Grass Roots Organizing: Women in Anticolonial Activity in Southwestern Nigeria

Cheryl Johnson


Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0002-0206%28198206%2F09%2925%3A2F3%3C137%3AGROWIA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-A


Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR’s Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html. JSTOR’s Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/journals/afsta.html.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
GRASS ROOTS ORGANIZING: WOMEN IN ANTICOLONIAL ACTIVITY IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

Cheryl Johnson

As the scholarship concerning women’s roles in African society and politics increases, it has become clear that West African women were active participants in the making of the histories of the societies in which they lived. Much is now known about founding ancestresses (Akan), queen mothers (Kanuri, Asante, Bamileke, etc.), women paramount chiefs (Mende), iyalodes (Yoruba), women’s councils (Igbo)—although a great deal remains to be done. Not so much, however, is known about women’s participation in anticolonial movements in the twentieth century. With the exception of the famous Aba Women’s War (Perham, 1937; Leith-Ross, 1939; Gailey, 1970; van Allen, 1972 & 1976; Ifeka-Moller, 1973; Afigbo, 1966), the one women’s anticolonial event which has attracted a significant amount of scholarly attention, little is clear about the women leaders who actively organized resistance to colonial policy which they considered inimical to women’s interests or as key organizers in the struggle for independence. Still less is known about the organizations they controlled. Although the first generation of leaders in independent Africa paid tribute to the important role played by women in raising political consciousness among Africans, they mention it only briefly, rarely describing women’s participation in their parties in any great detail (Denzler, 1976). Nor did the scores of political scientists who flocked to West Africa in the 1950s and the 1960s notice what women were doing in the way of organizing. Nonetheless the names of quite a few women of exceptional ability and understanding and the movements they organized occur frequently in the local newspapers giving evidence to their role. In addition extensive oral history collection among surviving women’s leaders, their families and their supporters enables scholars to begin the task of reconstruction of the history of women’s contribution to the anticolonial movement.

One area where women’s movements were particularly important in anticolonial activity was southwestern Nigeria. Here women possessed a long and rich history of collective organization through which they articulated and protected their interests from precolonial times onward (Awe, 1977; Mba, 1978). Predominantly Yoruba, this is an area with a strong urban tradition as well as institutions which prescribed women’s participation in government and economics, the most important of which were the office of iyalode (Awe, 1977) and the market (Marshall, 1964; Johnson, 1981). It would be no exaggeration to say that most able-bodied women were either farmers or traders, often both. It


137
was expected that women would trade in the market. While men were responsible for farming in the outlying areas, women were engaged in trading the agricultural produce grown by men as well as craft goods and services. Even where women were farmers, it was usually they, not their husbands, who retailed the farm produce. Their trading activities made them important in the distributive sector, imbued in them a group consciousness, a solidarity based on mutual interests and needs. These interests were recognized in precolonial societies. As a result women held important rights in the public domain: the right to discuss public policies, the right to representation on decision-making bodies, the right to property and inheritance. While this did not mean that women were the social and political equals of men, it did mean that they wielded influence in policy-making and possessed institutional mechanisms for making that influence felt.

Colonialism altered women’s position in their societies (Etienne and Leacock, 1980). It particularly affected their economic roles and ability to participate in local government. Southwestern Nigerian women quickly perceived the nature of the threat to their interests and regrouped their forces in order to preserve their interests. Usually this centered on organizing market women along new lines, utilizing both traditional skills and concepts of leadership as well as western protest actions. Like the Fante and Ga Confederacies in the Gold Coast or the Egba Board of Management in Abeokuta, the new organizations represented the uniting of the western educated elite leadership and traditional Yoruba leadership and institutions in order to promote the welfare of Yoruba women within the changed circumstances of the colonial situation. This study examines three of these movements: the Lagos Market Women’s Association led by Madam Alimotu Pelewura, the Nigerian Women’s Party led by Lady Oyinkan Abayomi, and the Abeokuta Women’s Union led by Mrs. Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti (formerly Ransome-Kuti).

THE LAGOS MARKET WOMEN’S ASSOCIATION

The first mass-based women’s interest group to recognize the power of collective action in protecting and promoting women’s rights in the Western Region of Nigeria during the colonial era was the Lagos Market Women’s Association (LMWA). The exact date of its foundation is not known, but by the mid-1920s it was an active movement. One scholar (Baker 1974:134-5) claims that the leading spirit behind its foundation was the Nigerian nationalist leader, Herbert Macaulay, founder in 1923 of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), the first modern political party in Nigeria (Coleman, 1958:197; Olusanya, 1973) 1. While it is true that Macaulay owed much of his early success to the support given his party by the market women and that the LMWA worked in close cooperation with the NNDDP on many issues, this view ignores evidence that since 1908 market women’s groups sometimes combined on an ad hoc basis for specific purposes such as opposing the imposition of water rates (Johnson, 1978:132). Macaulay’s example in organizing may have inspired the market women to think in similar terms, but the actual impetus for establishing an effective, well-disciplined market women’s movement came from the women themselves. Several elderly market women informants have described the NNDDP leader and the LMWA leader to the writer as walking hand in hand, that is to say, as equals.

Madam Alimotu Pelewura (Johnson, 1981) was the dynamic leader behind the foundation of the LMWA. A Yoruba born in Lagos, she followed in her mother’s
footsteps and became a fish trader by 1900. By 1910 she was recognized by Eleko Eshugbayi, ruler of Lagos, as an important leader of market women (interview with Jankara market women). By the early 1920s she was elected Alaga (head of the market women) in Ereko market, the largest and most prosperous meat market in Lagos (NAI, Com. Col. 1185). A government study in 1932 reported that Ereko was one of the most efficiently run markets in the city (NAI, Com. Col. 1368). According to this report, the Ereko traders contributed three pence each week to a fund which was used to hire lawyers (when needed) and two literate clerks to write letters and interpret in interviews with colonial officials and other individuals. Pelewura, an illiterate Muslim, used the same organizational skills in running the LMWA that she did in the market. Lack of formal education was not an insurmountable problem; the important thing was knowing how to utilize the skills and advice of both her supporters and hired literate persons for the purposes of furthering market women’s interests.

The first test of LMWA abilities to oppose effectively government measures inimical to women’s interests came in 1932 when the rumor spread throughout Lagos that the colonial government intended to levy a tax on Lagosian women. Although women in Abeokuta, another Yoruba city in the Western region, had been taxed since 1918, by and large the government, after the 1929 debacle at Aba, refrained from imposing direct taxes on women. Immediately the market women organized a committee, with Pelewura as a member, which went to Government House to discuss the issue with the Administrator of the Colony C. T. Lawrence (Daily Times, Jan. 29, 1932). Lawrence assured the committee that the government had no intention of taxing the women of Lagos (NAI, Com. Col. 2401). Not until eight years later would the government attempt to tax the women, at which time Pelewura was in the forefront of the opposition to the taxation.

Meanwhile Pelewura continued to rise in prominence in local politics and market affairs. At the end of 1932 she was appointed as a member of the Ilu committee, a recognized component of traditional government in Lagos, and under the Oba’s (king’s) authority (Cole, 1975:137). A representative of the market women always sat on it to ensure that women’s concerns were considered and Pelewura served as a spokeswoman for eighty-four market women’s representatives for sixteen markets (Tamuno, 1947:55). It was during this period that she also blocked the government’s attempt to move Ereko market to a new location (Johnson, 1981:3) and became actively involved with a much more militant group than the NNDP, In 1938 she accepted a position on the executive committee of the newly founded Nigerian Union of Young Democrats (NUYD) (Colemen, 1958). The NUYD was an off-shoot of the NNDP, but considered to be more radical than the parent organization, although it cooperated with the NNDP. Among its objectives was the intention to establish a female branch of the party (resolution of NUYD meeting of July 28, 1938, Herbert Macaulay Papers, Box 73, File 6), but it is unclear if this was carried out. Regardless of her new affiliation, Pelewura maintained her association with Macaulay and the NNDP, speaking occasionally on its platform (Johnson, 1978:139). At no time, however, did she attempt to transform the LMWA into a political party, preferring to act as a pressure group to ensure market women’s economic interests.

War-time regulations imposed on Nigeria in 1939 changed the economic situation to the detriment of market women. Largely to raise revenue for war expenditure, the government enacted an Income Tax Ordinance which proposed
to tax women with annual incomes of 50 pounds or more. Other laws empowered the government to requisition certain supplies for the use of the armed forces and to regulate prices of certain commodities considered essential for the war effort. European firms and unscrupulous chiefs and rulers were able to capitalize on these new laws in order to obtain greater profit for themselves and to establish monopoly conditions in certain areas of marketing. Only where strong women's associations, such as Pelewura's LMWA and Kuti's AWU existed, were women able to protect their economic interests.

The LMWA organized mass protests immediately to challenge the income tax law. On December 16, 1940 over a hundred women assembled outside the office of the colonial commissioner in Lagos. When the commissioner appeared, Rabiatu Alaso Oke, Iyalode of Lagos, stepped forward to protest that several women had received "return of income" forms, reminding him of the government's earlier promise not to tax women (NAI, Com. Col. 2401). The commissioner's unsatisfactory response was that only well-to-do women were being taxed. After this interview, the women departed and drafted a petition against the ordinance, with the help of Oged Macaulay, Herbert Macaulay's son, and set about getting the endorsement of over two hundred market women who put their thumbprints on the document (ibid.). The petition detailed the history of opposition to the various attempts to tax women and an account of the administration's promises on the subject. Further it stated that female taxation was contrary to custom and its imposition undesirable in the midst of all the other sacrifices connected with the war.

The following day the women closed the markets and again marched to the office of the commissioner (Daily Times, Dec. 18, 1940), this time led by Pelewura. The previous day's statements were reiterated on both sides, with the commissioner again emphasizing that only rich women had to pay the tax. Pelewura retorted that past experience had taught that once the principle of female taxation was conceded, all women would eventually be included under the terms of the law. Women therefore would not pay the tax and were prepared to suffer any punishment the government meted out. The women then marched to Government House where soldiers barred their entry. Only Pelewura and one other woman were permitted inside to meet with Governor Bourdillon (Egba Archives, "Political Parties in Abeokuta"). Bourdillon, however, refused to rescind the tax law. The women then proceeded to the house of Herbert Macaulay to inform him of the day's events and to plan strategy for opposing taxation.

On December 18th, a mass meeting was held at Glover Memorial Hall attended by from 1000 (the government's estimate) to 7000 (the Daily Times estimate) people (NAI, Com. Col. 2401; Daily Times, Dec.18, 1940). Both Pelewura and the commissioner addressed the meeting, basically restating their earlier positions in a caustic exchange. The commissioner stated that English women paid tax; Pelewura retorted that England was where the money was made whereas Africans were poor "owing to many factors over which they had no control." Further, it was the women of Lagos who bore the brunt of wartime hardship, having to feed and clothe unemployed husbands and relatives as well as to help their men pay income tax lest they be sent to prison for defaulting. She ended in Yoruba with a statement to the effect of "votes for women or alternatively no taxation without representation" (NAI, Com. Col. 2401). The women were clearly so adamant that the government decided it must revise the law, but it refused to abolish it completely. Within a few days, Bourdillon issued a
statement that the level of annual taxable income for women was being raised from 50 pounds to 200 pounds, an amount very few market women realized (ibid.). The women thus achieved a limited victory.

Meanwhile the economic consequences of the war began to make an impact on the market system in Nigeria. More than 110,000 Nigerian men enlisted in the armed forces, many of them serving in the Burma campaign (Olusanya, 1964:241). Large numbers of other men migrated to the cities to take advantage of the opportunities for wage labor resulting from demands for defense construction. The departure from the agricultural areas of such large numbers affected food production. Although women sometimes also farmed, they worked in conjunction with their men who had responsibility for the heavy work in the preplanting season and at harvest time. The reduction in the size of the agricultural producing sector and the rise in the urban labor force decreased food yields, as did government demands for food supplies to feed the soldiers. This all combined to drive food prices up. In the urban areas, especially Lagos, there was rampant inflation and an acute food shortage. As a response, the government determined to set price controls for essential foodstuffs and eventually tried to take over their distribution. Captain A. P. Pullen devised a food price control scheme which the colonial legislature enacted in February, 1941 (Oyemakinde, 1972:416).

The Pullen price control scheme undermined the economic position of Nigerian market women. Traditionally they controlled the distribution of foodstuffs, establishing a very efficient system of marketing and pricing. A small elite were very wealthy, maintaining large trading networks, but for the most part, market women traded with a narrow profit margin, barely making out a living. Buchi Emecheta provides a particularly vivid sense of the way those market women lived in Lagos during the war in her novel, *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). The new government plan had none of the flexibility of the traditional system which allowed the petty trader to make her small profit, partly because it misunderstood basic aspects of the network, partly because if failed to take into consideration basic costs of transportation and storage. For example, northern producers of white beans sold their produce to middlemen at 19s 6d a unit, but the government set the controlled price at 17s a unit (Oyemakinde, 1972:420). Under these conditions a vigorous black market developed in which the market women, the producers, and even the European firms, participated.

Women in various places enforced their decision of not not complying with the government scheme. During one week in the first year of the Pullen scheme, the women farina sellers of Ijebu-Ode (a major supplier of farina) stationed women on the Sagamu road where they set up road blocks and inspected every lorry bound for Lagos and removed any farina found aboard in order to show their displeasure with the government (NAI, Com. Col. 2497). The government had limited success in enforcing price controls: the entire African community conspired against it. Without a large and disciplined force of price control inspectors the authorities were hamstrung.

Madam Pelewura and the LMWA organized the resistance of the market women to price controls. By early 1944 it was obvious that controls were ineffective, and the colonial authorities undertook a series of four meetings with Pelewura and other market women leaders in order to discuss possible means of cooperation. They met point blank refusal to comply in any way with the price control scheme (Herbert Macaulay Papers, Box 13, File 5). Unable to reach any
sort of compromise, the authorities attempted to get the traditional elite to influence the women, arranging for a meeting of market women at the king's palace (Macaulay Papers, Box 13 File 5). An estimated three thousand women attended the meeting and, in the presence of the oba and the assembled chiefs, unanimously and vociferously refused to abide by the government price controls. Chief Oluwa refused to intervene on the government's side, flatly stating that the women must abide by the decision of their leader, Pelewura.

A few days after the meeting, Pelewura went directly to the Commissioner of the Colony and threatened to close all the markets in Lagos if the controls were not lifted. In a public confrontation with Pullen she compared life during World War II with what she remembered of World War I when "no white man sold gari in Lagos." In desperation the beleaguered official made a last attempt to gain her cooperation. He offered to pay her a monthly allowance of 7 pounds 10s and appoint her as head of the gari sellers of Lagos if she would support this policy (Macaulay Papers, Box 13, File 5). In a scathing rejection of these terms, Pelewura told him that not even if he offered her 100 pounds a month would she help him to "break and starve the country where she was born." Having failed in getting the market women's support, Pullen at last agreed to stop interfering with their sources of supply, promising to obtain government supplies directly from the farmers.

Economic conditions in Lagos worsened: government supplies were insufficient to meet demands for food. Long lines formed outside the government sale centers. Violence often broke out when people fought for places in the line. Pullen blamed the situation on "deliberate sabotage by the agents of Madam Pelewura" (NAI, Com. Col. 4037/s.44/c.9). How much of this was true is not known: however, market women informants are adamant that neither Pelewura nor any other market woman leader could control the behavior of the crowds clamoring for food supplies at the centers. The fact was that lines were long; they moved extremely slowly, and frequently the government ran out of stocks. The black market, in fact, was better organized and better stocked than the official government markets. In 1944, the administration estimated that as many as two-thirds of all the people in Lagos obtained their food from the black market (Oyemakinde, 1972:422).

During the entire period that the Pullen price control scheme was in force, the market women maintained a militant protest, constantly petitioning the government, complaining to officials, obtaining legal assistance when market women ran into trouble with the law. Many women were arrested for contravening the law, and some were imprisoned. When it became evident that the courts dealt more harshly with poor market women than they did the large prosperous European firms, Pelewura sought assistance from western-trained lawyers and nationalist leaders, particularly Macaulay and his son. For example, in September 1942 a number of people were charged with selling above the maximum official price. Several market women were imprisoned for a month whereas an employee of CFAO was fined only six pounds for the same offense (NAI, Com. Col. 2686). The LMWA sent a number of letters protesting such discriminatory penalties to the governor, the Lagos Chamber of Commerce, the commissioner of the colony, and the legislative and town councils (Daily Service, Sept. 23, 1942; West African Pilot, Jan. 16, 1945). In the process the women demanded that the male nationalist leaders support them publicly (Johnson, 1978:149). According to Tamuno (1966:37) Macaulay's opposition to Pullen "was
very influenced by the role of Madam Alimotu Pelewura and her deputies."

With the end of the war came the end for the need of wartime regulations and particularly the hated Pullen price controls and market scheme. Pelewura was the central figure in the escalating women's protest over political and economic grievances. Her importance increased during the general strike which began in 1945 and lasted for thirty-seven days (Cohen, 1977; Oyemakinde, 1972). The strike marked a turning point in Nigerian politics. Militant mass movements developed, calling for active Nigerianization and self-government in the near future (Olusanya, 1964 & 1973; Sklar, 1963). During the strike Pelewura and the LMWA organized the market women in support of the strikers. On June 2 she was one of the key speakers at a public reception for Michael Imoudu, the leader of the strike who had just been released from detention by the authorities (Oyemakinde, 1974:698). As the strike progressed the LMWA decided to keep the selling price of foodstuffs low as a means of demonstrating the women's solidarity with the strikers and also collected large donations from the market women for the Workers' Relief Fund (ibid.: 704-5).

The government decontrolled food prices in September, 1945. How much this was due to the women’s four year campaign against it and how much to the end of the war is open to debate. There was little reason for the colonial authorities to keep the controls in place, however, the resistance of the LMWA to government attempts to regulate the economy was an important aspect of the Nigerian response to the war, for it illustrates the awareness of the women to the acute frustrations of the colonial period and the need to accept responsibility to battle against them. The LMWA represented a reformulation and expansion of the traditional type of women’s organization, an important step in Nigerian women’s attempt to preserve their prerogatives under the changing conditions of the colonial system. The educated elite women, however, wanted to take this one step further and create a totally new political grouping. The founding of the Nigerian Women’s Party was their attempt to organize women along the lines of a western-style association, but building upon traditional structures and utilizing both traditional and western protest tactics.

THE NIGERIAN WOMEN’S PARTY

Oyinkan Morenike Abayomi (Johnson, 1978: ch. 6), the founder of the Nigerian Women’s Party (NWP), had been active in organizing women ever since she returned from her studies in Britain in the 1920s. The daughter of Sir Kitoye Ajasa², the first Nigerian knight, and Oyinka Bartholomew Ajasa, the daughter of first treasurer to the Egba United Government, she grew up in a household much involved in local and colonial politics and the West African press. Her British education equipped her to take part in the genteel pastimes engaged in by elite ladies, but she preferred to pursue activities which would benefit women less fortunate than those in her class and to expand existing facilities for girls’ education. In 1927, she founded the British West African Educated Girls’ Club (later renamed the Ladies' Progressive Club) in order to raise funds for girls’ education and the establishment of a girls’ secondary school in Lagos. Sir Hugh Clifford, Lady Clifford and the Education Department had promised her aid if she could demonstrate that the Lagos populace took her project seriously. That same year, in direct response to her club’s efforts, Queen’s College was established, the only government secondary school for girls until the 1950s. Although the Girls’ Club at no time indulged in overt political activity, Oyinkan Ajasa began to
develop an abiding interest in politics.

In 1934 she married Dr. (later Sir) Kofoworola Abayomi, a physician and one of the leaders of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), an early protonationalist organization founded in 1935 (Baker, 1974:117). Mrs. Abayomi joined the new movement and became head of its ladies’ section. Interested in increasing awareness of common problems among women of all classes, she tried to motivate elite women to take more active role in improving conditions for illiterate and poor women as well as themselves. In an article entitled “Modern Womanhood” (Macaulay Papers, Box 73, File 7), published in the NYM journal in 1935, she warned elite women that “The upphishness among the few privileged women who have been educated abroad must be killed. Unless the so-called highly educated make themselves open and approachable they will have no one to lead. . . .”

By the early 1940s Abayomi was convinced that women were being “cheated by our men and the government” (interview with Lady Abayomi) and required their own political organization. On May 10, 1944, she gathered about a dozen prominent women in her home at 18 Broad Street, Lagos, to discuss the women’s political situation (Daily Service, May 11, 1944). She decried the fact that though a large number of women owned homes and paid taxes, they had no representation on the town council or the legislative council. It is not known if she had in mind the example of Freetown, Sierra Leone where Constance Cummings-John had served as an elected member of the city council from 1938 to 1942 (see Denzer, 1981); however, she was aware that conditions there were more favorable for female education. Another issue she addressed was the lack of government scholarships for girls to study in England, pointing to Sierra Leone which provided such opportunities. Mrs. Tinuola Dedeke also spoke, exhorting the tiny coterie to “cast away all feelings of religious and tribal differences and present a united front for the sake of their motherland” (Daily Service, May 11, 1944. The meeting resulted in the women forming the Nigerian Women’s Party (NWP), the women present assuming the role of interim executive committee until a more definite organizational structure was established.

The NWP constitution (private papers of Mrs. T. Dedeke) set forth its aims and objectives as follows:

The Women’s Party makes its strongest appeal to the women of Nigeria irrespective of class or any other distinction, reminding them of their backward and unenviable position among the women of other races and calling them to action. It appeals to those who may be outside the ranks of the Women’s Party for sympathy and cooperation:

1. To shape the whole future is not our problem, but only to shape faithfully a small part of it according to rules laid down.

2. To seek by constitutional means the rights of British citizenship in its full measure on the people.

3. To work assiduously for the educational, agricultural and industrial development of Nigeria with a view to improve the moral, intellectual and economic condition of the country.

4. To work for the amelioration of the condition of the women of Nigeria not merely by sympathy for their aspirations but by recognition of their equal status with men.

Membership in the party was limited to women of African descent, but patrons could be adults of any nationality at home or abroad who supported the party’s objectives. Provisions were made for the annual election of an executive
committee consisting of seven officers and seven ex-officio members, and three committees were set up—health and education, market and native industry, and political and social. Although the NWP’s intention was to establish branches throughout Nigeria in order “to make the organization as representative as possible”, its efforts in this direction were not successful and its activities were essentially confined to Lagos. Part of the NWP’s lack of success was its inability to compete with the more militant Abeokuta Women’s Union (AWU) organized by Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti (formerly Ransome-Kuti).

The initial response to the NWP in Lagos was mixed. The NYM reacted with some surprise. The editor of their literary organ, the Daily Service (May 11, 1944), questioned the viability of an all-female organization but in general wished the new movement well. On the other hand, Herbert Macaulay opposed the new movement, no doubt because it threatened his special relationship with the market women (West African Pilot, June 26, 1944). There was further evidence that the new movement did not have the total support of the market women. Madam Idowu, the leader of a small group of market women, criticized it, claiming that the NWP could not truly speak for market women, accusing it of being too slow to act on behalf of women (West African Pilot, August 18, 1944). Idowu believed that it would be better if the market women dealt directly with the government on matters that concerned them rather than use an elite women’s group as intermediary. How much this reflected the view of Pelewura is unknown. Mrs. Dedeko claimed in 1976 that Pelewura was an important and valued associate of the NWP, but never had an official status. It appeared that Pelewura held reservations about the movement but established a working relationship with Abayomi whom she admired. At a public reception for Abayomi, Pelewura openly questioned the ability of Nigerian women to unite; yet in the same breath she announced her personal willingness to cooperate with the party (West African Pilot, July 24, 1944).

Estimates of NWP numerical strength range from 500 members to 2,000 (Baker, 1974:235; interview with Mrs. Tinuola Dedeko). The NWP did have a broad enough base of support to convince the administration to appoint Mrs. Abayomi as the first woman to serve on the Lagos Town Council shortly after the NWP’s creation. Though the active membership was small when compared, for instance, to an LMWA active membership of 8,000, NWP influence extended well beyond the bounds of the group of identifiable members. Depending on the issue, the NWP could mobilize huge demonstrations of women, often numbering in the thousands. Family and ethnic connections, trans-organizational membership, school ties, business relationships, and religious networks ensured a broad-based solidarity of women, just as they did in the male-dominated parties. An individual woman might belong to several organizations at the same time, thus increasing the chances for cooperation among groups. The NWP shared its concerns over particular issues with other women’s groups. Quite a few market women did belong to the NWP, as well as their market organizations. The Iyalode of Lagos at that time, Rabiatu Alaso Oke, an influential wealthy Muslim cloth trader, was one of its vice-presidents (interviews with Mrs. Dedeko and Chief Debayo). Abayomi appreciated the need to attend traditional functions and take part in market women’s activities. The ruler of Lagos recognized the NWP and invited its representatives to meetings convened at his palace on issues of concern to the Lagosian community (see invitations in private papers of Mrs. Dedeko and Daily Times, June 3, 1947, March 22, 1948 & September 5, 1949).
For the most part NWP leadership was drawn from the ranks of the Christian western-educated middle-class; however the rank and file included many illiterate Muslim women. According to Mrs. Dedeke, the majority of the membership was Muslim and they were among the more active. When pressed by the writer about what she meant by the phrase "more active", she replied "more willing to confront."

The NWP took up four major issues: (1) girls' education and literacy classes for adult women; (2) employment of women in the civil service; (3) the right of female minors to trade freely in Lagos; (4) protection of market women's rights. Government educational policies for girls posed serious questions for party leaders, many of whom were teachers. They desired an expansion in the number of schools available for girls (there was only one girls' government secondary school in Lagos, Queens College) as well as broadening of the curriculum. In particular they wanted training in science and foreign languages so that girls would have opportunities beyond teaching, then the major profession open to western-education girls in Nigeria. (Daily Service, Jan. 8, 1947). Further, they wanted government scholarships for Muslim girls, more vocational schools, and adult education for illiterate women (NAI, CSO 43222). In 1945 the NWP inaugurated a program of free literacy classes at the CMS Grammar School (Daily Service, April 25, 1945), but there are few details about how large attendance was and how long classes continued.

The second issue, employment of women in the civil service, had been a major concern since the 1930s, when Charlotte Obasa (Johnson, 1978: ch. 4) and her Lagos Women's League (defunct by the 1940s) fought a long battle for the right of women to employment in the government. As a result some women were hired, but they never received pay equal to that of men in similar positions. Female teachers were paid thirty-three percent less than men in the same rank (NAI, CSO 03571: vol. 1). There were also other areas of discrimination. Particularly rankling was the marked preference by the government for hiring European women, usually wives of administrative officers, as nurses and secretaries (NAI, CSO 43222).

The third issue concerned important customs inherent in the entire range of women's trading and apprenticeship. In 1946 the Nigerian legislature passed the Children and Young Persons Ordinance which prohibited children under fourteen from engaging in street trading, required parental permission for girls between fourteen and sixteen to trade, and limited to the hours of daylight the time in which young girls were allowed to trade. This struck at the heart of African traditions, According to custom young girls began their training in trading at an early age, well before the age of fourteen, thus extending the range of the economic activities of their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and guardians, many of whom were farmers or had businesses elsewhere (Mabogunje, 1961, and Ogunsheye, 1960). Indeed this formed a major part of the education received by the masses of young girls for whom the government failed to provide schools. Many injustices were inflicted on innocent girls as the police carried out their instructions to enforce the Children and Young Persons Ordinance. Police met trains entering Lagos and removed all young girls who appeared to be between fourteen and sixteen years of age. Occasionally they arrested young married women with babies on their backs for trading outside legal hours. The NWP joined with other women's organizations to form a united protest against this hated ordinance (Daily Service, July 15, July 20, July 22, Aug. 21 & Oct. 14,
1946). In a letter (Daily Service, Aug. 21, 1946) to the commissioner of the colony, the NWP expressed its fear that the authorities intended to introduce a pass system similar to that obtaining in South Africa by restricting movement of people in this way. After many joint protest meetings and deputations to the authorities, the commissioner admitted that the law needed remedy and agreed to suspend arrests (Daily Service, April 21, 1948).

Lastly, the NWP worked hard to protect and extend market women's rights, often allying with other groups, most notably the LMWA (Daily Service, July 9, 1946 & June 30, 1947; CSO 23610/s 558). It cooperated in the campaign against the Pullen Price Control Scheme and against other restrictions imposed by the administration during the war, particularly the ban on the exportation of locally woven cloth. Another source of irritation to the traders was the government's attempt, never successful, to establish the practice of selling by scale weight. This went against the process of bargaining which obtained in the traditional system of marketing, an integral part of social as well as economic intercourse. The NWP submitted a petition (NAI, CSO 23610/s 558) against the new requirement and sent a delegation to the commissioner of the colony to complain against it, bitterly observing that Lagosian women believed that their interests were not being "sympathetically considered by those elected to administer the affairs of the country." Another issue taken up by the party was the market women's opposition to the marketing practice employed by expatriate wholesale firms whereby the women were forced to agree to a package deal: the goods they wanted were advanced to them on condition that they take other goods specified by the wholesalers. In practice, these conditional sales were a clever maneuver on the part of the European businesses to get rid of slow-moving merchandise and the women, experienced in the art of the cut and thrust of commerce, immediately perceived the rationale behind these conditional sales. Many mass meetings protested this practice, but it is not known to what degree they affected commercial transactions.

While the main focus of NWP activities was women's interests, it also took an active interest in general political affairs. It participated in the opposition against various attempts to raise water rates in the city in the mid-1940s (see Daily Service, April 19, 1947). Its stance, however, was conservative. Its leaders preferred to seek to reform the colonial system rather than to abolish it immediately. After the war such an outlook became increasingly unpopular. A younger, more militant element, represented by Nnamdi Azikiwe's party, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), founded in 1937, and by Obafemi Awolowo's Action Group (AG) founded in 1944, dominated colonial politics (Sklar, 1963). Nationalist in outlook, the young politicians agitated for an end to colonialism and complete independence for Nigeria. In order to achieve these goals, the militants had to mobilize the entire population, men and women, to support their efforts. The NWP leadership was never able to take the initiative in mobilizing women, thereby establishing a power base in the new politics. Instead individual leaders were co-opted by the nationalist, and male-controlled, parties. Here they played an important role in propaganda activities and articulating national consciousness, but the rewards they received were only tokens. Women were rarely chosen as candidates for elective high office or appointed to prominent positions in the Nigerianized administration. The demise of the NWP illustrates the lessening influence of women in public affairs.
In 1950 southern Nigerian women received the franchise for the first time. That year the NWP ran four candidates—Lady Alakija, Mrs. Ore Jones, Mrs. Manuwa, and Mrs. Toro-John—in the Lagos town council elections (Baker, 1974:332, n.16). What form their campaigns took is not known, but they were unsuccessful in gaining the support of market women who controlled the large share of the votes. All four NWP candidates lost. Significantly, the one successful woman candidate, Mrs. H. Lawson, was sponsored by the NNPD/NCNC coalition. After this failure the NWP ceased to have an effective voice in Lagos politics, although it was heard from time to time on issues it had pursued such as the expansion of girls’ education and health care facilities. Its autonomous existence ended in 1956 when it joined other Nigerian women’s groups in Ibadan to establish an umbrella group, the National Council of Women’s Societies (NCWS). Meanwhile there had been a strong tendency for key members to join the AG. Lady Abayomi (her husband was knighted in 1951) became influential in the AG, and in 1956 she was appointed to the Western House of Assembly (West Africa, April 13, 1957). Two years later she was instrumental in forming the AG’s Western Regional Women’s Conference, serving as its president for the first year.

THE ABEOKUTA WOMEN’S UNION

In terms of creating an effective power base, the Abeokuta Women’s Union (AWU), later part of the Nigerian Women’s Union (NWU), was more important than any other women’s organization in the country. By the late 1940s it had eclipsed the NWP and had achieved the remarkable success of forcing out of office the Alake of Abeokuta, the traditional ruler of one of the Western Region’s most important cities. The AWU’s success was due to the vision and outstanding leadership ability of Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti (formerly Ransome-Kuti) (Johnson, 1978: ch. 7).

Born in 1900 in Abeiokuta, Anikulapo-Kuti was the daughter of Lucretia Phyllis Morenke Dese, a dressmaker, and Daniel Olumoyewa Thomas, a farmer and palm oil trader, the son of liberated African emigrants from Sierra Leone. Both her parents were Christian and strong believers in girls’ education, and they provided the best education they could afford for their daughter. After she completed schooling at Anglican mission schools in Abeokuta, they sent her to Britain to qualify as a teacher. In response to the racism she encountered, she developed an interest in anti-colonial politics. The first evidence of her new orientation was dropping her Christian name, Frances, in favor of her Yoruba name, Funmilayo, upon her return to Nigeria in 1922. Years later she dropped her husband’s European surname to demonstrate her complete adherence to African culture. Once resettled in Abeokuta she accepted a position as principal of the Abeokuta Girls’ School. She also began a program of literacy classes for market women in Ijebu-Ode, a town near Abeokuta where she lived after her marriage in 1925 to Rev. I. O. Ransome-Kuti. Her husband, older than she, was an Anglican minister and political activist, one of the main organizers and president of Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), a professional trade union with a multi-ethnic base which gave it a national orientation from the moment of its creation (Coleman, 1958:264-5). In addition he was involved with the NYM and was vice-chairman of its Abeokuta branch.

How much Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti involved herself in political activities during the 1930s is unclear, but she did have much influence in Abeokuta when
by 1942 she had organized the Abeokuta Ladies' Club, the forerunner of the AWU. The Ladies' Club undertook charity work and literacy classes for market women. In 1945 it cooperated with the NUT to provide assistance to women traders who had their rice confiscated by the government (Daily Service, Nov. 12, 1945). While investigating the situation, Ransome-Kuti discovered that the Alake, the traditional ruler of Abeokuta, was engaged in diverting the confiscated rice to his own stores, selling it, and pocketing the profits.

By 1946 there was a general feeling among the leaders of the Ladies' Club and the market women that a more broad-based movement should be formed which would be less elite in character. Thus was born the AWU. Adopting the motto "Unity, Cooperation, Selfless Service, and Democracy", its main objective was to unite women in order to defend, protect, preserve, and promote their social, economic and political rights (private papers of Mrs. Anikulapo-Kuti). Many educated women were members of the AWU, but an important factor in the organization's success was the commitment it made to market women and their involvement in modern politics. It actively sought to incorporate them into its organizational structure and membership, and the executive committee had on it many influential market women leaders, illiterate sometimes, as well as women from the western-oriented educated elite. Market women made up the bulk of the rank and file membership which, by 1948, numbered twenty thousand (interview with Mrs. Anikulapo-Kuti), but the organization's influence extended far beyond that. Scholars (Mba, 1978; Little, 1973:72) state that the AWU could command the support of between eighty and one hundred thousand women. Kuti demonstrated her personal commitment to the ordinary market woman by donning Yoruba dress and addressing AWU public meetings in Yoruba.

The position of women in Abeokuta had deteriorated under the colonial order. In precolonial society women had participated in politics and had their own representatives, the most important of which was the iyaloje, on state councils whose duty was to protect and promote women's interest (Awe, 1977). The advent of indirect rule, not imposed on Abeokuta until 1918, brought about important changes in the city government, mostly inimical to women as well as to the democratic character of leadership. Previously a system of checks and balances operated to prevent the ruler (alake) from becoming too authoritarian and despotic in his behavior (Morton-Williams). Under colonial rule, however, these checks and balances could no longer function effectively. The system set up by the British actually provided an umbrella over the alake's activities which allowed him to extend his prerogatives far beyond those allowed under traditional custom. The inherently sexist attitudes of British colonial officers, conditioned by bourgeois British attitudes toward women, led to an even greater worsening of the women's situation. While British officials did not go out of their way to change women's political functions, it simply never occurred to them that women had any significant role, and so they never made provision for it. The effect on the political position of women can be seen by comparing the range of power and influence enjoyed by the iyaloje of Abeokuta in the nineteenth century, Madam Tinubu (Biobaku, 1960; Johnson, 1978: ch. 3) and that possessed by modern day iyalode (Awe, 1977). Nowadays this office is mostly ceremonial with little political power attached to it.

The Sole Native Authority system (SNA) constituted indirect rule in Abeokuta and invested the alake with his powers of office. In 1920 Alake Alaiyeluwa Ademola II became the first western-educated alake. His rule was not very
popular, although it was to last until the AWU forced his abdication in 1948. Complaints (NAI, CSO/23610/S.55, vols. I & II) emerged against him in the early 1930s charging him with misappropriation of land and wrongful leasing of it to European firms and agents. In 1938 ten thousand irate citizens staged a mass demonstration before his palace in protest of his methods of tax collection (Daily Service, Oct. 22, 1938), Feeling against his regime intensified during the war years as a result of his overenthusiastic interpretation of the colonial government’s orders regarding requisitioning of food.

The brunt of the alake’s policies and methods during the war fell particularly heavily on the women, the main producers of food and distributors of it (interview with Mrs. Anikulapo-Kuti). His Alake’s police set up roadblocks at strategic points along the way to Ibadan, Lagos and Ijebu-Ode in order to stop the women and examine their loads, seizing chickens, yams, gari and rice, curtly dismissing protests with the statement that “nobody should eat until enough food was collected for the soldiers.” Often the women received no compensation for their seized produce, or when they did it was at a rate lower than that set by the administration. Angry women charged that the Alake pocketed the profit he made in selling the produce to the government at the price legally specified.

The most important grievance of Abeokuta’s women, however, was taxation and specifically taxation without representation (interview with Mrs. Anikulapo-Kuti). Ever since 1918, when taxes were instituted, women were required to pay income taxes upon reaching the age of fifteen and continued to do so when married. Men did not have to pay until the age of seventeen (Mba, 1975). Women thus provided as much as one-half of district revenues (Daily Service, June 13, 1947). Yet, women had no direct representation on the SNA councils, a situation they resented very much. Further, the manner in which taxes were collected was often insulting and violent, including the chasing of women, beatings, and stripping of young girls, allegedly to assess their age. Over the years the number of complaints increased, finally reaching a point where women decided that their only chance to gain redress of their grievances was a more militant approach.

The AWU launched a campaign in 1946 protesting the SNA system of government. Led by Kuti, it was well organized and forceful, bringing together the women of the community, and eventually, at a very late date, the men. In June the AWU presented a petition (Daily Service, July 8, 1946) to the SNA which demanded that the government pay salaries of the market supervisors (parakoyis) and that women receive representation. Women believed that the tax burden fell too heavily on their shoulders. Not only were they paying income taxes and water rates, but they also had to provide the money for the market supervisors. Arguing this was double taxation, they insisted that since the entire community, buyers as well as sellers, used market facilities, the entire community should help pay the costs of running the market. The second demand stated:

Inasmuch as Egba [a sub-group of Yoruba which made up the majority of Abeokuta’s population] women pay taxes, we too desire to have a say in the management of the country, because a taxpayer should also have a voice in this spending of the taxes. We . . . request you please to give consideration to our being represented in this council by our own representatives at the next general election.

The polite and meek tone of this request notwithstanding, the women did not intend to compromise on this issue.
The petition fell on deaf ears. Late in 1946, the alake retaliated by increasing the tax rate for women (Daily Service, Oct. 19, 1946). Thousands of women marched to the palace to protest these increases. The alake’s only response was that if any woman felt her taxes too high, she should appeal to him individually since it was “no group business” (ibid.). The AWU next sought to contest the tax levies in court through a test case involving Janet Ashabi, a trader, who believed her annual income tax assessment was excessive. Ashabi lost her case when the resident, E. N. Mylius, refused to accept her own assessment of income and decided instead to raise her taxes (Daily Service, Nov. 7, 1946). The AWU protested this decision in a letter (Daily Service, Feb. 3, 1947) that charged the resident was “not conversant with the conditions in which the women of Egbaland live...” He refused to reconsider his decision.

Kuti and the AWU meanwhile intensified their effort to gain support for an all-out protest movement with three main objectives: (1) the abdication of the alake; (2) the abolition of the SNA and its replacement by a more representative form of government which would include women representatives; and (3) the abolition of flat rate taxation of women (private papers of Mrs. Anikulapo-Kuti). Kuti engaged in a tremendous letter writing effort, outlining the women’s grievances to the newspapers in Lagos and Abeokuta. The AWU hired an account to audit the SNA accounts. After his investigation into the government’s financial situation, it presented an alternative budget to the SNA for consideration. It presented more petitions and sponsored a number of court cases when the evidence suggested a good opportunity for illustrating women’s grievances, for it was clear that the British administration tended to exonerate its agents, white or black, even when there was no doubt that complaints against them were justified.

To give one example, early in 1948 the AWU brought to court a case against the superintendent of police for criminal assault in tax collecting, but he was acquitted even though he had admitted to beating between six and twelve women (Daily Service, March 1 & April 20, 1948).

When it was abundantly clear that going through the proper channels—petitions, test cases in court, and publicity in the press—produced no results, the AWU adopted more radical methods—sit-ins, mass protest demonstrations, and outright refusal to pay taxes. The new militant approach began early in 1947 when Kuti refused to pay her taxes (Daily Service, April 29, 1947) and was arrested. At her arraignment, where she pleaded not guilty, eight thousand women congregated at the courthouse to demonstrate their support (Daily Service, April 29, 1947). The following week at her trial, where she pleaded not guilty, five thousand women conducted a protest demonstration outside the court (Daily Service, May 8, 1947). She was fined three pounds or one month’s imprisonment, and she decided that it was politic at that time to pay the fine since she was due to leave within the week with the NCNC delegation which was going to Britain for constitutional talks. Part of the reason for her decision at this time was her belief that this was an excellent opportunity to take the women’s cause before the British public like the male-dominated groups had done often in the past (July, 1968; Coleman, 1958). The next year when she again refused to pay taxes, she was prepared to go to prison if necessary in order to make her point.

Once in England she lost no time in airing the women’s grievances. She met with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Arthur Creech Jones, long a champion of African rights, in order to argue her case (Aloma, 1948). In addition, she published an article in the Daily Worker, the journal of the British
Communist Party, for which she was attacked by the conservative leaders of the NWP (interviews with Lady Abayomi and Mrs. Dedede). In her article she deplored the poverty, oppression and repressive system under which Nigerian women lived. At home Madam Pelewura and the LMWA held a huge meeting to support the statements she made to the Daily Worker and to pass a vote of confidence in her leadership (West African Pilot, Sept. 1947).

Inspired by the results of the constitutional talks at which Nigerian nationalists had put forward their protests concerning the first pre-independence constitution, Kuti returned to Abeokuta more firmly resolved than ever to mobilize the women. She once again refused to pay her taxes, this time preparing herself for a term in prison, if necessary. Meanwhile, she led the AWU in laying down plans for a systematic program of mass demonstrations of protest.

The first major demonstration took place on November 29 and 30, 1947 (West African Pilot, Nov. 29, 1947; interview with Mrs. Anikulapo-Kuti). More than ten thousand women took part, never swerving from their support. Kuti recalled that as they neared their destination, the alake’s palace, she commanded the marchers to stop, closed her eyes and told them that all those who were afraid should leave while her eyes were closed. None, she said, withdrew. They maintained an overnight vigil during which they sang abusive songs. Three of these went as follows:

O you men, vagina’s head will seek vengeance
You men, vagina’s head shall seek vengeance.

Even if it is only one penny.
If it is only a penny Ademola,
We are not paying tax in Egbaland.
If even it is one penny.

Ademola Ojibosho!
Big man with a big ulcer!
Your behavior is deplorable.
Alake is a thief.
Council members thieves.
Anyone who does not know Kuti
will get into trouble.
White man you will not get to your country safely.
You and Alake will not die an honourable death.

The women were dedicated, well-organized and well-disciplined. No violence or looting took place and no weapons were carried. In planning the demonstration the women were careful to stress the importance of not allowing the authorities any excuse to attack them or use violence. While it was never stated in so many words, more than likely memories of Aba and the administration’s action in killing many women accounted for this concern.

After the November demonstration, the AWU claimed that the Egba General Council promised to suspend taxation while their grievances were investigated (Daily Service, Jan. 24, 1948). Shortly thereafter, several AWU members appeared before the Council to answer questions and were informed on December 3rd that other women would be consulted in the near future. Instead, harassment began. Several women were put in prison on charges of defaulting in their tax payments. The AWU responded by staging another protest demonstration and vigil from December 8 through December 10, equally as large and well-organized
as the November demonstration, determined to remain outside the palace until the imprisoned women were released. On December 10, the prisoners were released and the AWU ended its vigil, but the government continued its harassment and jailed more women. The AWU sent letters of protest to the Daily Service, the alake, the Egba Central Council, the chief secretary of the government and the governor (ibid.).

The effect of these demonstrations was very great. Although Kuti was banned from the palace because of her role in organizing the demonstrations, it was apparent that the alake had been forced to reconsider his position (Daily Service, March 2, 1948). At various times throughout January and February, he announced that women would be appointed to positions within the government: two councillors to the central council, an iyalode, two other women chiefs, and representatives to the finance committee (Daily Service, Jan. 2 & Feb. 20, 1948). However, he stalled for time, claiming that these appointments would be made as soon as good candidates could be found. Meanwhile the British administration attempted to stem the tide of opposition. On February 27, 1948, the resident read a prepared statement before the Egba Central Council declaring his support for its decision to ban Kuti from the palace and regreting the “insulting of the alake” and other recent activities of “certain persons who had disturbed peace and tranquility of Abeokuta” (Daily Service, March 2, 1948). Further, he refused to change the government position on the taxation of women and warned that future demonstrators against it would be treated like common criminals.

Administrative attempts to use divide and rule tactics to woo away the AWU executive from its support of Kuti failed. The district officer invited the executive to a meeting of the central council in order to present its grievances to the government, specifically excluding Kuti. By an embarrassing mishap, however, the invitation had been addressed to Kuti. When this was pointed out, the district officer replied that it was clear that she could not be present since the central council had banned her from the palace. The AWU executive refused to attend the meeting without her and organized a demonstration before the palace which blocked the two main colonial officials, the resident and the district officer, from leaving the palace.

By April the AWU and its supporters were determined to get rid of the alake and obtain their demands. Kuti, who had refused again, to pay her tax was scheduled to appear in court in April. The AWU planned a massive demonstration but cancelled it because some anonymous person had paid her tax the day before the trial (Daily Service, April 27, 1948). The anonymous person in question was probably either the alake or a British official (Mba, 1975). The AWU, next presented to the resident a petition “The Women’s Union Grievances”, which reiterated grievances and demands, including the demand that the alake be removed from his office (private papers of Mrs. Anikulapo-Kuti). They followed this with a five-hour march through the streets of the city chanting their demands (Mba, 1975).

The AWU now had the support of the entire community. At first the men, except for Kuti’s husband, a strong supporter of the AWU from the very beginning, did not show any signs of support, although a number of men in Abeokuta had gone on records to protest certain abuses of the alake’s power. By the end of 1947 the situation had changed. The Majeobaje society, an ethnic self-help union of which Rev. Ransome-Kuti was president, offered its sympathy and help (Mba, 1975). On December 20, 1947, there was a mass meeting of men at
Sapon Market Square where they passed a unanimous resolution expressing their endorsement of the women’s efforts “in the cause of happiness, freedom from oppression, and the peace of Egbaland . . .” (Daily Service, Jan. 17, 1948). Editorial in the most important African newspapers in the Western region also indicated widespread support for the AWU’s demands. It was only a matter of time before the government capitulated.

To gain time the alake left for a holiday at the beginning of June, hoping things would cool off in his absence. Before he left, he appointed a special committee of men and women to investigate the complaints of the AWU (Daily Service, June 1, 1948). He also suspended taxation of women and agreed to women representatives on the central committee. It was too little, too late. The AWU continued its demonstrations while he was away, joined now by the Ogboni Society and even by some members of the central council (ibid.). After he returned, the alake ceded further ground by relinquishing his position as the Sole Native Authority; however, the AWU and its women sympathizers refused to accept nothing less than his total abdication and continued their demonstrations. Seeing that the situation was not negotiable, the resident advised the alake at the end of June to leave the city for an extended period of time (ibid.). Finally, on January 3, 1949, the alake abdicated. The women’s protest had been successful. Four women, all executives of the AWU and including Kuti, were appointed to an interim council established in place of the SNA, female taxation was abolished, and the alake was forced out of office.

As a result of the success of the AWU, it decided to expand its organizational structure on a trans-ethnic and trans-regional basis. It changed its name to the Nigerian Women’s Union (NWU). Branches were established in Calabar, Aba, Benin, Lagos, Ibadan and Enugu, and women in Kano requested assistance in setting up a branch there (Daily Service, Dec. 30, 1949; private papers of Mrs. Antikulapo-Kuti). It continued to operate literacy classes and began maternity and child welfare classes. By the 1950s many members had become actively involved in the struggle for independence, but like the NWP, it remained a special interest group and did not attempt to engage in overtly political action on a national scale. Many influential members joined the AG or the NCNC, Kuti herself remaining in the NCNC until 1959 when she broke with the party.

The subsequent history of Kuti and the NWU is very revealing of the general continued decline of women’s position in Nigerian politics; however, this essay is not the place for further discussion of it.

CONCLUSION

The three organizations represented in this discussion portray three different kinds of women’s political movements. The LMWA represented a unification of a traditional network which, in concert with the traditional male authorities, sought to protect women’s traditional economic autonomy and rights. The NWP represented the response of the “new” elite women who owed their status partially to new trends introduced by colonialism, namely, western education and Christianity. It addressed those concerns of women who sought a role in the colonial system: expanded educational opportunity, equal pay for equal work in the wage labor market, expanded occupational opportunities in the civil service. Though it attempted to forge working alliances with the market women, many of them illiterate Muslims, it did not achieve complete success; however, it did seek to influence political developments in the more modern political structures of
Nigeria, both within the colonial government structure and the Nigerian political groups organized by male leaders. The AWU was the most successful of these three groups. Unifying the traditional organizations of Yoruba women and the mass organizational techniques of a modern pressure group it forged a powerful union between the “new” elite and the market women. Furthermore, it succeeded in expanding its organization into other ethno-linguistic areas, setting up branches in other important cities. In the 1940s its greatest success was the successful and well orchestrated campaign which forced the abdication of the alake of Abeokuta whom they identified as the representative of corrupt British authority.

What these three case studies elucidate is that: (1) women were acutely aware of the threat which colonial policies posed to their social status; (2) women could organize through their own ethnic political organization and utilize traditional mechanisms to organize the women’s community to fight women’s battles to preserve and protect their economic rights; and (3) Yoruba women recognized the utility of modern western style techniques and skills in political and economic organization in carrying on their struggle with the colonial authorities. In the 1940s they increasingly linked their particular objectives with the wider objectives of complete self-government and were an important source of support for the nationalist movement which developed during the war. Without their full support, economically and emotionally, it is doubtful that the militant male leaders could have won their objectives as quickly as they did. However, few of these women’s organizations sought to have power within the male-controlled organizations, but rather wielded their influence within their own separate organizations vis-à-vis the men in the political process. As soon as the women’s specific objectives were realized, women leaders retired from the competition for political rewards in the post-war government or in the independent government. It remains for other studies of independent Nigerian society to assess whether women’s decision not to mount a separate struggle for women’s political power qua power during the independence movement was a serious mistake in strategy which has now placed them at a disadvantage in today’s Nigeria.

NOTES
This discussion is based on field work undertaken in Lagos and Abeokuta in 1975/76. The author is grateful to the following women who were so generous with their time and reminiscences: Mrs. Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti (formerly Ransome-Kuti), Mrs. Tinuola Dedeke, Mrs. Elsie Femi-Pearse, Lady Oyinkan Abayomi, Lady Alakija, Alhaja Abibatu Mogaji and many of the market women at Jankara market.
1. The Nigerian Union of Young Democrats and the Nigerian National Democratic Party were both heavily influenced by Herbert Macaulay, and often worked together in a way that made some suspect the NUYD was very nearly a younger, more militant “branch” of the NNDP. Macaulay, for instance, served on the executive Boards of both parties, and in 1942 Ayo Williams served as Vice President of the NNDP and President of the NUYD (see Daily Service, June 8, 1942). Pelewura also served in both parties (Macaulay Papers, Box 73, File 6).
2. Sir Akitoye Ajasa was a Yoruba returnee from Dahomey. He was a western-education and high-ranking member of the early African Christian elite, a close friend of Governor Lugard, edited a newspaper, The Nigerian Pioneer, and was regarded as a political conservative. 3. In the 19th century many liberated Africans from Sierra Leone settled in what is now Nigeria. They were important in the development of Christianity, education and new forms of constitutions. One of the most important of these was that devised for the Egba Board of Management.
4. In 1948 the executive committee consisted of Madam Oduola Sowemimo, Mrs. Eniola Soyinka (secretary), Madam Nusiratu Oduola, Mrs. Amelia Osinou, Madam Adetutu Soley, Madam Ibironne Majekodunmi, Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (later Anikulapo-Kuti, president), Mrs. Oluwole, Madam Christiana Ddurodola, Madam Oni Ogunfolaji, and Madam Alice Folaji. (for a photograph of this group, see Aoma, 1948:3.)

REFERENCES

ARCHIVES AND PRIVATE PAPERS
Anikulapo-Kuti, Mrs. Funmilayo. Personal papers in her possession at the residence in Abeokuta.
Dedeke, Mrs. Tinuola. Personal papers in her possession at the residence in Lagos.
Egba Archives, Abeokuta.
Macaulay, Herbert. Special collection of papers located at the University of Ibadan Library.
Nigerian Archives, Ibadan [abbreviated in text, NAI], Commissioner of the Colony Series [abbreviated Com. Col.], Colonial Secretary’s Office Series [abbreviated CSO].

INTERVIEWS
Dedeke, Mrs. Tinuola. Lagos, April 7; June 2, 1976.
Jankara market women.

PUBLISHED SOURCES
Daily Times. (Lagos), 1932-42.
   1211-38.
Olusanya, G. O. (1964) "The Impact of the Second War on Nigeria's Political Evolution."
Oyemakinde, Wale. (1972) "The Pullen Marketing Scheme: A Trial in Food Price Control in
van Allen, Judith. (1972) "Sitting on a Man: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions
   ______ (1976) "'Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War'? Ideology, Stratification, and the
West African Pilot (Lagos), 1944-46.