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Review of *The Women's War of 1929: A History of Anti-Colonial Resistance in Eastern Nigeria*

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The 1929 women's revolt was undoubtedly one of the most significant events in African-European relations in colonial Nigeria and has attracted significant scholarly attention. Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock provide the reader with a fine analysis of the women's anti-colonial movement of 1929 and other protests in the 1930s. Falola and Paddock succeed in giving the reader a detailed account of the broader socio-economic and political factors that led to the revolt, how women drew upon cultural elements in framing their protest, and its long-term effect on British administrative policy. Their most important contribution is the large collection of primary documents that have been gathered in this single volume. Students and researchers interested in protest movements in colonial Nigeria from a gender perspective will benefit greatly.

The authors have organized their analysis into six chapters followed by the related documents. The first serves as historiographical introduction. Each of the remaining five chapters takes up a specific theme dealing with the differing perspectives of the events surrounding the Women's War held by the British and the African actors. Chapter 2 provides background information on women and gender in pre-colonial south-eastern Nigeria. The authors argue that women's pre-colonial status provides the context for understanding their opposition to colonialism and the specific events that led to the outbreak of the revolt at Oloko. Chapter 3 presents the

background to the British conquest of south-eastern Nigeria and the peculiar challenges faced by the British in their attempt to establish hegemony over the area. Chapter 4 provides a detailed account of the Women's War, its perceived causes, and the motives of the women who took part in it. This is perhaps the most important chapter. Falola and Paddock extend the analysis to the historical context of the British presence among the Igbo people and the contested nature of the introduction of taxation in the region. Chapter 5 deals with the aftermath of the Women's War. It explores the British response, and especially the imposition of 'collective punishment' on communities that participated in the uprising. Chapter 6 opens the second part of the volume with an overview of the documents and the methodological and historiographical implications of the different perspectives represented in them. The chapter also offers suggestions on how to use and interpret the primary documents in the book and on their relationship with broader themes in colonial history.

As the authors reveal, there is no agreement on the immediate and remote causes of the revolt. Historians and feminist scholars to date have considered that the Women's War of 1929 was primarily inspired by political grievances. Yet, contrary to the dominant historiography, economic rather than political motives may have been paramount for these peasant women. The political and feminist interpretations of the Women's War were by no means passive acts. They emerged partly from the concerns of nationalist historians who were interested in portraying African resistance to colonialism, and partly from feminism's attempts to use gender and women as a useful category for historical analysis and struggle within African societies. However, Falola and Paddock have explored the broader social, economic and cultural context for the revolt. They argue that the causes of the revolt are economic, social and cultural, but that the spark for women's action was the introduction of taxes. Current interpretations fail to account for the agrarian roots of the revolt, the economic motives of the women, and also for the fact that only women were involved in the protest.

By making the women's voices central to their analysis, the authors also reveal how they drew on existing cultural debates and symbols in framing their protest. While colonial officials interpreted the women's movement as the disturbance of good order, the women saw themselves as important factors in local social structures and in colonial politics. Such self-identification was important in developing the kinds of dialogue and discourses that inescapably linked the women's actions to a conception of their rights, support of traditional values, and rejection of what was seen as hegemonic, foreign and European.

As this book illustrates, the testimonies of men and women speaking about the Women's War allow readers to hear their voices. Most importantly, these texts illustrate what south-eastern Nigerians saw as their responsibilities to their families and communities, and how they understood the colonial government's responsibilities toward them. Throughout this book, the authors have done a fine job of highlighting the richness of African voices, which reveal the complexity of the colonial encounter.

TOYIN FALOLA and ADAM PADDOCK, *The Women's War of 1929: a history of anti-colonial resistance in eastern Nigeria*. Durham NC: Carolina Academic Press (hb \$90 – 978 1 59460 931 2). 2011, 936 pp.