

# African Studies Review

<http://journals.cambridge.org/ASR>

Additional services for ***African Studies Review***:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



---

**Marc Matera, Misty L. Bastian, and Susan Kingsley Kent. *The Women's War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. xiv + 278 pp. List of Illustrations. Chronology of Major Events. Acknowledgments. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \ \$32.00. Paper. ISBN 978-0325070308.**

Saheed Aderinto

African Studies Review / Volume 58 / Issue 03 / December 2015, pp 237 - 239  
DOI: 10.1017/asr.2015.88, Published online: 23 November 2015

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0002020615000888](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0002020615000888)

**How to cite this article:**

Saheed Aderinto (2015). African Studies Review, 58, pp 237-239 doi:10.1017/asr.2015.88

**Request Permissions :** [Click here](#)

control of African children in a context of changing social values, concerns over sexuality, urbanity, and the formation of modern citizenship.

*Making Modern Girls* has something to offer to all readers. This book adds to the scholarship on gender and colonialism and to the new literature on African children, and it presents an intriguing view of the problems of modernity in Africa. George's account of the lives of working-class girls is compelling, although the focus on Yoruba working-class girls is a bit disappointing. More attention to hawking within other ethnic groups would have added to her analysis of girlhood in colonial Lagos. Nevertheless, this work offers a deep perspective on the contours of modernity in colonial Africa, while presenting new insights into the links among gender, labor, and sexuality in colonial Africa.

Dior Konaté

South Carolina State University

Orangeburg, South Carolina

dkonate@scsu.edu

doi:10.1017/asr.2015.87

**Marc Matera, Misty L. Bastian, and Susan Kingsley Kent.** *The Women's War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. xiv + 278 pp. List of Illustrations. Chronology of Major Events. Acknowledgments. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$32.00. Paper. ISBN 978-0325070308.

In November and December 1929, a series of protests, riots, and demonstrations took place in Igbo and Ibibio-speaking areas of southeastern Nigeria. Known in colonial archives as the "Aba Women's Riot," this event marked a turning point in the story of British colonial rule in southeastern Nigeria and left an indelible mark, not only on the colonial perception of women, but also on the broader history of the African anticolonial movement. *The Women's War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria*, written by three scholars specializing in African and British history and anthropology, provides one of the most detailed and multidimensional accounts of the circumstances that led to those events and their impact on the African-colonial encounter.

The book begins with a critical engagement with the politics of nomenclature and the academic and political implications of how diverse groups of people have documented the event (known locally as *Ogu Umunwaanyi*) since 1929. The authors analyze the relationship between events and its conceptualization, and the politics of knowledge production. Early writers and commentators accepted the colonialists' framing of the Women's War as "illegitimate" actions on the part of "disgruntled natives" against the colonial authority. But from the 1960s onward academic writers, notably Africanist scholars, across generations, disciplines, and locations, began to provide revisionist perspectives that restored women's agency in both the

causes and the impact of the war. Eight well-written chapters take readers into the history of southeastern Nigeria, weaving together different strands of ideas to deliver a first-rate historical investigation. The authors argue that “the political and economic factors that gave rise to the *Ogu Umunwaanyi* cannot be separated from Igbo and other southeastern social systems, which were being transformed by and reacting to their engagement with the tenets of colonial, western society.” To drive home their argument, they “explore local worldviews, the spatial arrangements of the market and the lineage compounds, women’s associations, and the effect of mission Christianity upon women’s contemporary roles in the region, and the changes faced by indigenous women during the 1920s in their position vis-à-vis men and their society in general” (6).

Chapters 1 and 2 provide the most important context for the discussion—an account of the precolonial world of the Igbo and the advent of the missionaries, and the numerous political and economic policies imposed by the British after the “pacification” of southeastern Nigeria. The authors point out clearly that the physical and spiritual lives of the people did not exist in isolation. Rather, they coexisted in a tightly knit manner in various domains such as the compound, family, and marketplace. From the late nineteenth century onward missionaries and British colonialists “changed the land” by disrespecting the customs of the people, introducing new economic policies and transforming the prevailing political institutions to suit their own exploitative agendas. Colonial transformation in particular had a greater negative effect on women than on men because the imperialist enterprise was largely a male-centered and male-maintained endeavor. The core themes of chapter 3 include the ways in which the World War I emergency policies (characterized by forced labor and food shortages) and the demographic impact of the influenza pandemic further fractured the relations between Africans and the British.

When government officials in autumn 1929 ordered a household census in preparation for a new taxation regime for women, they not only broke some significant cultural codes related to gender, privacy, and domesticity, but they also pushed the women to the wall. Chapters 4–8 provide a comprehensive account of the Women’s War itself, the actions of the women who waged the war, and those of the colonial officers who responded to the protesting women with violence. The verbal, symbolic, and physical manner in which the women prosecuted the war clearly revealed that it was not an uncoordinated event without a clear mission, as the British claimed. In appraising the consequences of the war on gender relations, colonial violence, and African nationalism, the authors examine how the public discussion of the event in the metropole, the newspapers, and the legislative houses exposed the contradictions of colonialism as a “civilizing” mission. Hence what appeared at first to be merely a local event in southeastern Nigeria sparked national and global agitation that questioned the legitimacy of colonial rule and the violent response of the government to the women’s legitimate agitation.

The *Women's War of 1929* makes a significant contribution to studies of African women, gender, colonialism, and colonial violence. Matera, Bastian, and Kent retell a familiar story with new sources and insights, and present perspectives that enrich our knowledge of this remarkable event.

Saheed Aderinto  
Western Carolina University  
Cullowhee, North Carolina  
saderinto@email.wcu.edu

*Editors' note:* For an extensive collection of primary documents, see *The Women's War of 1929: A History of Anti-Colonial Resistance in Eastern Nigeria*, edited by Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock (Carolina Academic Press, 2011).

doi:10.1017/asr.2015.88

**Alicia C. Decker. *In Idi Amin's Shadow: Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda*.** Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014. xviii + 244 pp. List of Illustrations. Acknowledgments. Abbreviations. Note on the Use of Names. Appendix: Methods and Sources. Notes. Maps. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. \$80.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978-0821421185.

President Idi Amin Dada remains an enigmatic figure in the history of African leadership. The commander of the Ugandan army before deposing President Milton Obote in 1971, Amin ruled the country by more than doubling the size of the military and creating new security organizations. He violently repressed political opposition, committing some of the most egregious human rights violations in the history of the country: between one hundred thousand and a half million persons disappeared or died before he himself was deposed in 1979. Focusing on the lives of women who survived his rule, Alicia Decker's meticulously researched and crisply written study explains not only why but how Amin's brutality reached the level it did. This is a particularly important contribution, because Ugandan women have been considered marginal to this sociopolitical history, as demonstrated by the dearth of scholarly or popular attention to their role.

Decker convincingly explores the highly gendered militarism of Amin's regime, which drew on and reproduced hyper-masculinized identities and practices to legitimate the dictator's brutal use of force. At the same time, new constructions of masculinity and femininity emerged in militaristic practices. "Weak" (feminized) men and "immoral" women were identified as threats to state security and thus legitimate targets of police and military violence, while "masculinized" (tough) women within the security forces and hyper-feminized "mothers of the nation" bolstered the legitimacy of Amin's rule. But while Amin tolerated few alternatives to these rigid gendered identities, Ugandans themselves had more complex relationships to the state, which Decker examines here with a focus on women in particular.