cassava as a cash crop, known as the "women's crop," added to the de facto power women were building up in the cash economy which would profoundly change the social relations between husbands and wives as men became more financially dependent upon their wives (Ottenberg 1959:215). By the 1930s, women in a village of Owerri Province regarded themselves as the food producers and crop owners, and all but one of the twenty crops cultivated were grown and owned by them (Ardener 1975:139-141).

As women's financial assets grew, they diversified their business interests and used their finances and other support to advance their children.

In the Uyo district of Ibibio country, women carried out the following economic activities; they were moneylenders, they brought canoes for transporting palm produce to the beaches of Calabar and Cross rivers, hired male labour to work their lands and paddle their canoes, brought titles for male children, and paid bridewealth for son's wives (Andreski 1979:98, 112, 127, 156 as quoted in Ardener 1975:137).

The women in Southern Nigeria wielded more power, authority, and influence in the precolonial period than at any other time. Their representation at the highest levels of government was institutionalized in a number of areas (Okonjo 1976:45-56; Mba 1982). With colonization, as has been discussed, they saw the erosion of their power and rights. This undoubtedly engendered resentment and antagonism towards the administrators, especially the warrant chiefs, fellow Africans who had profited from a

regime that many women considered illegitimate. Only a spark was needed to turn their frustration into outrage. This may be yet another factor that helps explain the women's contempt for the warrant chiefs. A discrepancy between a group's economic and political power--as when a commercially successful group loses or is prevented from acquiring political power--has proven on many occasions to be a powerful source of discontent leading to riots and revolutions.

### SOME UNIFORMITIES OF THE THREE CASES PRESENTED

We are attempting in this modest study to systematize our data on female militancy at a low level of generalization. There are obviously many differences between, for example, the relatively simple Thuku Disturbances that comprised demonstrations and a strike on two consecutive days and the much more complex Women's War that continued for more than a month and comprised demonstrations, the destruction of much property, the attacking of jails, etc. Regardless of the differences among these events, however, they are examples of female militancy and our focus is on their similarities. Our three examples are not necessarily typical of female militancy. We are not making any claim that other cases will conform to the uniformities that we have found. Sometimes one holds more strongly for one society than for another.

#### 1. The Pattern and Consequences of Militancy

The behavior of militant women in East and West Africa is strikingly similar despite differences in time, locale and culture. Both the Kom and the Kikuyu uttered a shrill call that brought other women to their aid. Kom and Igbo women went to the offender's compound where they danced, sang abusive and indecent songs, and hurled insults. Sometimes they physically assaulted him and destroyed his hut and other property.

In all three cases, women used a traditional sanctioning device, adapting it to their present circumstances. The sanctioning device, whether the quturama ng ania, anlu, or "making war," in all cases had a strong obscene element reminiscent of some western all-male sporting groups where scatological talk, sexual insults, and horseplay are prevalent. Kikuyu women exposed their genitals to the offender, Kom women urinated and defecated all over his compound, and Igbo women hurled sexual jibes at him and sang scurrilous songs. These exhibitions of vulgarity were meant to insult and embarrass the offender by showing the women's utter lack of respect for him. In these rituals of humiliation he was ridiculed, disgraced, and cast out from the community of law-abiding tribesmen until he displayed the proper contrition.

In these rituals the Igbo, Ibibio, and Kom women adopted male symbols, wore pieces of male clothing, and covered themselves with vines which may have been linked to a martial tradition in which women warriors went into battle camouflaged with vines. Identification with the male role may have signified the offender's failure to fulfill its obligations, and therefore, the end of male dominance and the taking over of male roles with all their prerogatives by women--a form of role reversal. In taking on the male role,

Kom women addressed men as if they were women--probably another form of insult. This topsy-turvy state of affairs could only be righted by the culprit repenting and assuming his proper role with all its obligations.

The results of the women's efforts were mixed and somewhat difficult to ascertain. In the Kom Uprising the women secured several of their numerous demands: an Anlu leader was allowed to sit on the local council and the Roman Catholics transferred several unpopular teachers. Ardener writes that things eventually settled down to a new order but fails to explain what this new order was (Ardener 1973:431).

The Thuku "Riot" alarmed the Europeans and the administration and there was a tax reduction. For a time there was some serious discussion about needed reforms. With Thuku's deportation and the collapse of his movement, however, the Europeans and administrators soon returned to their complacency and dismissed the "riot" as not providing evidence that drastic reforms were needed.

The Women's War was successful in deferring the taxation of women for a while and in getting rid of the corrupt system of warrant chiefs but, in the long run, it did little to enhance women's political power and authority.

There are several constraints on women's political participation that should be considered. Excluded from the formal political structure, women had to resort to extra-legal channels to voice their grievances. This required verve and audacity, was dramatic and heroic, but was costly in time and effort. Once the explosive aspects of their ventures were over, the system settled back into its routine ways or altered slightly.

As wives, mothers, farmers, and traders, women were already overburdened with diverse demands on their time and energy. They produced and prepared the food that fed large families. They mothered many children. They carried out the tiring chores of getting water and firewood. Study after study has shown that African women average considerably more hours of work a day than men, much of it physical labor. To engage in a riot or a rebellion was an enormous drain on their already taxed resources. To engage in a riot or rebellion over any extended period of time was beyond the capacity of most women. Hence, their involvement could be for a limited time only, while those in the colonial administration had no such constraint.

Another characteristic of female militancy is the lack of rewards for its leadership. Instead of securing women formal or public positions, as so often happened with men, they remained largely anonymous. Although Kikuyu women were the heroines of the Thuku demonstration, taking over leadership from the rejected males, it was African men who continued the negotiations with the colonial administrators after the demonstration. In the western press at least, the names of a number of African men connected with the Thuku demonstration were recorded but the sole woman we know of is Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru. Again, Mamma Abula and Mamma Neng are the only women mentioned in the documentation of the Anlu Uprising although thousands of women were involved. The Women's War is an exception. Since there was a Commission of Inquiry and since there has been so much research on it, the names of many participants are known.

As has been said many times before, if there is to be any lessening of the gap between male and female status, women must move into public roles and hold formal positions, and there must be an end to the bias that sees women's activities as inconsequential. Otherwise they will continue to be the nameless doers of history.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. Indigenous Social Structure Relatively Egalitarian with Status Gained Largely Through Achievement

In these societies men had more power, more wealth, and more status than women. But, although men owned the more profitable crops, received the bulk of the money from bridewealth, controlled the land through patrilineages, and held the most prestigious titles, women were by no means without wealth, power, and autonomy. They were disadvantaged in comparison to men, but they were not servile or entirely dependent upon them. Women held an important and respected position in their societies where they had considerable control over the disposal of their surplus crops, and freedom to travel and attend to their own affairs. They could not achieve the highest titles and political offices, but they could attain considerable power and prestige. The gap, then, between men's and women's status was not so great that it was unthinkable for women to challenge male, even colonial, authority.

The Nigerian women were in an especially strong economic position, being a rising commercial group with control over considerable economic assets. But, like women in the other two British colonies, they were denied participation in the formal political structure. They, as well as the Kenyan prostitutes, were in a position of status inconsistency and, as has been repeatedly demonstrated, such people are likely recruits to social movements.

Traditionally, these societies were relatively egalitarian where status based on achievement was stressed over status based on ascription. Precolonial Kikuyu and Igbo societies were chiefless, decentralized, and fragmented into a number of autonomous communities administered by councils of elders. Talented people rose to positions of leadership (Tignor 1971:341-342).

A woman's status depended more on her own achievements than on the achievements of her husband or her father. For instance among the Igbo, membership in the ikipore ani, a representative body of women, was sometimes based on lineage but always based on achievement. To become an opinion leader and eligible for membership, a woman had to demonstrate the qualities of logic and the ability to "talk well." Since achievement was culturally valued, women with talents were encouraged to develop them whether it was in farming, trading, or organizing. Hence, it is not surprising to find a grassroots leadership springing to the fore in the events studied. Leadership of a women's movement could provide energetic and talented women with an avenue to prestige and authority, at least among the women, and recognition by the men. Because of this emphasis on achievement, it follows that women lacked a deep respect for age, sex, birth or formal authority as criteria of rank, probably an important factor in their readiness to rebel.

### 3. Well-Entrenched Rights and Areas of Jurisdiction

In these societies women traditionally had had a fair measure of self-government and well-established rights. Igbo society has been characterized as a "dual-sex" political system with women's interests represented at all levels. The Kikuyu and Kom had a more limited dual-sex system.

Women made important economic contributions, producing the bulk of the food that fed their families. Since they did the day-to-day farming and much of the petty trading, there were important areas that, to a large extent, fell under their jurisdiction as did certain ritual spheres having to do with female rites of passage. The rules and regulations they established in these areas were seen as legitimate by the community at large.

Having had considerable self-government, women were accustomed to presenting and defending viewpoints, making and enforcing rules, learning to compromise, and in general had developed useful political skills. These skills, in turn, gave them self-confidence and self-images as independent political actors--bold, competent women who matter-of-factly handled their own affairs.<sup>29</sup> Any encroachment upon, or abrogation of, their rights, be it by chiefs, agricultural officers, colonial administrators, or even the head of state, was met with righteous indignation and a determination to resist.

### 4. A Tradition of Collective Even Militant Action

Women apparently understood the importance of female solidarity, that in unity lies strength. Perham notes that in the Women's War the women called themselves Oha Ndi Nyiom roughly translated as "women world" or "spirit of womanhood" and that "When the character of the riots themselves is reviewed, the overwhelming impression is the vigor and solidarity of the women" (1937:211, 214).

Leith-Ross, an astute observer of African women, makes a similar observation:

Amongst the Ibo, . . . the women do play an influential part, not only by native custom but because of their inherent vitality, independence of views, courage, self-confidence, desire for gain and worldly standing. More than the men, they seem to be able to cooperate, to stand by each other even in difficulties, and to follow a common aim . . . Among the women, there seems to be something--perhaps merely the bond of sex--that links them up over wide areas so that a woman's call to women would echo far beyond the boundaries of her own town (1939:21-22).

Anlu at its peak was estimated to have 99% of Kom women behind it (Ritzenthaler 1972:401). In these societies, women traditionally had their own institutions and associations, and it was their collective strength that gave women political clout.<sup>30</sup> The disturbances examined here were not unique but part of historical patterns. Time and again women demonstrated their ability to mobilize rapidly to protect their common interests.

Collective action provided a way of handling matters of particular concern to women and of seeing that their rules and regulations were enforced. Many of their tactics--ridicule, harrassment, fines, strikes, mass demonstrations, physical assault, destruction of property, and ostracism--depended for the effectiveness on the cooperation of all women. One reason for women's solidarity probably lies in the separateness of men's and women's worlds. Women developed strong relationships with their mothers, sisters, and other women, and it was to them that they turned for all kinds of support. Or to put it another way, they were free from a psychological dependence on men.

Female militancy was enshrined in the folklore in the form of heroines, legends, martial symbols, and distinctive garb. The Kom had a tale of women warriors repelling the enemy and the bravery of Kikuyu women was extolled in the Kanegenuri. Wreathing the head in young ferns, swathing sticks in palm fronds, wearing pieces of men's clothing, and covering the body with vines were symbols of female militancy. It was not that such militancy occurred frequently or even regularly, but it happened and was not forgotten.<sup>31</sup> Since the folklore provided role models such as Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru and Nyanyeruwa as well as a tradition of successful militancy, it facilitated its recurrence.

##### 5. Failure of African Male Leadership and an Unpopular Colonial Government

While the colonial government can be faulted for being insensitive to Africans' needs in general, it was even more insensitive to the needs, rights, and aspirations of African women. The colonial system was particularly disliked by the women who lost the most in power and self-government under it. Women's political institutions were ignored by the British when they set up government. Women were excluded from the administration while African men were brought into the system at the lower levels and allocated the available prestigious and authoritative positions. This gave individual African men great power and status as the new elite in the tribe.

The clash between the government and the women came out most clearly at the level of local government where the colonial system directly impinged on the everyday lives of the people. The women's strongest hostility was reserved not for the British but for the Africans in their employ. These chiefs, headmen and tribal police often abused their power, exploiting the women who, being among societies' most vulnerable members, often had to shoulder a disproportionate share of government-imposed burdens. In the women's eyes, these men were often seen as corrupt collaborators who were not only cooperating with, but profiteering from, the colonial regime. At the Thuku demonstrations, the women taunted and ridiculed the African police and defiantly confronted their loaded rifles. Likewise, they scathingly rejected their own male leaders, whom they saw as "selling out" to the British, and pursued a course of action diametrically opposed to what the men had advocated. In Ingololand, the warrant chiefs were hated for their arbitrary and corrupt rule and the women had only contempt for the native courts. The Kom chief was unpopular as were several government agents who tried to introduce changes, and Anlu women, disgusted with the courts, set

up their own. Since the women, disgusted with the courts, set up their own. Since the women had lost faith in the institutional channels for settling grievances, they resorted to extra-institutional channels.

African police under British command in both the Thuku and Aba riots, by firing on unarmed demonstrators and killing and wounding more than 149, provided the women's movements with martyrs and carved out a niche for themselves in African history as the bully boys of an unpopular regime.

NOTES

1. A shorter version of this paper was published in Perspectives on Power, Jean F. O'Barr (ed.), Durham: Duke University Press, 1982, pp. 50-72. In this version there is more material on the Thuku Disturbances which strengthens my argument and the paper has been considerably revised. Earlier versions were given at the Conference on Third World Women and Power, Center for International Development, Duke University, 1981 and the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research on Women, Oxford University, 1984. I am indebted to the participants for many helpful comments. Special thanks are due Greet Kershaw, Rita Gallin, Shirley Ardener, Helen Callaway, Tabitha Kariogo, and Sister Joseph Agbasiere for their stimulating and useful suggestions.
2. I am indebted to Rosberg and Nottingham (1966), Ross (1927), and Papers Relating to Native Disturbances in Kenya (1922) for most of the material on the "riot" itself.
3. For a discussion of the legitimacy of African grievances and a scathing attack on the self-interested settlers' policy, see Ross, 1927:217-237.
4. See Ross (1927) and Berman and Lonsdale (1980) for a much fuller discussion of the Kenyan government's efforts to control African labor.
5. Kenya National Archives (KNA):FH/1, FH/2, Fort Hall District Annual Reports, 1920-21, 1921-22.
6. KNA:FH/24, Fort Hall District Annual Report, 1924.
7. While Muriuki was writing about the period up to 1900, his field work was done in 1967-68, and his informants were discussing chiefs' actions during their life-time which would cover a later period. These abuses continued as long as chiefs held unrestrained political power which was well into the 1930s. Much of this discussion on chiefs is based on Tignor's 1971 article.
8. One may correctly doubt Muchuchu's ability to recall Nyanjiru's exact words some forty years later but her message obviously made a strong impression on him and since it was short and clear, his paraphrasing is, in all likelihood, accurate.
9. Personal communication with Frederick Murage, December, 1984.
10. KNA:PC4/1/2. Kikuyu Provincial Annual Report, 1922.
11. Bujra, as I have pointed out, takes issue with the view that prostitutes operated from brothels and were paid by the brothel-owner. She argues that these early prostitutes worked independently and were beholden to no one (1975:221-222).
12. This interpretation was first suggested by Greet Kershaw and is strengthened by Bujra's analysis.

13. Besides the accounts already footnoted, the Fort Hall District Annual Report, 1922, KNA:FH/2 was also checked.
14. Jomo Kenyatta in his well known study of the Kikuyu (1961) did not mention any areas under women's jurisdiction in his account of the traditional judicial procedures (see chapter 9, "The Kikuyu System of Government"). And, while he discusses procedures followed when men quarrel or receive an insult or some other threat to their dignity, there is no mention of the procedures women follow on such occasions.
15. KNA:FH/48 Fort Hall District Annual Report, 1948, p. 4.
16. KNA:FH/24 Fort Hall District Annual Report, 1924.
17. Tignor writes about Kikuyu society being "democratic" with a "diffused government of elders" where "most adult males had the right to voice their views during council meetings" (p. 342). While I agree that these societies were more democratic and egalitarian than the politically centralized societies with royal lineages, it should be recognized that one-half of the population, the women, did not participate in the most politically important decision-making bodies, the councils of elders.
18. My information on this uprising comes from articles by Ritzenhaler (1972), Ardener (1973), and a book by Nkwi (1976).
19. The division of tribal areas into quarters or wards is the old Tikar pattern of political and social organization.
20. There is ample evidence from other parts of Africa of how explosive the attempt by a colonial government to introduce new farming methods can be (Wipper 1977:173-178, 228; Cliffe 1965).
21. There is a discrepancy in dates. Ritzenhaler cites November 17th while Ardener cites November 20th.
22. I have not been able to ascertain when the uprising ended. Ritzenhaler states that, at the time of writing in May 1959, the rebellion was still underway with no end in sight.
23. Kaberry is actually describing the Nsaw ethnic group but states that their system of land tenure can be regarded as typical for Bamenda Province where the Kom live and that the general principles of the Kom system appear to be similar to those operating among the Nsaw. In the absence of better information, I will use the Nsaw data. Only the main features as they pertain to women will be outlined. For a more detailed discussion see Kaberry, 1952, 29-52.
24. Because the Women's War is already well known, I will deal with it more briefly than with the other two examples. My major sources are Perham 1937; Mba 1982; and, to a lesser extent, Green 1964; Van Allen 1972; Leith-Ross 1939; and Ifeka-Moller 1975.

25. Sister Joseph Agbasiere in a personal communication said there were several reasons the order to court her livestock angered Nwanyeruwa. It was considered improper for a young man to give an older woman an order. Such an order was the equivalent of asking how much money she had and, hence, was considered rude and was believed to bring bad luck as well.
26. See the Report on Eastern Provinces by the Secretary for Native Affairs, (Lagos, 1922). These criticisms, Perham notes, were repeated by the Assistant Secretary for Native Affairs in his Report on a Tour in the Eastern Provinces by the Assistant Secretary for Native Affairs (Lagos 1923).
27. Ifeka-Moller (1973) points out that Van Allen errs when she argues that the riots were but an extension of the sanctioning device, "sitting on a man," that operated within the community, whereas the "Women's War" involved intercommunity mobilization.
28. The problem of the lack of data on women's political activities was also noted by Betty Plewes in her study of women and trade in West Africa (1977). "The largest gap I found was in the descriptions and analyses of women's political activities . . . For example, there is reference in the literature to the strikes, boycotts and demonstrations carried out by women during the nationalist struggle in Ghana, but nowhere have I been able to locate descriptions of how they were organized, who the leaders were, or what the effects were" (pp. 10-11). Fortunately new research is filling these information gaps.
29. This is interpretive in the sense that empirical data on self-images are not available. Data do support other aspects of the statement.
30. Plewes' study (1977) supports this hypothesis. She states that where women's organizations exist women have greater political power resulting from the potential and actual use of collective action. Mba in her study (1982) of women's political activity in Southern Nigeria makes the same argument. It does not take too much inference to link women's greater political power to their willingness to revolt.
31. Ifeka-Moller (1975) writes about the Women's War "of which memories are undimmed, although it took place a long time ago, and in parts of Nigeria is still a potent element in the culture of today" (p. 127). Tabitha Kanogo and Federick Murage of Kenya told me separately in 1984 that they had heard the story of Mary Nyanjiru in their youth. Tales of the women's deeds have become part of the political consciousness and, hence, part of the political education of succeeding generations of Kikuyu youth.

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