

Margaret Ekpo:
Lioness in Nigerian Politics



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Stella A. Effah-Attoe
&
Solomon Odini Jaja



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by

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all African female leaders and groups, past and present, struggling for Women Emancipation in Africa.



Table of Contents

	Page
<u>MAPS:</u>	
(i) Map of Nigeria showing Cross River State	
(ii) Map of Cross River State showing Odukpani Local Government Area.	
(iii) Map of Odukpani Local Government Area showing Creek Town.	
 Preface	 vii
<u>CHAPTER</u>	
1. Creek Town - A Heroine's Birth-Place	1
2. Margaret Ekpo's Early Years	9
3. Role in Nigeria's Political and Constitutional Development	18
4. Role in the Nigerian Civil War	46
5. Socio-Cultural Interests	72
6. Socio-Economic Concerns	85
7. Back To Her Roots in Retirement	104
8. Reflections and Recommendations	107

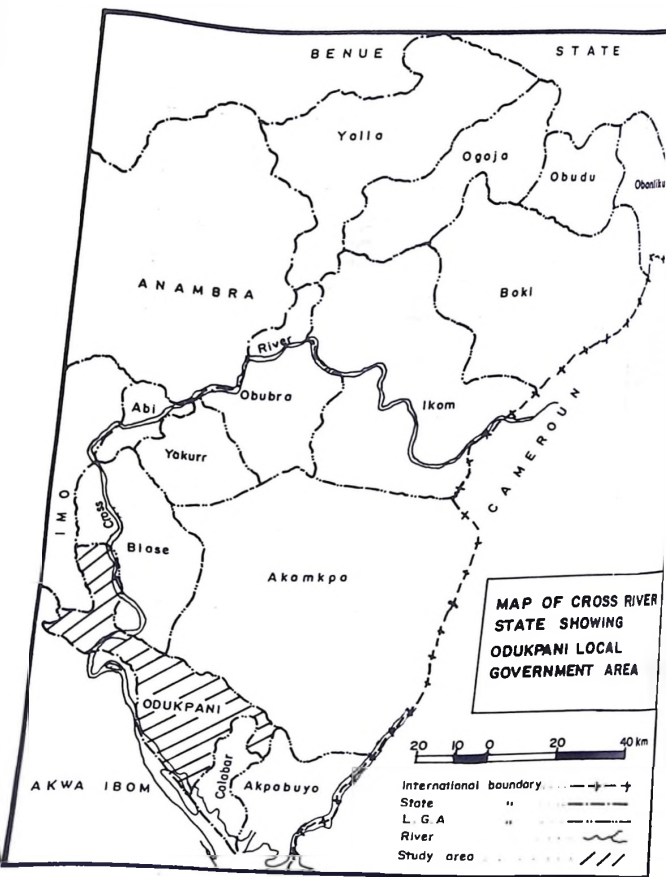
9.	Women Emancipation: An Assessment of A New Era	127
10.	Legacies	149
11.	Conclusion	163

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

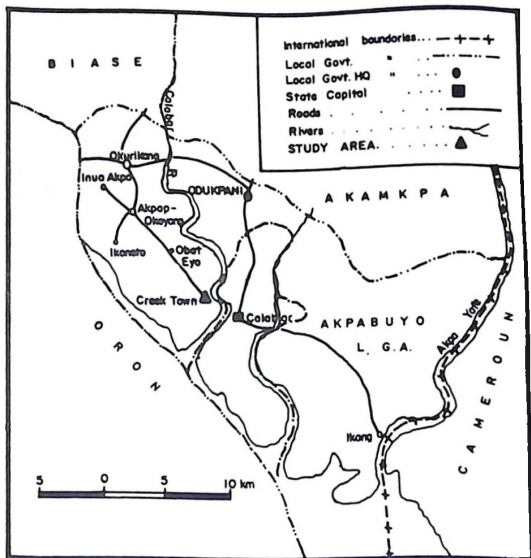
NAE	National Archives, Enugu
NAI	National Archives, Ibadan
NCNC	National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon later renamed National Council of Nigerian Citizens.
WIN	Women in Nigeria

MAP OF NIGERIA SHOWING CROSS RIVER STATE





MAP OF ODUKPANI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA SHOWING CREEK TOWN



Preface

This book entitled Margaret Ekpo: Lioness in Nigerian Politics is long overdue. However, it is opportune and gratifying that, at last, it has been published at a time when the Nigerian nation State is undergoing a traumatic change. It has arrived to herald the advent of Nigeria's Third Republic.

This book, in the Africa Leadership Forum biographical series, has several objectives in view. It provides the first full-scale biography of Nigeria's foremost woman leader from the closing decades of the Colonial era in Nigeria to the First Republic. So far, several works and commentaries have appeared in magazines, newspapers and other media. Some of them had portrayed Margaret Ekpo in one form or the other. Others even painted a wrong picture of her heroic activities, particularly by identifying her with the 1929 women's war in Nigeria. This book attempts, in a quiet but forceful manner, to correct most of the erroneous impressions about her and to apportion to her only the credit due her.

The book also illustrates abundantly that the account of the making of the Nigerian nation-state may never be complete without some mention, however briefly, of the role Nigerian women leaders, particularly Margaret Ekpo, played. As this book progresses, it further illustrates that the arrival of Margaret Ekpo on the Nigerian political scene marked a turning point in the progressive evolution of women emancipation and development in Nigeria. Her arrival also coincided, quite accidentally, though, with the emergence of a new era, the human relations era of women emancipation, and women development programmes in

Nigeria. The role and contributions of Margaret Ekpo in this regard are delineated.

In another dimension, this book offers a clear insight into other aspects of the role and contributions of Margaret Ekpo in their political, constitutional, socio-economic and socio-cultural contexts.

As may be imagined, Margaret Ekpo, like other great men and women in history throughout the world, had her problems, experienced vicissitudes and changing fortunes in the course of her life. The book highlights all this and more. Here, the reader has a not over-sympathetic assessment of her patriotism, dynamism, resolute and abiding faith in "One Nigeria" as a motive-force for Nigerian unity, progress and development. Her adventures with "Biafra" during the Nigerian Civil War illustrate, in unmistakable terms, that she is a heroine and a Nigerian woman leader who was made of sterner stuff.

Furthermore, the book indicates, in a lucid manner, her reminiscences, ideas and legacies for the benefit of her countrymen and women in general. An awareness of these aspects of her life, one hopes, will considerably assist other leaders in their crusade for women emancipation and development in Nigeria.

Above all, this book provides a testimony of her indomitable courage to speak out, to advice and admonish her countrymen and women, all governments in the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the general public on values, morality and qualities of effective leadership and leadership-style in the changing environment of the Nigerian nation-state.

This work took its authors almost three years of consistent research, followed by a year of writing and production. However, the work would never have seen the light of day without a generous grant and support offered by the Africa Leadership

Forum under General Olusegun Obasanjo. We are sincerely grateful to him and the Forum for their invaluable assistance.

We are also grateful to Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo for her untiring effort to provide the authors with information, sometimes at short notice, as well as facilities, materials, pictures and other useful data, without which the production of this book would have been impossible.

Our gratitude also goes to the Director and all the staff of the Public Records Offices, London, Rhodes House Library, Bodleian Library, Oxford, as well as the chief archivist and entire staff of the National Archives at Ibadan and Enugu.

We thank members of Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo's family for their invaluable assistance. Our special gratitude goes to her late sister, Mrs. Grace Chukwurah, whose support and assistance were very invigorating. At her sudden death, we missed a worthy friend and an informant of a high order.

We thank all our senior friends and colleagues, particularly Professor G. N. Uzoigwe, Professor E. J. Alagoa, Professor (Mrs.) Bolanle Awe and all others too numerous to mention here but who, in spite of their commitments, found time to offer us useful advice and guidance in the course of our research and production of this work. We are deeply appreciative of their invaluable comments and contributions, but, we fully accept any errors (including facts and ideas) appearing in this work.

We further extend our gratitude to Mrs. Bassey Okon and N. O. Ikotudia of the Institute of Education, University of Calabar, and the Governor's Office, Calabar, respectively, who worked very hard to type and reproduce the manuscript in a readable form. We also thank Mrs. Bassey Avoh, the photographer who accompanied us during our tours of the major places of interest concerning this work. Similar thanks go to all our numerous

friends and well-wishers whose support helped to make the production of this work possible.

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&

Solomon O. Jaja.

1

Creek Town - A Heroine's Birth-Place

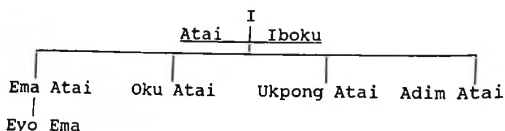
The study of the life and work of Margaret Ekpo has to start with a mention, even briefly, of her place of birth, Creek Town and its early development among other Efik communities. Creek Town has always been one of the thickly populated towns in the area later known as Cross River State. In the nineteenth century, it had about 3,000 inhabitants. By 1906, when A. W. Biddell, District Commissioner for Calabar District, carried out a census in the District, Creek Town had a population of 8,000 persons; Calabar, the District headquarters and Capital of Southern Nigeria, had about 15,000 inhabitants.¹ The relative importance of Creek Town in the District in those days may therefore be easily imagined. In the same Calabar District, the population of other principal towns and villages involved in Biddell's exercise also reflected their relative importance and position in the scheme of affairs. For example, the population figure for *Uyanga Okpo Usung* was 5,000 in 1906; Oban had about 6,000, Okoyong, 2,000 and Netim 3,500 inhabitants.² Creek Town could therefore be placed next to Calabar in importance, administratively and politically, at that time.

Founded in the fourteenth century, Creek Town became one of the crucial settlement areas in the history of Efik migration along the Cross River - Calabar River basin. It was from there that several other Efik settlements were planned and finally established. Among these were Old Town (Obutong), Duke Town (Atakpa) and Adiabo.³ Old Town, Duke Town and Adiabo were, all, in Calabar. Duke Town, in turn, expanded and became the

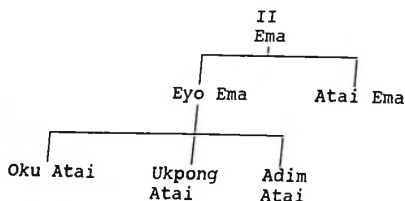
nucleus of other settlements - Henshaw Town (Nsidung), Archibong Town, Cobham Town and Eyamba Town. All these were important Efik trading settlements in the nineteenth century, and even up to the early twentieth century.

Creek Town was also significant in Efik history because of its kingship or Obongship traditions. So far, there are rival traditions in Creek Town genealogy.⁴ These variants need not delay one here. Two of the most prominent genealogies, documented by A. K. Hart and A. J. H. Latham, were as set out below.

The Genealogy of the Kings of Creek Town



(Source: A.K. Hart, Report on the Obongship of Calabar⁵, p. 40).



(Source: A. J. H. Latham, Old Calabar 1600 - 1891, p. 10⁶).

According to Hart's version, Atai Iboku was the founder of the dynasty of the Ataís of Creek Town. Descendants and rulers were Ema Atai, Oku Atai, Ukpong Atai and Adim Atai. Ema Atai was the founder of Otun and Cobham town; Oku Atai was the founder of Mbarakom (Ambo); while Ukpong Atai and Adim Atai became the joint founders of *Obutong* (Old Town), *Mbiabo* and *Adiabo*.

The second genealogy admits that *Ema*, the leader of the migration group that founded Creek Town, was also the ancestor of *Eyo Ema* and *Atai Ema*. It was from *Eyo Ema* that three other groups traced their descent: that is, *Oku Atai*, *Ukpong Atai* and *Adim Atai*. An important fact that may be observed from the two genealogies is that there is still need for reconciliation of the two popular Efik genealogies of Creek Town. Another important fact is that Creek Town, in view of its connection with the establishment of other leading Efik settlements, for example, Duke Town, Old Town, Henshaw Town, Archibong Town, Adiabo and Mbiabo, Claimed primacy in the appointment and control of the Obongship of Calabar.

This dispute survived the Nigerian Civil War. It was eventually settled in 1970 by what is termed the "Creek Town Accord" of 1970.⁷ Since then, following E.A. Udoh's Report and the White Paper on it, the Obongship of Calabar has been held on a rotatory basis by the ruling families.

Creek Town is also reputed to have produced at least, two Eyamba Ekpe holders among its rulers. These are Esien Ekpe Oku Ambo in Creek Town who held the title of *Eyamba I*; and Ekpenyong Ekpe Oku Ambo in Creek Town who became *Eyamba II*. Eyamba Ekpe was the highest grade in Ekpe society.⁸

Ekpe was the government in the various Efik settlements then. The kings who held Ekpe titles were regarded as having made a worthy contribution to the growth of Efik culture and tradition.

Thus, Creek Town won its significant position also among the Efik for having contributed immensely to the growth of Efik history, customs and tradition in pre-colonial times. It had no comparable rivals.

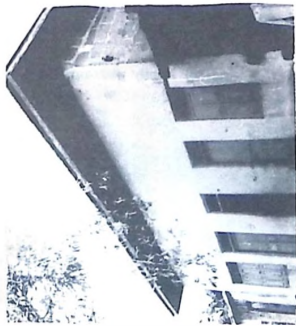
Fondly called *Obio Oko* by the Efik themselves as a veneration for their ancestral home, Creek Town was the first Efik settlement that received missionaries on the Calabar River in the nineteenth century. Under the leadership of king Eyo Honesty II (C. 1835-1858) Creek Town Council of Chiefs sent a delegation to go to the starting point of the Calabar River and receive the first missionaries who came into the area. These were the Presbyterian Missionaries guided by Consul Beecroft. A description of what took place at the reception was recorded thus:

As the King (King Eyo Honesty II) saw the Missionaries he suspended his engagements and went in his "six-oared gig, covered by an immense and handsome Umbrella of various colours" to pay his respect to Captain Beecroft and the Christian party. He was followed by two large war canoes each paddled by twenty-eight men, with a row of armed men standing down the centre, and a swivel gun in the bows. Some of his Chiefs also came in their canoes adorned with flags. It was a welcome of great pageantry. Captain Beecroft also reciprocated with a hearty welcome and warm hand shakes, each expressing gladness at seeing the other.⁹

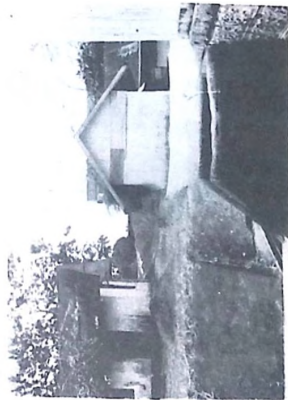
The reception of the missionaries at the mouth of the Calabar River was a major event. It marked the beginning of the ascendancy of the Efik in the spread of christianity in Cross River - Calabar Basin. It, among other things, afforded the Efik another strong handle of change in economic, political and socio-cultural expansion in the Cross River - Calabar Basin in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

However, as an irony of history, Creek Town which brought the Presbyterian Missionaries into Cross River - Calabar Basin Complex was not fortunate enough to become the headquar-

1. CREEK TOWN - A HEROINE'S HOME



**Margaret's Parents' House - The house
she grew up in Creek Town**



**Girls' Institute, Creek Town, where Margaret
went to school**



School where Margaret taught as a teacher



**Creek Town Presbyterian Church where Margaret
and her family worshipped**



**Mary Slessor's House in Okoyong
Near Creek Town**

ters of the mission in the area. This was due to its geographical location in an arm of this creek and distance away from the main stream of the trading stations established by Europeans. King Eyo Honesty II failed to Complete the reception of the missionaries on land as he had done on the river. The noble king had given the missionaries an excuse that some of his prominent Chiefs were absent on the day of the reception on the river. He therefore preferred to put off the second and the more important reception on land until his most prominent chiefs were present. Therefore, another date was fixed for the reception on land.

During the interval, a rival king, Eyamba V of Duke Town, seized the opportunity lost by King Eyo Honesty II of Creek Town and therefore became the first king in the area to organize a rousing reception for the new missionaries and Consul Beecroft in Duke Town, Calabar. The account of the grand reception has been summarized thus:

The King and his chiefs received his guests including Captain Beecroft and the ships' Captains, in his iron palace, "a large and elegant apartment, handsomely furnished". Eyamba himself was dressed "in black hat and feathers, with waist cloth", according to country fashion and loads of beads and brass rings he sat down in "an arm-chair of solid brass", under a handsome canopy.¹⁰

A gift of a bible was made to King Eyamba V by the missionaries. Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell addressed the king and the audience at the public reception, disclosed the purpose of their visit and asked for land to enable them establish christian missions in and around Calabar, promote education; and improve the welfare of the people of the area. The reception was rounded off with a dinner, exchange of greetings, short prayer and benediction. Duke Town, Calabar, thus took the primacy in the development and progress of the presbyterian mission in the area. It was there that the first church, later cathedral was built. A school was later established and Duke Town became the main

centre of Presbyterian Missionary evangelism in the area.¹¹

Creek Town refused to give up its initial effort to welcome the missionary in spite of the above setback. King Eyo Honesty II therefore organized a similar rousing reception for the christian missionaries. But, it was too late in the day to enable Creek Town maintain its primacy in the Presbyterian christian missionary work. However, Creek Town made commendable progress in various directions to hold a worthy second position in christian missionary enterprise in the area.

Undaunted by what his rival, King Eyamba V of Duke Town, had done, King Eyo Honesty II had to cooperate with the missionaries to ensure that every christian activity carried out in Calabar by the missionaries was replicated in Creek Town. After the reception, King Eyo Honesty II granted land for building of a church and a primary school; he also ensured that a Presbyterian Church and a primary school were built and that missionaries were posted to the town.

While Rev. Hope Waddell and Rev. Goldie were placed in Duke Town, Calabar, Rev. Newhall and Rev. Edgerley were sent to Old Town. Rev. William Jameson was sent to Creek Town according to his preference. Through their efforts began the nucleus of the first primary school in Creek Town for boys and girls.

Waddell was immediately posted permanently to Creek Town where he started work on the building of the Presbyterian Church in 1850 and completed it in 1854. Church worship was moved away from the premises of the King's Palace to the new church building.¹²

Creek Town, however, effectively competed with Duke Town in other ways. It produced the first ordained Efik clergyman, Rev. Esien Ukpabio;¹³ it established the first centre for

translation of the Bible into Efik language; it set up the first press for production of educational and missionary books, pamphlets and other reading materials in English and Efik languages.¹⁴

Creek Town also competed successfully with Duke Town, Calabar, in missionary evangelism and spread of primary schools. Through the Creek Town Presbyterian church and primary school, education spread to neighbouring villages - Adiabo, Ikoneto, Mbiabo and several other villages. Later, the Presbyterian mission established the first Girls' Training Institute in South-Eastern Nigeria in Creek Town, the famous Creek Town Training Institute.¹⁵ This Institute was supported by funds provided by the United Free Church Mission (the predecessor of the Presbyterian Mission) and donations or grants from the Government.¹⁶ This Institute offered courses for both Nursery, primary and post-primary education classes. It offered both general education courses and technical or vocational education courses. More will be said about this Institute in the next chapter in connection with the formal education courses received by Margaret.

In Calabar District, there were at the same time, other competing schools; but, these did not have the facilities for Girls' technical and vocational education like the Creek Town Girls' Institute. Other existing schools in the area were the Henshaw Town school which was supported by the chiefs; Duke Town Grammar School, Hope Waddell Training Institution, Creek Town primary school and Roman Catholic Mission Schools.¹⁷ Thus, apart from enjoying educational facilities like Calabar, Creek Town had the special privilege of establishing and running the first Girl's Training Institute in South Eastern Nigeria. These developments at Creek Town later had an important bearing on the training facilities Margaret Ekpo received.

Commenting on the Creek Town Girls' Training Institute and comparing it with other schools in Southern Nigeria, J. A. Douglas, Director of Education in Southern Nigeria, observed:

Nearly all the schools for boys and girls are doing well. Female education is still very backward throughout the colony outside of Calabar and Creek Town. The attendance is small and irregular, and the chiefs and people appear to be unwilling to have their girls educated.¹⁸

Creek Town, in spite of the unwillingness of its chiefs and people to sponsor and support the education of girls, became the cradle and home of Margaret Ekpo. A birth place, with its environment, could and often does influence the history of great men and women. Creek Town, no doubt, played this remarkable role.

2

Early Years

Margaret Ekpo was born on 27 July 1914 at Adiabo Okurikang near Creek Town in the present day Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State.¹ Jackson Akpasubi, in a newspaper feature article, rightly observed that "her birth was special, coinciding with the significant year Southern and Northern Nigeria were amalgamated".²

She was originally named Bassey Sampson Ekpenyong Efa. She was called Bassey because she was born on a Sunday. In the local community, Sunday is considered *Abasi* day (God's day). Intimate members of her family call her "Mma B". Her baptismal name is Margaret Sampson Ekpenyong Efa. When she became married, later in life, some of her friends and relations preferred to call her by her first son's name. As a result she was often referred to as *Eka Effiong* or *Eka Effi* (Mother of Effiong). When she became a teacher, several persons chose to refer to her as *Mma Teacher*.³

Margaret's father originally came from *Agulu-Uzo Igbo* near Awka in present-day Anambra State. His name was *Okoro-afor Obiasulor*. He was a palm-produce merchant who migrated to Adiabo Okurikang in the present Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State. He settled as a friend of the community. He was then a very youngman. At Adiabo Okurikang, he became a very intimate friend of one Ekpenyong Efa (an indigene of Adiabo Okurikang). He continued with his trade and in addition became a farmer.⁴

Okoroafor was a very strong man who defeated many people during local wrestling bouts. His wrestling prowess greatly impressed Ekpenyong Efa who decided to name him *Sampson*, a corrupt version of the familiar Biblical Samson whose name was synonymous with physical strength and power. Young Sampson later went to live with Ekpenyong Efa, his very intimate friend. Sampson was later sent to Hope Waddell Training Institution by Ekpenyong Efa. At the Hope Waddell Training Institution, Sampson was trained as a pastor for the Presbyterian Mission. After his training Young Sampson was paid £2.10 per month as a pastor and teacher. He later adopted his friend's name and became known as Sampson Ekpenyong Efa.⁵

After his training at Hope Waddell, Sampson met and later married Margaret's mother at Adiabo. Margaret's mother was originally called Inyang Eyo Aniemekwue. Inyang Eyo was from Creek Town. She hailed from the family of King Eyo Honesty II of Creek Town. In her life time, she was involved in trading and sewing of clothes.⁶

Reverend Sampson Ekpenyong Efa later left the Presbyterian Church for the Apostolic Church which he helped to establish in Creek Town. His wife, Inyang had accompanied him to his new church where she became a deaconess.⁷ Reverend Ekpenyong Efa died in December 1934. His wife, Inyang passed away in October 1966.⁸

Reverend Ekpenyong Efa and his wife, in their life time, had nine children: six girls and three boys. Theirs was a large family. The first child of the family was Mary Sampson Ekpenyong Efa. She died on 10 August 1979. The second child was Mrs. Lucy Ugwuala (Nee Ekpeyong Efa). She died in July 1965. The third child was a boy: Rev. Robert Sampson Ekpenyong Efa. The fourth child was Mrs. Grace Chukwura (Nee Ekpeyong Efa). She died on 19th November 1991. Margaret Ekpo is the fifth child of the family. After her came Moses Sampson Ekpenyong

Efa. Next was Mrs. Agnes Ibekwe (Nee Ekpeyong Efa). Following her is Ukpabio Sampson Ekpenyong Efa. The last child in the family was Dora Amayo Sampson Ekpenyong Efa. She died on 10 December 1982, at the age of fifty.⁹

Young Margaret grew up in a relatively large household. Her father who was both a pastor and a teacher was a product of the Presbyterian Christian Mission. He possessed all the strict and disciplined qualities associated with christian missionaries at the time. Thus, Reverend Ekpenyong Efa brought that discipline to bear on his children. Margaret Ekpo clearly explained this when she stated:

... the Missionaries in those days were so disciplined. And that discipline was brought to bear on their children. I can tell you that some of us do not know how to dance Ekombi (Calabar traditional dance), because our father was very strict. When he was alive, by 5 O'clock, there must be morning prayers in the church. That is where I picked the habit of rising early. I remember we used to have a big family bell and if the bell was rung and we didn't get up, my father would bring a cane and beat all of us...¹⁰

The discipline imposed by Margaret's father in the family had a very significant impact on the lives of all members of the family generally and on Margaret's life in particular. From her childhood until the present day, all aspects of her life have been guided by strict discipline. Her disciplined life-style, no doubt, contributed tremendously to her success in life.

Apart from Adiabo, Margaret spent a part of her early childhood in Nwaniba in present-day Akwa Ibom State, where her father also worked. From Nwaniba her father was transferred to *Esin Ufot*, near Creek Town. She along with all members of the family, went with him to settle at *Esin Ufot*.

Margaret's father was regarded as a very enlightened man considering the standards at the time. It was his desire that all his

children should be educated, including the girls. He, therefore, encouraged all his children to go to school. Thus, when young Margaret was of school age, he sent her away from Esin Ufot to Creek Town. Margaret therefore started primary school at the Girls' Institute, Creek Town. The school was managed by Scottish missionaries. In 1931, she passed the standard six examination. In her own words:

In those days all schools used to send their students to one centre to take the standard six examination. I did mine in Hope Waddell Training Institute in 1931. I passed my standard six in 1931.¹¹

It was, indeed, a very significant achievement for a girl to read up to standard six and even to pass the standard six examination in those days. It was a rare feat. By all indications, she was a very brilliant girl at school. In addition, Margaret was a very good athlete. She did high jump, long jump, 100 meters race. She usually came first and won many prizes such as basins, pots and umbrellas.

The Girls' Institute was a very unique institution. Many girls from other parts of Nigeria and also from other parts of West Africa attended this school. Many girls from areas such as Iboland, Okrika, Bonny, Yorubaland, Ghana, Sierra Leone, attended the Girls' Institute, Creek Town. For instance, pupils such as late Mrs. Virginia Egeonu from Okrika attended this school. Late Mrs. Inyang (Nee Nya) a one-time Principal of Edgerley Memorial Girls' Secondary School, Calabar, also went to the Girls' Institute. Mrs. Nya (Nee Nyong Etim) went to this school and also later taught in the school. Mary Slessor's adopted children (twins) attended the Girls' Institute.¹² On the whole, the school produced some of the earliest educated women especially in Southern Nigeria, at the time.

In January 1932, Margaret started her teaching career at Creek Town school. This was a mixed school. In those days,

jobs were scarce. There were hardly any other jobs to do apart from teaching, especially for women.

Two years after she started her teaching career, her father died. As a result of her father's death, Margaret could not embark on any further studies. This was because she did not possess enough financial resources to do so. As a result, she continued teaching as a pupil teacher in Creek Town school.¹³ She was a devoted and conscientious teacher.

From Creek Town school, Margaret was transferred to Holy Trinity School, Calabar in 1935. She taught in this school for one year. In May 1936, she was transferred to Saint Michael's School Aba. While at Aba, Margaret left Saint Michael's School and took up an appointment in a school called "A Man's Great AIM School", owned by Chief Umo Essien from Essene in Ikot Abasi area of Akwa Ibom State. This elderly gentleman is still alive.¹⁴ Margaret later left this school to teach at Saint George's school, Aba, in 1938. Saint George's School was owned by one Ikpeme. The headmaster of the school was Pastor Eyo Ekpo, father of Retired Major-General Ekpo. Young Margaret taught Ekpo in this school in 1939. She taught in this school until her marriage to Dr. John Udo Ekpo, an Ibibio, from Ikot Eyo in Eket area of Akwa Ibom State.

Margaret would have married an Ibo, Vincent Okoro, from Arochukwu. She met Vincent in a train when she was travelling from Port-Harcourt to Aba. While in the train, Margaret slept throughout the journey. She, therefore, did not know when the train arrived at Aba. According to Margaret:

... I felt somebody tapped me urging me to wake up and that person was Vincent Okoro. We later became very friendly. After that I started going on holidays to his place at Port-Harcourt and later to Abonnema, where he was transferred to. Vincent was a clerk at G.B. Ollivant at Port-Harcourt and Abonnema.¹⁵

However, young Margaret later called off the relationship with Vincent because she had met another young man, with whom she had fallen deeply in love. That young man later became her husband.

It was in 1938 at Aba that Margaret met Dr. John Udo Ekpo. Both met during a ball room dance at the African Club, Aba. Beautiful Margaret loved dancing very much. Her best relaxation was ball room dance. As result she was fond of attending many dancing sessions.¹⁶

On this occasion, Margaret attended one such ball room dance in the company of her sister, Grace (later, Mrs. Chukwura). Margaret and her sister were so gaily and beautifully dressed that they attracted the attention of many people around. One of the persons who was so attracted was Dr. John Udo Ekpo. He was sitting some where at the corner of the dance hall. Dr. Ekpo was so attracted that he could not help enquiring from people around who the two beautiful young ladies were. According to Mrs. Ekpo:

... He was told that one of us was a seamstress and that was my sister. He was also told that the other was a teacher and that was myself. And Dr. Ekpo decided that he would want to get close to the teacher, that was myself. That was how I met my husband...¹⁷

After a period of courtship, Dr. Ekpo proposed to marry Margaret. There were serious opposition to the marriage from both Margaret's family and Dr. John Udo Ekpo's family. In Margaret's own words:

... My people opposed the marriage because he was an Ibibio and his people opposed it because I am an Efik...¹⁸

In spite of the strong opposition from members of her family, Margaret eventually became married to Dr. John Udo Ekpo in 1940. The wedding ceremony took place at Saint Micha-

el's Anglican Church, Aba.

This incident portrayed Margaret as a very strong-willed woman. She could also be regarded as a broad-minded woman who saw nothing wrong in marrying a person from a different ethnic group. She was, indeed, one of the earliest detribalised Nigerians who was not affected by the sentiments of her people, the Efik, most of whom discriminated between the Efik and the non-Efik. This broad worldview adequately equipped her for the next stages of her life viz: matrimonial life, family life, political and business careers.

Margaret's husband was born in Ikot-Eyo in Eket area of Akwa Ibom State. He was a medical doctor at Aba General Hospital. He however later resigned and set up his private practice, also at Aba. Dr Ekpo resigned his appointment from the General Hospital because he was discriminated against and looked down upon by the Europeans in the colonial service. This was however not peculiar to Dr. Ekpo or to the medical profession alone, during the colonial period. In other sectors of the colonial civil service, Africans generally were discriminated against by the Europeans. More often than not, Europeans occupied the senior cadres of the civil service structure, while Africans occupied the junior set-up. Also, Europeans and Africans with the same qualifications were not placed on similar grades. Usually, the Europeans earned fatter wages than the Africans, even when they had similar qualifications.

After his resignation, Dr. Ekpo set up a medical clinic at Aba called *Windsor Clinic*. The name Windsor came about as a result of the opposition of his marriage to Margaret. In Margaret's own words:

We likened ourselves to the Duke of Windsor in England, who left his throne and married a commoner (Mrs. Simpson) as a result of opposition to their marriage.¹⁹

Dr. John Udo Ekpo was a very intelligent and hardworking man. This probably had something to do with his educational background. It may be noted that he was a product of Yaba Medical School. People such as Dr. Ndukwe, Dr. Green, Dr. Michael Okpara, Dr. B. J. Ikpe, Dr. Ekong and Dr. Michael Peterside, were all his contemporaries at the Yaba Medical School.²⁰ His private practice flourished very well and, as a result, he along with his wife Margaret was able to build ten houses in Aba.

Margaret later resigned from her teaching career and established a sewing institute at Aba also called Windsor Sewing Institute. Apart from sewing clothes, she also trained young women as seamstresses.

Dr. John Udo Ekpo and his wife had two sons. They are Edward John Udo Ekpo and Winston Eyo Udo Ekpo. Edward, the first son, was born on 5 December 1935. Winston was born on 17 April 1943.²¹ Margaret was a very loving and caring mother to the two children of the marriage.²² Edward is a journalist, while Winston is a retired army major and is currently a business man. Margaret has eleven grand-children and one great-grand child.

In 1946, Dr. Ekpo fell ill. He had a stroke. As a result, Margaret had to take him to Dublin in Ireland for medical treatment. In order to raise enough money for Dr. Ekpo's treatment overseas, all the couple's ten houses in Aba were sold. This was, indeed, a great misfortune.

Thus, apart from being a loving mother, Margaret was also a loving and a devoted housewife. She patiently demonstrated the qualities of a committed christian wife who loved her husband and kept the bond of marriage until her husband died on 17 December 1974. This was unlike what obtains these days where very few women are prepared to be so devoted to their husbands. However, Margaret's intense love for her husband matched his passionate

2. MARGARET EKPO - HER EARLY YEARS



Margaret in Western Fashion



Margaret in Trendy Western Outfit



Margaret in Indian Fashion



Margaret and a European hair style



Margaret - A fashion conscious lady



Margaret in braided hair style

love, care and devotion for her.

In Dublin, Margaret seized the opportunity to enrol in the Rathmine School of Domestic Economy for further studies. This was between 1946 and 1948. Thus, by the time her husband had fully recovered from his illness, Margaret obtained a Diploma Certificate in Domestic Economy. In 1948, she and her husband returned to Nigeria.²³

By the time the couple arrived home, Margaret had become very much exposed. As a result, on arrival she wrote a small book entitled *European Women As I see them*. She was forced to write this book because, while in Europe, she discovered that women in Europe behaved differently from the way they behaved in Nigeria. Some were rich others had just enough to maintain themselves, others were poor. In Nigeria, European women did not perform any household chores; but, in Europe, they did all household work themselves. This book was written by Margaret, among other things, to re-awaken Nigerian women from their slumber, to expose to them a lot of things about European women and to help to liberate Nigerian women from the clutches of colonial mental slavery and lethargy.

Margaret's exposure served as a solid foundation for launching herself effectively into the politics of Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s. Margaret's role in the political and constitutional development of Nigeria will be discussed in the next chapter.

3

Role in Nigeria's Political and Constitutional Development

Margaret Ekpo's entry into Nigerian politics was neither accidental nor unplanned. She had a definite urge to go boldly into politics at the time she did. During this period, hardly any woman could be found in Nigeria's political terrain.

Margaret's entry into political activism was at the behest of her late husband. This was, indeed, a rare opportunity and an outstanding fit for a Nigerian woman to have performed at the time. Dr. Ekpo seems to have been forced by circumstances to support and encourage his wife in her ambition to participate actively in partisan politics because of a number of reasons, some of which may be considered here.

Dr. Ekpo was a Yaba-trained medical doctor. In those days, in spite of the fact that medical doctors worked very hard, they were paid lower salaries than those of nurses, probably, because they were trained locally and held qualifications which were not fully acceptable by the colonial authorities. Moreover, the colonial authorities did not provide them with any incentive in terms of promotions. Thus, Yaba-trained medical doctors could not aspire to become full Medical officers without further training overseas. They remained and were recognized and paid as Assistant Medical Officers. Many Nigerian doctors concerned, including Dr. Ekpo, were very unhappy and dissatisfied with the conditions of service of the colonial administration. In the words

of Margaret:

... My husband was always moody. He always explained to me that the European doctors were paid higher wages...¹

This added to her grievances about the deplorable condition of Nigeria, the ugly experiences of the country under colonialism and the poor service conditions of Nigerian women. Margaret felt that the time had come for her to take to partisan politics and join with other nationalists in the struggle for Nigeria's independence and women emancipation.

Incidentally, this was the period when political awakening was taking place in Nigeria, in the 1930s and 1940s. It was during this period that political activists, such as Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Herbert Macaulay, Mbonu Ojike, and others, were touring the country and organizing political campaigns and rallies to help force the pace of decolonization in Nigeria. In 1945, these politicians came to Aba to organise a political rally. Since Margaret's husband was a civil servant, he could not attend the rally. This was because the colonial authorities had barred civil servants from participating in partisan politics. According to Margaret:

Being a civil servant, my husband could not attend... My husband asked me to attend the rally so that I could tell him what was said.²

Margaret who had been waiting for this opportunity seized it and attended her first political rally under the banner of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (later named National council of Nigeria Citizens). She went there with the full consent of her husband.

In these rallies, Margaret was able to learn quite a lot about politics. In her own words:

There I learnt that it was time for us to rule ourselves; that we

must work hard to make sure we ruled ourselves; and that it was time our colonial masters should go home...³

Margaret used to be the only woman in the large political crowd. This was because, in Aba, at that time, no Ibo man would allow his wife to move out of the home and interact with other men in an open hall or field for the sake of politics.⁴ Margaret was therefore considered a very rare, extraordinary and brave woman of her time. In addition, many people could not understand why her husband allowed her that much exposure. Indeed, Dr. Ekpo exhibited fine qualities rare to find among men of his own times when it was generally believed that *a woman's place was just in the kitchen*.

For a long time, Margaret remained the only female voice that was heard during political rallies in Aba. However, she did not feel comfortable enough and wanted many more women to join her. She therefore had to devise an appropriate means to sensitize and mobilize the womenfolk effectively for their new journey.

The end of the second world war was in sight in 1945. This provided Margaret with the next handle for action. During this period, there was still scarcity of salt and other essential commodities which everyone, especially housewives, anxiously needed and also struggled to get. One of them was tablesalt. Margaret decided to make politics out of ordinary tablesalt. She therefore organized an association which was later called *Aba Market women's Association*. On the platform of that Association, she went to all the big shops, such as John Holt, United Africa Company (UAC), and bought up several bags of salt. She then hoarded them.

She insisted that any woman in Aba who did not register as a member of Aba Market women's Association would not be allowed to buy the salt. On the Associations meeting days, any woman whose name was not in the register of the Association was therefore not allowed to buy the salt.

The belief was that any woman who did not put salt in her family soup or meals would have serious problems with her husband. A husband who wanted to eat a palatable meal, it was thought, would therefore see reason to allow his wife to come out and attend the meeting where she could buy salt. Many husbands discovered that they had no other alternative than to permit their wives, even though grudgingly, attend the meetings organized by the Aba Market Women's Association under the Presidency of its founder, Margaret Ekpo. This strategy helped Margaret to mobilize Aba women very effectively. It also contributed a great deal towards creating more political awareness among the women of the area and beyond.⁵

This strategy was later adopted by women in other parts of Eastern Nigeria.

After attending a political rally, Margaret always ensured that she organized a meeting of the Association in order to brief members of the Market women's Association about the discussions and proceedings of such rallies. During such meetings, she also ensured that the women were adequately exposed to the current political developments and major decisions at the time. According to her:

... I would tell the women, do you know that your daughter can be the matron of that hospital? Do you know that your husband can be a District Officer (D.O.) or Resident? Do you know that if you join hands with us in the current political activities, your children could one day live in the European quarters? I used to tell them these things every time and so they became more interested.⁶

With the use of this type of campaign strategy, mass rallies, group discussions, pep talks and informal education, and massive propaganda, Margaret was able to convince many women and got them interested in politics. The result was that a number of women in Aba thereafter decided to accompany Margaret to

political rallies whenever any political rally by campaign teams was organized in Aba. At these political rallies, many of the women, for the first time in their lives, saw in real life such political heavyweights as Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Mazi Mbonu Ojike and others. They also had the opportunity of listening to their inspiring speeches. On returning home, these women would narrate what they saw and heard at meetings to other members of their association. Thus, many women began to realize that men alone could not bring about the independence of Nigeria and that men needed the support of women in their nationalist and development efforts. Above all, women began to realize that they had a part to play not only in Nigeria's political future but also for themselves and their people.

It will be recalled that, shortly after Margaret returned with her husband from their Dublin trip, she wrote a book entitled *European Women As I See Them*.⁷ This was, indeed, a great achievement for, it was not common for a Nigerian woman to write books at that time. The publication of this book was very significant in the sense that it went into circulation at the height of political and nationalist campaigns for decolonization in Nigeria. Moreover, it greatly inspired and reawakened the interest of Nigerian women in politics.

In 1949, a significant event occurred in Enugu, that is, the Iva Valley shooting at the coal mines. This is also referred to as the *Enugu Colliery Massacre*.⁸ Margaret seized the opportunity offered by this ghastly incident to enhance her role in politics and nationalist activism. The coal miners at Enugu were very poorly remunerated during this period. They demanded salary increment and better conditions of service. Rather than respond positively, the colonial administration exposed them to wanton massacre through shooting of guns at them. The shooting led to the death of many coal miners. As a result, many Nigerians protested vehemently against the massacre.

Following this development, Margaret Ekpo, along with others such as Jaja Nwachukwu, S. O. Masi, Iwuna, and Bell-Gam, organized a rally at Aba. They mounted the soap box to address people about the Colliery incident. In doing so, they succeeded in whipping up sentiment against colonialism and its agents.

This gesture, however, displeased the colonial administration. Margaret and her friends were accused of making inflammatory statements. Margaret and four others were arrested and detained. Their houses were thoroughly searched. They were later released but ordered to report at the United Africa Company (UAC) every hour for security screening. The colonial government had found Margaret's speech at the mass rally most offending. She had whipped up the sentiment of the womenfolk by her public address, particularly when she said:

...The colonial government should thank their stars that only men were killed; if any women had been killed, I would have made fire to burn at Aha...⁹

That was considered a very inflammatory statement by the colonial administration. The massacre and the reaction of the generality of the people led to the setting up of the Fitzgerald Commission of Inquiry by the colonial government. The Commission was mandated to investigate the crisis and make recommendations. This Commission eventually came out with a report. Two white papers followed in 1950.¹⁰

The Fitzgerald commission's report may be viewed as a charter of freedom for the people of Nigeria. In Solomon Jaja's own words:

At the beginning of the decade that saw the end of the British Colonial rule in Nigeria, this report became the only voice that cried in the wilderness and saw the vision of the advent of Nigeria's independence. It proclaimed in unmistakable terms that Nigeria was ripe for grant of self-government or

Dominion status.¹¹

On this same issue, a section of the report observed:

As to the goal which great Britain has set for her colonial peoples there can now be no doubt, although there may be differences of opinion as to timing it is to grant them as soon and as completely as possible the government of their own affairs.¹²

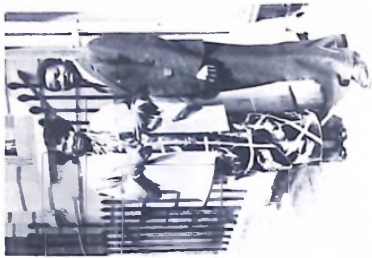
Comments such as the above vindicated Margaret's stand. All along, she had seen the workers' role in the Colliery Incident of 1949 as an aspect of the struggle for self-determination as well as human rights. Indeed, the Commission's report recommended the granting of self-government to Nigeria by the British Administration.

Margaret's concern and struggle for human rights were also demonstrated in 1954. In this year, a wardress, Mrs. Onyia, was murdered in cold blood by an irate warder. He murdered her because she resisted an attempt by the warder to seduce her. When Margaret and her friends in Aba heard of this, they were greatly disturbed. As a result, Margaret organized many women, including the members of Aba Market women Association in Aba, and travelled with them in a train to Enugu, where the incident occurred. Margaret and her women went straight to the prison yard. Women in and outside Enugu converged there and their representatives inspected the spot where Mrs. Onyia was killed. Enugu shook.

Margaret and the women ensured that the case was taken to court for appropriate action. Although the murdered woman had already been buried, Margaret and her women group insisted that her body should be exhumed for autopsy in order to allow for a proper investigation of the case. Following this development, the skull of the slain woman was brought to the court as exhibit. Margaret and her women felt satisfied that justice took its normal



Margaret in an official party



Margaret in London attending the London constitutional conference

course and the murderer was condemned to death and eventually hanged.¹³

It is now necessary to re-assess Margaret's attitude to another tragic incident. It is a fact that the women's agitation or women's war of 1929 in Eastern Nigeria, usually and erroneously referred to as the "Aba Women's riot",¹⁵ greatly inspired Margaret. The agitation was directed against colonial administration policies and actions which had threatened the interest of women. By 1929, the colonial government had attempted to extend taxation to the women of Eastern Nigeria. The women, however, agitated. The resultant crisis spread to "... large areas of Owerri province, including Ahoada division and into Opopo, Abak, and Ikot-Ekpene (Utu Etim Ekpo) areas of Calabar province".¹⁴

Indeed, Margaret was not the only Nigerian female politician who felt greatly inspired by that historical development. Apart from Margaret Ekpo, others such as Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (a member of the Western House of Chiefs in the early 1950s), Mrs. Janet Mokuolu (a member of the Eastern House of Assembly in the early 1960s), Miss. Ekpo Young (also a member of the Eastern House of Assembly, in the early 1960s) and Mrs. Wuraola Esan (the first female Senator in Nigeria in the early 1960s), among others, were also inspired by the events of 1929. According to Margaret Ekpo:

I was greatly inspired by the women agitation of 1929 in Eastern Nigeria. I was a very young girl then. I will like to correct a misconception, I did not take part in the 1929 Women's War. In 1929, I was just about fifteen years old. But because I stayed in Aba for a long time and got mixed up with politics there, many people feel I was part of the women's war. But, I was growing up and heard so much about the event, I began to admire the women and wished to emulate their example.¹⁶

The political activities of women in Western Nigeria were

another important development that inspired early female Nigerian politicians, including Margaret Ekpo. In Western Nigeria, Abeokuta women took the lead in political action.¹⁷ The introduction of the Sole Native Authority (SNA) system and subsequently taxation system greatly disillusioned the Egba. Women were greatly offended because in the whole of Nigeria, only their counterparts in Abeokuta and Ijebu Native Authorities paid poll tax.¹⁸ Egba women then needed a strong and inspired leadership. This was provided by the emergence of Mrs. Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti.

In 1944 Mrs. Ransome Kuti organized the Abeokuta Ladies Club (ALC) which, in 1946, was renamed Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU). Although its functions, initially were purely social, Mrs. Ransome-Kuti used this organization to mobilize women and to fight for their rights. Following the continued insistence by the Alake of Egbaland that women should pay tax, Mrs Ransome-Kuti organized them to demonstrate, calling on the Alake to abdicate his throne. Thus, on 9 July 1948, Alake Ademola left Abeokuta.

These developments in Abeokuta inspired many women in Nigeria such as Hajiya Gambo Sawaba from the Northern part of Nigeria and Margaret Ekpo from the East. Margaret Ekpo attested to this:

I used to read so much about Mrs. Ransome-Kuti. I admired her. In 1954, I decided to go to Abeokuta to invite her to come and talk to our women. I had never met her before that time, but I told my husband and the women about her; that I wanted the women to see her and hear from her that a woman could be very powerful. Then Mrs. Kuti's husband, Reverend Ransome-Kuti, was still alive. I asked her husband whether he could allow his wife to come to Aba, that I wanted to use her as a demonstration that women could do what men could do. He agreed. I spent a day or two with them before heading back to Aba.¹⁹

Margaret had earlier written to all the leaders of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) local branches all over Eastern Nigeria informing them that she was bringing a very distinguished woman to address them. In her letter she had directed that all the women should gather in the different localities in preparation for their arrival.

When Mrs. Ransome-Kuti arrived, she and Margaret toured the length and breadth of Eastern Nigeria where Mrs. Kuti addressed the women. The tour lasted one month. Margaret Ekpo observed:

Mrs. Kuti gave us very useful advice. Her talk really enlightened the women. It opened the eyes of women.²⁰

Margaret used the opportunity afforded her by the visit and tours by Mrs. Kuti as another major platform for women mobilization, political awareness campaigns and for establishing her legitimacy as a woman leader among Nigerian women.

Therefore, Margaret Ekpo and a number of other women in Eastern Nigeria intensified their political activities. In 1951, Margaret became the first woman Vice President of the NCNC Eastern working committee. This was after the first parliamentary election into the Eastern House of Assembly.²¹ In 1953, she was appointed special member of the Eastern House of Assembly. She left the House in 1954.²²

In 1954, Margaret was appointed a Chief with a seat in the Eastern House of Chiefs, again to represent the interest of women.²³ Since then she has retained the title Chief. Margaret confirmed that this appointment was a novelty, but other members of the House of Chiefs accommodated her presence and admired her contributions to debates in the House. In the House of chiefs, she made a motion calling on the house to put pressure on the Police Authorities to employ women into the police force. She lobbied seriously and the motion was passed. Thereafter, women

got employed into the police force at Enugu; they were later employed for service in Lagos, and other parts of Nigeria.²⁴ This was a great achievement for womanhood. By this achievement, Margaret began to open the doors of public service appointment more freely to Nigerian women. This trend has continued ever since.

In 1955, Margaret was appointed a member of the Aba Urban Council Caretaker Committee. Dennis Osadebay who later became the President of the Nigerian Senate was the Chairman of this Committee.²⁵

In an ascending order, it maybe noted, Margaret Ekpo later played a very significant role in the constitutional development of Nigeria. She did not only participate in the Constitutional Conferences but also contributed tremendously, as an adviser for the N.C.N.C., to the making of Nigeria's Independence Constitution. Her contribution to the constitutional development of Nigeria started in 1953 when she attended the constitutional conference held in London in July and August 1953, as one of the advisers under the banner of the N.C.N.C.

The N.C.N.C. delegates to this conference included Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, Kolawole Balogun, E. O. Eyo, Bello Ijumu and K. O. Mbadiwe. Apart from Margaret Ekpo, others who attended, as N.C.N.C. advisers, included T.N. P., Birabi, Chief F. S. Edah, E. G. Gundu, N.N. Mbile, Chief Yama Numa, V. A. Nwankwo, Mbonu Ojike, L.P. Ojukwu, Chief H. Omo Osagie and D.C. Osadebay.²⁶ For details about attendance of delegates and advisers from other political parties, see Annexure A.

The 1953 Constitutional Conference was organized because "Her Majesty's government had decided that the Nigeria Constitution would have to be redrawn in order to provide for greater Regional autonomy and for the removal of powers of intervention by the centre in matters which could, without

detriment to other Regions, be placed entirely within Regional competence".²⁷ The terms of reference for the conference included the following:

- (a) The defects in the present constitution
- (b) The changes required to remedy these defects
- (c) What steps should be taken to put these changes into effect, and
- (d) The question of self-government in 1956.²⁸

These terms of reference were agreed upon in a discussion between the Governor of Nigeria and the leaders of the Action Group, National council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, and the Northern People's Congress at a meeting on 19 June 1953. These were subsequently accepted by the British government.²⁹

The Nigerian delegates comprised six delegates from each region, plus one delegate to represent the Cameroons under the United Kingdom Trusteeship. Out of the six delegates from the Western and Northern Regions, five were to be nominated by the majority party in the Regional House of Assembly, and one by the principal minority party in the Region. In the Eastern Region, four delegates were to be nominated by the majority party and two by the minority party. In addition, each regional delegation and the Cameroon's representative, it was also agreed, could be accompanied by advisers.³⁰

A total of nineteen delegates and forty advisers comprised the Nigerian delegation. The Governor of Nigeria, Sir John Macpherson, also attended the conference. The United Kingdom delegation comprised four delegates, six advisers and the Secretary of State for the Colonies. The Conference, which met at No. 10 Carlton House Terrace, held twenty plenary sessions which lasted

from 30 July to 22 August 1953.³¹

The composition and size of the Nigerian delegation to the 1953 London Conference attracted both negative criticism and positive commendation from the people of Nigeria and the outside world. Eyo E. Ekpe, in a newspaper report, referred to the composition and size of the NCNC delegation as *Political Squandermania*. According to him:

While Zik and his gang of confusionists are running to London, I wish to say that of a singular concern to the peoples of this country is the manner and way in which the NCNC...administer the funds of the party. That sixteen members of the party are to go to England as against five delegates and advisers stipulated in the invitation smacks of political squandermania ever witnessed in the country.³²

As regards the 1949 Constitutional Conference, he further noted:

£13,000 collected from the peasants of this country in 1946 has not been accounted for. Of recent the NCNC embarked on a country-wide collection tour. I am not at all in doubt that the monies collected this year have exceeded that of 1946. What in heavens name are these teams of invaders going to do in London?... I say enough of these deceits now.³³

Ekpe vehemently opposed the inclusion of Margaret Ekpo in the NCNC delegation. He clearly expressed his dislike when he observed:

I am told Mrs. Margaret Ekpo is a member of the National Executive Committee. That is alright. But what is she going to do in England? Perhaps an adviser too...?³⁴

From all indications, it appears, Ekpe was not a member of the NCNC. He was later known to be a staunch member of the National Independence Party (NIP); perhaps, this could account for his opposition to the London delegation. The NIP was Professor Eyo Ita's faction or minority party. Membership of the NIP was

basically composed of a breakaway faction of the NCNC which, at one time, had accused Dr. Azikiwe and the NCNC of being tribalistic in their approach and activities. Ekpe's strong criticism of Margaret Ekpo, perhaps, resulted from her continued stay in the NCNC despite the massive departure of her kith and kin to the NIP. It could also be attributed to the gender factor: since Margaret was a woman he did not see what significant contribution she was going to make in such a historic conference in London.

Ekpe, it appears, was very unhappy also with the fact that the composition of the NCNC delegation did not reflect adequate geographical spread. This is clearly reflected in his other observation on that occasion:

On the whole, now ladies and gentlemen, is Calabar Province well represented in the NCNC delegation to London? 'This is an eye opener'.³⁵

Irrespective of the fact that the 1953 London event attracted some negative comments from the public, it was a very significant and historic development in Nigeria's political culture. The conference voted for a federal constitution for the government of Nigeria. It agreed on a distribution of the different powers of government between the central and provincial or regional governments.³⁶

The London Conference of 1953 also attracted some commendations from various quarters. The right Honourable Dr. Edith Summerskill, P.C., and a member of the British Parliament, greatly commended the participation of Nigerian women in the conference. Dr. Summerskill was a leading feminist in the United Kingdom. Between 1950 and 1951 she was the Minister of National Insurance. Between 1945 and 1950 she was the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Food. According to her:

While the newspapers devote space to the procedural and

administrative aspects of the new constitution, they fail to highlight a matter of great interest to more than half the population of our respective countries, the women. For the Nigerian delegation included two very able and interesting women. Mrs. Tanimowo Ogunlesi came as one of the advisers with the leaders of the Action Group... Mrs. Margaret Ekpo is with the delegates representing the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons... both of them are teachers and have successfully combined their work with marriage.³⁷

She further stated:

I was therefore very interested in the chat I had with Mrs. Tanimowo Ogunlesi and Mrs. Margaret Ekpo to learn about the activities of women in Nigeria and that a conference of 400 women had been held this year to discuss problems which are of special concern to women... As I talked to Mrs. Ogunlesi and Mrs. Ekpo in the House of Commons my mind went back to those years at the beginning of the century when women were excluded from the debating chamber.³⁸

This, indeed, was a great commendation for Nigerian womanhood at the time. This was a time when even women in developed countries such as Britain had not attained very reasonable political heights. This commendation was significant also in the sense that it came from a non-Nigerian, especially a Briton, a majority of whose people at that time hardly saw anything positive about Nigerians and their society.

The resumed conference on the Nigerian constitution was held in Lagos in January and February, 1954. Margaret Ekpo also attended this resumed conference as an NCNC adviser. The composition of the Nigerian delegations to this conference was the same as the 1953 London Conference in terms of number and size.

The conference resumed to consider the report of the fiscal commissioner, various points on which the legal draftsman found that they needed guidance when they came to draft amendments to

the constitution to carry out the recommendations of the conference in London, and to sort out certain issues which the London Conference had left over.³⁹ The Conference which met in the House of Representatives, Lagos, held ten plenary sessions and lasted from 19 January till 1 February 1954.⁴⁰

Mrs. Ekpo also attended the 1957 Constitutional Conference held in London, as an adviser. This conference was held in May and June 1957. The conference reached agreements on changes in the structure of the Federal Government, on the attainment by the Eastern and Western Regions of Regional Self-government, on constitutional changes in the Northern Region and the Southern Cameroons and on amendments to the legislative lists. Amendments to the constitution were made in August 1957 to bring into force Regional self-Government in the East and West and the major changes agreed upon for the Federation of Nigeria and the Northern Region.⁴¹

Mrs. Ekpo attended the Ad Hoc meeting of the Nigerian Constitutional Conference, also as an adviser. This conference took place in Lagos in February 1958. For details about the composition see Annexure C. At this conference, the discussion centered, among other things, on the future of the Nigerian Central Marketing Board and the Federal Electoral law.⁴² The conference considered the report of the committee on the Nigerian Central Marketing Board set up in accordance with the decision in paragraph 67 of the Report by the Nigerian Constitutional conference. Some of the recommendations made included the abolition of the Nigeria Central marketing Board and new arrangements for export of Nigerian Produce.

Between 29 September and 27 October 1958, the resumed Nigeria constitutional conference was held in London, at Lancaster House. It held 40 plenary sessions. Mrs. Ekpo was in attendance as an adviser to the NCNC delegates.⁴³ The conference deliberations focused on the types of fundamental human rights

which touched on such issues as the right to life, freedom from inhuman treatment, freedom from slavery or forced labour, the right to liberty, rights concerning civil and criminal law, the right to private and family life, rights concerning religion, the right to freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, freedom of movement and residence.⁴⁴

One of the proposals deliberated upon in the 1958 London conference was the abolition of special membership status in the Nigerian constitution. The implication of this was, among other things, that there would no longer be room for nominated candidates to represent special interests and particular groups who did not have the franchise, for example, Nigerian women. If this proposal was approved, it would mean the exclusion of women from Nigeria's political development. According to Margaret Ekpo:

It was at the 1958 London conference room that I noticed that the word special member or nominated member was going to be removed from the Nigerian constitution. I argued the issue. They wanted to replace the word elected member for the word special member. At this time Nigerian women did not have the franchise and so if the words elected member were introduced, then Nigerian women would have been thrown off completely from the political arena of Nigeria.⁴⁵

Mrs. Ekpo drew the attention of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe to the above issue. It was then that Dr. Azikiwe, after consultation with NCNC delegates, promised her that, after the NCNC might have won the election in Eastern Nigeria, he would ensure that the constitution of Eastern Nigeria was amended to allow for universal adult suffrage. When this had been done women would be able to vote and be voted for. Here, Margaret seems to have scored her highest point for Nigerian womanhood. At the same time, she demonstrated her political prowess and patriotism.

Mrs. Ekpo's contribution to the emancipation and upliftment of women in Eastern Nigeria in particular and Nigeria

in general was very impressive. Thereafter, she left no stone unturned in her efforts to see that not only the women of Eastern Nigeria but also all Nigeria women regained their pristine role in all spheres of endeavour. This level of achievement required discipline and commitment which she possessed abundantly, Margaret affirmed her disciplined disposition when she noted:

If I had gone to the London conference and spent my time shopping along the streets of London, I would not have known about the intention to eliminate the words 'Special Member' from the constitution. If I had gone shopping while deliberations were going on, may be Nigerian women might not have gained the franchise at the time they did. This is a lesson young women of today should learn.⁴⁶

Following Dr. Azikiwe's promise to enfranchise Eastern Nigerian women, Mrs Ekpo embarked on a massive political campaign as soon as she came back from London in 1958. She organized political rallies to address women in various parts of Nigeria informing them that they had no voting rights in the country. She called on the women to vote massively in support of N.C.N.C. which would introduce Universal Adult Suffrage if voted into power. Thus, Margaret used her success in the bid for franchise to mobilize Nigerian women for emancipation and also for the NCNC.

Her interest in the emancipation of Nigerian women dates back to her early years in Nigerian politics. On 20 September 1954, during a deliberation in the Eastern House of Assembly, at Enugu, Mrs. Ekpo strongly expressed her opinion about women. This was during the second reading of the Eastern Regional Marketing Board bill, 1954. In her contribution to discussions, she observed:

Women were much more involved in the oil trade than the men. Yet there was no indication that women producers would be represented on the Board.⁴⁷

On this issue, the *West African Pilot* noted: "The Hon. Mrs. Margaret Ekpo was continuously cheered when she made out a case for those of her sex..."⁴⁸

There is the need to mention that the environment then, the 1950s, appeared somewhat conducive for propagation of women emancipation in Nigeria. The period witnessed an intensive effort to sensitize and mobilize Nigerian women mainly in all sectors, particularly, in the Eastern and Western parts of the country. While Margaret Ekpo was actively involved in this scheme in Eastern Nigeria, Mrs. Ransome-Kuti was involved in Western Nigeria. The role of Mrs. Elizabeth Adekogbe, President-General of the women Movement of Nigeria and a contemporary of Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, also deserves mention, however briefly, in a work of this nature. Her role and that of a few other Nigerian women towards emancipating the rest of their gender also deserve a full-scale study.

Mrs. Adekogbe strongly condemned the system of nomination of women into the legislature. In her own words:

...This system will not persist as it cannot stand the test of time and popularity... the nomination system will never satisfy us... It confers an inferior status on the women of this country... It is highly undemocratic, grossly unfair and very insulting to the women of this country when men have to nominate who should represent women in the legislature.⁴⁹

Mrs. Adekogbe and her group, following Mrs. Ekpo's example consistently called for the introduction of universal adult suffrage in the country. In 1954, she led a delegation of five to the Nigerian secretariat in Lagos to interview Government representatives on behalf of the women of Nigeria. In the discussions, she requested for elective franchise for Nigerian women.⁵⁰ She had consistently expressed unhappiness over the negative attitude of the leaders of Northern Nigeria and the Northern Peoples' congress (NPC) towards enfranchising women

in the North. she remarked disappointingly:

Women clamour for the vote has reached a stage when the Northern People's Congress and the Sardauna of Sokoto should no more be silent. The attitude of the NCNC all along was well known. Times without number the NCNC declared for the introduction of adult suffrage into the electoral regulation of the country. The Action Group has at last refused to be beaten in the race for the incorporation of this democratic way of voting into our statute book.⁵¹

It is interesting to note that, in the 1950s, women were not alone in the demand for universal adult suffrage. In Eastern Nigeria, as early as 1950, such men as Mbonu Ojike and Eyo Ita had strongly advocated for introduction of universal adult suffrage into the Nigerian constitution. This was contained in a minority report of the General Conference on Review of the Constitution which took place, in January 1950. In the end, as has been pointed out above, it was Margaret Ekpo's political lobbying power during the 1958 Constitutional Conference in London that opened the door for enfranchisement of Nigerian women.

In the struggle for Nigeria's independence, Margaret took a number of far-reaching decisions. One of these was her resignation from the Eastern Regional Coronation Committee on 22 March 1953. This was in compliance with NCNC Jos Convention decision to boycott all British ceremonial parades, official cocktails and dinner parties. She threw sentiments aside for compliance with and loyalty to her party's decision.⁵³ Other prominent party members who resigned from the coronation committee include K. O. Mbadiwe on 9 April 1953,⁵⁴ and Mazi Mbonu Ojike on 12 April 1953.⁵⁵ Boycott of the coronation ceremony by these party loyalists was one of the strategies used in fighting against British colonialism in Nigeria, and to force the pace of decolonization.

Margaret Ekpo also fought vehemently against bribery and corruption in the country. In order to carry out this function

effectively she joined an association called "Bribe Scorners' League". The President-General of this organization was J. K. Ladipo. The organization pledged to carry out a crusade of cleaning up the society by tackling the social ills from their roots. The organization felt that the incidence of bribery and corruption was very rampant and that bribes were being demanded and received openly.⁵⁶ The Association also believed that, if not checked in time, Nigeria after independence would be seriously affected by that deadly social disease. Margaret Ekpo presided over several meetings of the organization held in Aba, as its Eastern chairperson, the only woman who held such a position then in Nigeria. Several observers claimed that the meeting of 2 February 1953 held in Emy Cinema hall at Aba, presided over by Margaret, was a huge success.⁵⁷ Though her Association did not totally eradicate bribery and corruption from Nigeria of her days, many Nigerians believe that the situation then was better than what Nigeria is witnessing today.

A rather very interesting aspect of Margaret Ekpo's political career was the solid support she got from her husband. Although her husband, Dr. Ekpo, was fully involved in medical practice, his interest in, and commitment to, the political development of Nigeria was clearly visible. His interest in politics might have been responsible for the kind of support he gave his wife and the N.C.N.C. In spite of this, Dr. Ekpo was never appointed nor elected into any political office unlike the situation one often finds today. He served as an adviser to his wife and also expressed his opinions publicly and frankly about crucial political events only on the pages of newspapers. For instance, in February 1953, in a newspaper, he stated:

I have heard the news of repeated resignations of some Eastern Assembly men from the N.C.N.C. party... But all these stories of expulsions and resignations need not worry anybody. They are merely 'growing pains'. They will only serve to leave the NCNC stronger than ever before, in the end. And as I know that there may be some people who may

wish to know where I stand, I am writing now to assure everybody that as for me (with my house) I am still in the NCNC and I am absolutely loyal to the NCNC and its leadership.⁵⁸

Dr. Ekpo's stance as expressed above in no small way helped to influence and strengthen Margaret's Continued loyalty to the NCNC, despite the internal wranglings that resulted in the departure of prominent leaders of Eastern minorities, such as Eyo Ita, Okoi Arikpo, Dr. Davies Manuel, Dr. E. U. Udoma and others, in the early 1950s. Dr. Ekpo's conviction and support for NCNC as a party and the political cause espoused by his wife featured in a series of publications in the national dailies. In one of these, he wrote:

The sweeping of the polls by the NCNC party at the Calabar county Council election is indeed an eye opener to some doubting Thomases who thought that because of what is happening at Enugu, the NCNC at Calabar would go down. At the Calabar County Council election, the NCNC swept all the wards in the constituency and the fearless NCNC Assemblyman Mr. Eniang Esien was one of the successful candidates.⁵⁹

It is very glaring that, in all his utterances and political activities, Dr. Ekpo demonstrated a pro-NCNC stance and unity of political purpose with his wife, Margaret. In addition, his writings indicated that he was very politically conscious and mature. This could well explain Margaret's huge success in Nigerian politics of the early days.

During the 1950's, Margaret toured most parts of Eastern Nigeria, addressing several political rallies and engaging in several political discussions and debates. In 1963, for instance, she took part in a debate where she opposed the idea of women in the East paying tax. The debate took place at the Roof Garden of the Niger International Club, 13 Asa Road, Aba. Margaret and A.O. Erokwu, Barrister-at-law, appeared for the opposition while Mrs.

Anisiobi and O. Balogun, Barrister-at-law, appeared for the proposers.⁶⁰ Margaret also spoke at the N.C.N.C. victory celebration in May 1953 where she called upon women to take their places in the politics of Nigeria.⁶¹ On 4 July 1953, she was the principal hostess to Port-Harcourt Women NCNC members, at Aba.⁶² On 3 October 1953, she gave a public lecture at Sapele under the auspices of the N.C.N.C.⁶³ On 2 September 1953, Mrs. Ekpo was elected Secretary-General of the Nigerian Women's Union. The Union members embarked on several tours to different parts of the country to address and enlighten the womenfolk on different political issues in the country.⁶⁴ Mrs. Ransome-Kuti was the leader and General-President of the union. Mrs Margaret Ekpo, Mrs Ransome-Kuti and other members of the union believed strongly in women emancipation and advocated for adult suffrage for all Nigerians including women. In the course of their tours, they visited many places including Port-Harcourt and spoke highly about the union and its objectives.⁶⁵ Several women joined the union and branches were formed throughout Nigeria.

In 1954, Mrs. Ekpo resigned her membership of the Nigerian Women's Union. This was because on 4 August 1954, at Enugu, the National Secretary of the N.C.N.C., Kola Balogun, on the basis of the party's directives, had issued a release calling on all NCNC women members to resign from the union.⁶⁶ The reason for this decision is not very clear; but, it is strongly believed that the leadership of the union had refused to affiliate it with the party. On 29 November 1953, Margaret was appointed Chief Trader of the Eastern Region by the Traders Union of the East.⁶⁷

Margaret was a very prominent member of the women's wing of the NCNC. She participated effectively in the inauguration of the women's wing, not only in Aba where she was based, but all over the country. Concerning the prominence, loyalty and reputation of Mrs. Ekpo within the rank and file of N.C.N.C., the N.C.N.C. Women's wing once declared:

On Monday, March 16, our women will demonstrate to the world that they have a very important part to play in the national struggle for Nigeria's Independence. It is noteworthy that they have chosen to identify themselves with the forces of the liberation Army, headed by Generalissimo Nnamdi Azikwe... and Lieutenant Colonel Margaret Ekpo who has been on the vanguard not only inspiring the fighting men, but also contributing very largely in directing operations. She has never lagged behind the firing lines, and had she not been made of a strong stuff, she would have been despondent as no other members of her sex were numbered among the soldiers in active service in the Eastern Zone... We welcome the Women wing of the NCNC.⁶⁸

Margaret embarked on numerous political campaigns all over the country not only alone with the parent body of the N.C.N.C., but also with the women's wing to mobilize Nigerian women sufficiently for the task ahead. On 1 October 1960, Nigeria became an independent nation. Nigerian women won the struggle side by side with their men.

During the 1959 Federal Election, Margaret Ekpo wanted to represent the NCNC in the Federal House of Representatives in Lagos. But she lost the nomination because the chairman of the party in her constituency was interested in contesting the election. As a result, he manoeuvred her out of the race. She protested vehemently and showed evidence of unfair treatment meted out to her. Her party, the N.C.N.C. therefore decided that she should be nominated for the Regional House of Assembly. Thereafter, she was nominated. She contested and won the election in Aba Urban North constituency under the N.C.N.C. platform in 1961. In this election, she defeated five prominent and wealthy men, one of whom was late Barrister Ayam Uzoigwe. Subsequently, she became a member of the Eastern House of Assembly and remained a member until 1966, when the Military took over political power from the civilians.⁶⁹

Margaret's victory at the polls in 1961 was very significant

not only in the sense that she was a woman, but in the sense that she won elections outside the confines of her original homeland that is, Calabar. She was not an indigene of Aba either by birth or by marriage. Her victory at Aba signified her full acceptability in the area on account of her sincere services, loyalty and dedication to the cause and aspirations of the people of Aba. It was, indeed, not an easy task to have achieved such a feat at that time. However, today, it might be very difficult for anyone to achieve such a goal in the face of growing sectionalism. It must be noted that Mrs. Ekpo was not the only female in the Eastern House of Assembly during that period. Mrs. Janet N. Mokelu was also a member of the House. She contested and won election in Enugu South East constituency under the same N.C.N.C. platform.⁷⁰ Mrs. Mokelu had been a member of the Eastern House of Chiefs and a member of the Enugu Provincial Assembly.⁷¹

In Calabar, Miss Ekpo A. Young contested and won the election under the NCNC platform. The difference between Margaret and those other two women was that, while Margaret won elections in another constituency, the two women won election in their own constituencies. All these women were great achievers. They did not win elections on a platter of gold. They worked very hard to get to such enviable positions. Margaret Ekpo noted this by stating that "it was not a joke to win an election in those days. It required a lot of hard work"⁷² Chief I. I. Murphy was also a member of the House. He represented Ogoja East. Another member was Mr. M. O. Ugbut who represented NCNC Ogoja South West.

Throughout her term in the Eastern House of Assembly, Margaret contributed tremendously to various debates there. In the Eastern House of Assembly, debates of 21 April 1961, among other things, she called on the Government to consider giving grants to the Association for Motherless Children in order to help them continue the good work they were doing. She also called for the immediate completion of the Child Health Centre at Aba. This

was another indication of her human rights stance.⁷³ She achieved her goal.

In December 1961, during the debates in the House, Margaret called for the discouragement of imported goods such as Chinaware, and the encouragement of the manufacture of locally made products, for example, the wares from Okigwe ceramic and brick industries.⁷⁴ This emphasized the need to strengthen Nigeria's economy through the policy of indigenization and self-reliance from the start.

In the debate of 19 September 1963, Mrs. Ekpo called on the Minister of education to seize the opportunity of the Russian foreign scholarship scheme to send many Eastern Nigerian boys and girls to Russia for studies.⁷⁵ She believed that education and manpower development were the key to Nigeria's future success as a nation. Later events bore out her foresight.

On 17 September 1965, Margaret called on the House to pressurize the leader of Northern Nigeria to grant Northern women franchise. In her own words:

We would not like our Northern women to continue to live in harem. The women in Northern Nigeria should be enfranchised to enable them enjoy what I, Mrs. Mokelu and the rest are enjoying... No nation can rise without her women. I would like our able and dynamic Premier to tell the Northern premier that women of the East, the Mid-West, the West will not, I repeat, will not tolerate to see our women in the North being locked up...⁷⁶

In the debate of 18 September 1963, she called on the Minister to look into teachers' salaries and to ensure that teachers were paid regularly for no nation, as the Ashby Commission once stated, can rise above its teachers. Mrs. Ekpo also ably represented her constituency, Aba. On several occasions, she drew members' attention to the numerous problems facing Aba. On 18 September 1963, she drew the attention of members of the

House to the serious erosion problem facing Aba. According to her:

Coming to my constituency, Aba which erosion is fast destroying, the Minister of Town Planning and the Commissioner for Onitsha are living witnesses. I have a photograph here taken... and would like to submit this photograph with the permission of the speaker...⁷⁸

On 29 September 1964, Margaret registered her bitter protest against the merging of Aba urban town with Aba south and Aba East Constituencies. In her own words:

It is so disheartening to see that a constituency with only 96,000 people has a seat, and Aba urban constituency with a population of 131,000 is merged with Aba south and East.⁷⁹

Margaret demonstrated impartial tendencies during her debates in the Eastern House of Assembly and in all aspects of her political activities. Although she was an indigene of Calabar, she did not always support views aired by Calabar people for Calabar area, during debates in the House. She preferred objectivity to sectionalism. For instance, in the Eastern House of Assembly debates of 6 December, 1961, she said:

There has been a lot of saying by our Hon.friends from Calabar that they are being cheated. I will not say so at all. It will be noted that there are not less than four plantations in Calabar. The Plantations were sited there after all factors were taken into consideration. When these plantations start to yield results, perhaps so many industries will be sited there to cope up with raw materials.⁸⁰

Her impartial nature was also demonstrated in the debate of the House on 24 November 1965. She then said:

...There is already a move for a School of Technology to be built and, if I am not mistaken, it is to be built at Enugu... I would suggest that this school of Technology should not be built at Enugu, but at Port-Harcourt or Aba...⁸¹

Her views, on this occasion, were, however, not accepted. Eventually, the only College of Technology was built in Enugu, the capital of the then Eastern Nigeria. No similar school was built elsewhere in the Region. The result of this approach to technological development in the region is outside the scope of this work. However, it may be noted that the minority areas of Eastern Nigeria were denied an early start in technological development as both the college of technology and the earlier trade school were both sited in Enugu.

It is on record that Margaret was a very proficient speaker who contributed to almost all the debates in the House. She made the House a very lively place and was held in high esteem by her colleagues, especially the menfolks.

As a result of Mrs Ekpo's outstanding achievements in many fields of endeavour, she was given a national honour, "Officer of the Order of the Niger", (OON) on the first of October 1965.⁸²

With the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War in 1966, Margaret's life shifted into another horizon. She was forced to leave the murky waters of politics. She then came face to face with the reality that the country, whose sovereignty she fought so hard to achieve, was being torn apart by an unfortunate civil war. The Nigerian civil war and Margaret's reminiscences therefore form the subject matter of the next chapter.

4

Role in the Nigerian Civil War

The Nigerian Civil War has come and gone. However, its memories still linger on. Some gained by that war; others lost by it, but the total effect was shattering.¹

For Margaret, the Nigerian Civil war was an unnecessary war. "We in Nigeria left undone what we should have done; and we did what we should not have done; in fact there was no good health in us. By that war, I lost virtually everything I had except life",² she concluded.

As a frontline Nigerian woman leader, Margaret did not want to reopen old wounds nor rehearse, in detail, the prelude to the Nigerian civil war.³ So many things definitely went wrong and needed urgent solutions. But, she did not believe these needed a military confrontation nor a civil war solution, if only wise counsel had prevailed. She believed in the strategy of dialogue, discussion and the conference table. As Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth president of the United State of America, once put it, "the American nation is the American nation; it must remain united and inexorable with blood if need be".⁴ In the same way, Margaret viewed the Nigerian nation as the Nigerian nation which must be kept together and united, if necessary and only, as a last resort, by war. Her faith in Nigerian unity was very strong, so strong that it could not be bent over by force, cowed down by intimidation or changed by one of the crudest detention in African history, or by imprisonment. She was prepared for the worst, even death. In fact, she preferred to die a Nigerian in Nigeria which she had helped to

nurture for so long. She had also tried to liberate Nigeria from the clutches of colonialism and build her up as an independent nation.⁵

In 1966 there occurred a *coup* and a *counter-coup*; each was bloody. Each *coup* claimed a Head of State or Government and several other Nigerians dead or wounded.⁶ There was indiscriminate killing of Nigerians from one part of the country. This occurred several times; but, most important ones occurred on 29 May, 29 July, 29 September and 29 October 1966.⁷ The people from every major group in the former Eastern Nigeria were affected by these murderous acts. "In her view: We were all affected. But, I did not believe that that was yet enough reason for secession or war".⁸ She believed that two wrongs would never make one right; that a declaration of secession was tantamount to an open declaration of war; that the Nigerian side would accept the challenge, that the consequences would be total and more wasteful of human life than the pogrom that was mourned and complained of at the time in Eastern Nigeria.

Five major events took place in Nigeria during the first five months of 1967. The first three raised the hopes of every well-meaning Nigerian that peace was in sight. The last two dashed those hopes to the ground and replaced them with fear of war.

The first of the events was the Aburi Accord or Agreement.⁹ In January 1967, this Agreement was reached by the Nigerian Supreme Military Council at Aburi, Ghana. But, both the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Government of Eastern Nigeria interpreted the Agreement differently. There was no second meeting to resolve the differences. There was no independent panel of arbitrators to help the two sides to the dispute resolve their differences or come back to a conference table. This was one of the saddest omissions from the decisions which were reached at the Aburi meeting. So, according to Margaret, "the Army boys from the North and the East were given an opportunity to drag Nigeria into an unnecessary war". In her view, the war

could have been averted even after the failure of the Aburi Accord.

The second events which took place in 1967 made this situation apparent. The Government of Eastern Nigeria began to hold Consultative Assembly Meetings in all the major towns and cities of Eastern Nigeria. The main objectives were to consult with the people of the area through their leaders of thought to determine how best to channel the course of actions in Eastern Nigeria; how to relate with the Federal Government in handling the political, economic and social problems facing Eastern Nigeria; and how to choose the best options for the future administration of Nigeria. When the Assembly met at Aba in April 1967 Margaret was invited to attend it as one of the leaders of thought in the area, having been a political representative of the area in the Eastern House of Chiefs and the Eastern House of Assembly for over a decade and until the military *coup* of 15 January 1966. "I was also a frontline Nigerian woman leader in the area, *coup* or no *coup*. When I received my invitation, I was very happy to attend the Assembly in Aba township Hall", she added.

What followed was a total disappointment considering the importance and the strategic position of Aba. The Governor of Eastern Nigeria, Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, arrived there in an helicopter and was present to address the opening session. After rehearsing the events of the period 1966 - 1967, he gave the delegates various options to deliberate on and take their own decisions. He requested the delegates to send copies of their resolutions to him.¹⁰ He then left.

His absence from the Assembly turned what would have become an Assembly of leaders of thought with the Governor of Eastern Nigeria to a public forum for politicians to display their egotism, short-sightedness and provocative utterances. Eventually, in spite of protests from a few dedicated and well-meaning Nigerians, the Assembly resolved that Eastern Nigeria should

review its association with the rest of Nigeria and as soon as possible establish a country of its own. In the end members dispersed.

In early May 1967, the Assembly was reconvened at Umuahia. This time it was more embracing. The same procedure that was used at Aba was repeated at Umuahia. Decisions similar to those at Aba were taken. Again, the members returned home.

Tension mounted gradually and discussions centered more on the creation of a new nation, what it would be called and how it would relate with Nigeria. This was the last of the pre-civil war meetings Margaret attended.

Like a still, small voice, she spoke to her fellow Nigerians; she cautioned and warned; but her warnings fell on deaf ears. Rather than appreciate her advice, cautions and warnings, several Nigerians saw her as a threat to their ambition, a "black leg" and later a *saboteur* or *sabo*.

In her advice and warnings, Margaret maintained four main positions: the independence of Nigeria was not won on a platter of gold. It was won from the British after so much suffering and loss of human lives. It was won through protracted negotiations, conferences and meetings. No one should do anything to compromise Nigeria's independence, no matter the extent of threat, provocation or enticement.

She cherished Nigerian unity and therefore advised her fellow Nigerians to work hard and ensure that Nigerian unity was maintained. She spoke, almost in tears, to the Assemblies at Aba and Umuahia reminding her fellow Nigerians of an old adage: "united we stand; divided we fall". She briefly recounted what continued unity would mean for Nigeria, "a land flowing with milk and honey". She also drew their attention to the fact that no great nation ever became successful without internal rifts, struggles and

conflicts. But, in the end, those countries always emerged to be very successful. She illustrated her case with a reference to Britain, a country in which she had lived and received her training, Canada which she had visited as a politician; and the Soviet Union which she had also visited on invitation and as a Nigerian Woman leader. The lessons from these countries, in her view, should warn Nigerians to desist from attempts to balkanize Nigeria upon the least political or ethnic disagreement. The most regrettable aspect of the matter, as she saw it, was the incorporation of the on-going political, economic and social disagreements in Nigeria into the military frontiers. For the survival of Nigerian unity, the two fronts must be kept aside; soldiers should learn to keep to their own role and leave civilians to handle the affairs of Nigeria through negotiation at the conference tables. Nothing should be done to tamper with Nigerian unity.

Margaret also stressed the need to accord recognition to the ethnic minorities in Nigeria.¹¹ In Eastern Nigeria, she advised the Government to borrow a leaf from the Mid-West which was created a state through the cooperation of all parts of Nigeria. She opposed the idea of provincial system of administration as a replacement of State. In order to ensure the stability of Nigeria, states, in her view, must be created as was promised to all before the establishment of the Mid-West State. The Calabar - Ogoja - Rivers State, in her view, was long overdue and should, along with other States, be created without further delay. She prayed the Assembly to include her proposals into their report to the Government.

In connection with the future progress of Nigeria, Margaret emphasized the need for love and cooperation among all ethnic groups. She called on all sections of Eastern Nigeria to eschew bitterness and learn to live like brothers and sisters. The peoples of the North, the West and the Mid-West should learn to do the same. She condemned the wanton murder then going on in Nigeria and called on all governments to prevail upon their people

to stop murdering their fellow Nigerians, an act that was reprehensible before God and men and would tend to impede rather than promote the process of national integration.

Margaret called on the Assembly to continue to recognize the role and importance of women in Nigerian society. She thanked them for inviting her to the Aba Assembly and later to the Umuahia Assembly. She wished the Assembly a fruitful deliberation and all women success in their efforts to build one Nigeria in which no man, nor woman would be oppressed.

In the end, the leaders of thought Assembly or Conference made its resolutions before members left. The resolutions were conveyed to the Government at Enugu for consideration and further necessary action. Another opportunity was lost, of securing the cooperation of the leaders of thought from Umuahia and other provinces of Eastern Nigeria. The Assembly was the second to the last of its kind before the civil war.

About two weeks afterwards, another Assembly, dubbed the "Constituent Assembly", was held at the New House of Assembly, Enugu. Margaret was not invited to it. She did not attend it. However, from the information she gathered, it was held for three days instead of for one day as was the case at Aba, Umuahia and other important towns of Eastern Nigeria.¹² Its chairman was Alvan Ikoku, a one-time member of the United Independence party.¹³ Nnamdi Azikiwe was there also. At first the situation appeared to be quite promising. But, the question that was on everybody's lips was "Constituent Assembly for what"? The atmosphere was quite tense.

On the whole, the meeting of the constituent Assembly, Margaret thought, was a veritable opportunity to search for a peaceful settlement, documentation of the losses suffered by the people of Eastern Nigeria, a call for an enquiry and payment of adequate compensation to all who were victims of the events of

1966 on both sides. However, this was not done. So, another opportunity for a search for peaceful settlement was lost.

The last Assembly listened to free speeches.¹⁴ Some members booed at Nnamdi Azikiwe who, as an elder statesman, attempted to counsel for a peaceful approach to any settlement of the issues at stake. Others called him names and jeered at him. The news spread. During the day for free speeches, some spoke on the assurances which were said to have been given to the people of Eastern Nigeria by the late Obafemi Awolowo. According to them, it was believed that Awolowo had reliably promised the Government of Eastern Nigeria of cooperation from the Government and people of Western Nigeria. It was believed that Awolowo had assured that, if Eastern Nigeria seceded from the Federation of Nigeria, Western Nigeria including the Mid-Western Nigeria would follow suit. Then, all three independent States East, West and Mid-West - would cooperate and work out the best way to pursue their destiny untrammelled by the action of the Government and people of Northern Nigeria.

Others, while hailing this chain-secession ideology, extolled the qualities of Awolowo and concluded that it was the best thing that was about to happen to Nigerians: "Three independent States carved out of an amorphous Republic called Federation of Nigeria". They dreamt the dream of the end of Nigeria as a Federal Republic; they saw the visions of the end of what they termed *Hausa-Fulani Oligarchy*; they began to breathe an imaginary air of *freedom* circulating in an independent Republic of their own creation. At the end of this revolutionary Assembly, Nnamdi Azikiwe and others left, totally disappointed. This was also the way Margaret had felt a few weeks before when their own council of prudence had fallen on the deaf ears of her countrymen and women. Thus, the second event, the meetings of the Assemblies and conferences of the leaders of Eastern Nigeria, eventually came to an end on 28 May 1967.

In the meantime, the third major event had taken place on 27 May 1967, that is, a day before the end of the Constituent Assembly. Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria's Head of State, had taken the bull by the horn by announcing over the Nigerian Network news that Nigeria had created twelve new states and adopted a new administrative structure, that is, a twelve State structure within the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Eastern Nigeria was divided into three States - the East Central State, Rivers State, and South Eastern State.¹⁵ Margaret believed that that was a major revolutionary step taken by the Nigerian Government to make secession impossible; to ensure that if it was attempted, it was doomed to collapse; and to guarantee the identity of the minority peoples in Nigeria in general and in Eastern Nigeria in particular. Many Nigerians also thought that those who were planning any secession would see the handwriting on the wall, call off their bluff and seek for a peaceful way of settling the issues at stake.

However, such an alternative, for Eastern Nigeria's policy makers and secession strategists, was considered unrealistic and abandoned. For them, it was impossible for several reasons. First, Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, as Governor of Eastern Nigeria, had no more territory to rule. His vast territory, formerly called Eastern Nigeria, "had been abolished by Decree No. 27 of 1967, the State Creation Decree. In its place, three other States had been substituted, and each of them had been placed under a military Governor. The die was cast.

Three days afterwards, that is, 30 May 1967, Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu declared, in another broadcast message over Eastern Nigeria, the birth of a new Republic, the "Republic of Biafra".¹⁶ He dropped the ideas of State creation and adhered to the old concept of provincial Administration system. Thus, he unwittingly offered to the minority peoples of Eastern Nigeria an opportunity to choose between a Nigerian Federation with a state system of administration and a Republic of Biafra with the old provincial Administration system. They quickly chose the former

and, in a subdued tone, practically rejected the latter. Biafra decided to deal with them.

A variety of repressive measures were adopted to consolidate the gains and position of the new Biafra; the army, the police and the Military intelligence were unleashed on innocent civilians. Any sign of opposition was punished with a death sentence; non-compliance with directives from the Supreme Headquarters was punished severely, in some cases with imprisonment without trial. The slightest suspicion by neighbours, most of whom through over-zealousness, group disaffection, bribery or retainership yielded information to roving men and women of the Military intelligence from Supreme Headquarters or its field offices. Any suspicion, any infraction, was met by a forceful arrest without warrant, detention without trial or "protective custody" as some of them styled the action. In Margaret's view, rumour bred rumours; suspicion increased by leaps and bounds; tension rose; and fear gripped innocent civilians, particularly those from the ethnic minority area.¹⁷

The fear created by neighbours was the worst psychological situation one had to pass through in those early months of the declaration of the Republic of Biafra and the commencement of the Nigerian civil war. Neighbours made the best use of available opportunity to wreak vengeance on others whom they did not like, had quarrelled with, had offended or had suspected were not from their own ethnic group and could not be trusted. They gave out information, true or false, but quite often tendentious, that persons from the ethnic minority areas were no longer trustworthy; that some of them after their work, drove several miles home for safety or to wait for liberation by federal troops.

Certain actions, though not openly outlawed were surreptitiously regarded as sabotage, crime, and security risks. These actions included tuning in Radio Nigeria; tuning in Nigerian Television Channel; singing Nigeria's National Anthem; saying

anything complimentary about the creation of twelve states by the Nigerian Government; saying anything uncomplimentary about the Republic of Biafra; refusal to admit that Nigerian troops had not been *wiped out* at the Opi junction near Nsukka; saying anything about the fall of Enugu, Owerri and so on. Words were selected carefully and weighed before use; any comments about Nigeria were made behind closed doors and only to very intimate relations; comments about the war were usually guarded. At that time, the popular maxim *silence is golden* became true.

Events moved fast. The Civil War progressed; Aba remained as yet undisturbed but quite uneasy. Then, in September 1967 Margaret's turn came. She was arrested and classified as a *saboteur*, a popular name for a non-conformist. How it happened, what happened next and how she eventually regained her freedom and went to live in Lagos and no more at Aba will be recounted in the rest of this chapter.

According to her, on that fateful September day:

At about 5p.m., two Ibo men in plain clothes entered my house at No. 21A Park Road, Aba. They said that they were sent from the Military Intelligence office at Umuahia to bring me, my brother Ukpa-Sampson Ekpenyong and my houseboy, Etuk Akpan. They enquired about my brother and I told them that he was not around. Later, my brother came in. He and my houseboy were taken outside without further ceremony. One of them then asked me to take any change of clothings I might want to have with me because Government wanted me and would like to ask me some questions. I entered my room, packed few dresses and cloths in a suit-case, took some money in my purse and dressed properly. Thereafter, I came out and followed him. We left my premises in a kitcar. The car drove us to Umuahia where we arrived at about 10p.m. on the same day.¹⁹

That was the end of Margaret's personal freedom and the beginning of sorrows for one who had served Nigeria loyally all her life. She lost her freedom throughout the Nigerian Civil War.

She only regained it at the end of the war.

At Umuahia, she was driven in the kitcar to the Military Intelligence office where she disembarked. She was asked to sit on a bench at the corridor; other people were there also, some sitting on similar benches while others were standing. People gazed at each other's face in silence. One could hear the drop of a pin on the floor in the awful place. At about 1 a.m., an officer drove in and alighted from his car. As he arrived where she and others were left unguarded, he was angry and queried furiously, "who are these people? who brought them here and dumped them here without guards? Suppose they run away"? He then shouted for his officers to come. While everyone else seemed to be gripped with fear, wondering what would happen next, Margaret raised her head and accosted the officer in a moving but firm feminine tone:

Officer, you are welcome. I am Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo. I was brought here by some men for reasons they have not yet disclosed to me. I can not run away. If I run away from here, it will be useless because wherever I go to in this Eastern Region of Nigeria, I will be recognized.²⁰

On hearing her and the mention of the words "Eastern Region of Nigeria, long after the declaration of the Republic of Biafra", he chuckled, looked round, and then walked away. Neither he nor any of his officers came back to where Margaret and the other suspects were waiting, possibly, for trial and a final sentence by the Military Intelligence Court. So matters stood till day-break.

At day-break, Margaret sauntered around the large courtyard. She saw one of the officers at the center and asked for help. She asked for a policewoman who might help her and also accompany her to the nearest toilet. When none was made available, she found her way to a toilet where she helped herself completely unaccompanied. Later, she returned to her wooden bench, sat there anxiously waiting for her assailants. She remained there till 4 p.m. without food, water or drink.²¹

4. MARGARET EKPO IN COMMERCE AND
INDUSTRY



**Marg boutique, Lagos - Margaret (Right) showing
a student how to sew**



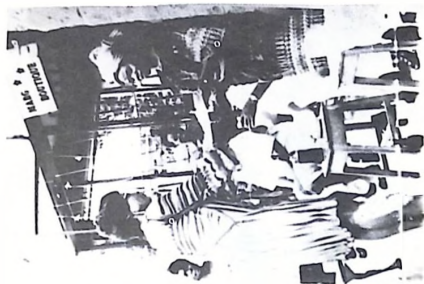
**Margaret (Left) monitoring a student
learning how to sew**



Margaret (left) taking measurement of



Margaret (Centre) and two of her students



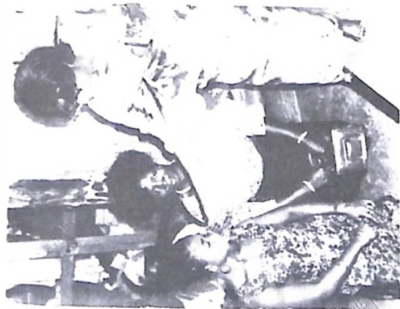
Margaret (Left) presenting a certificate to a graduate



Margaret (2nd Right) and some of her apprentices



**Margaret (Right) blessing a graduand
and wishing her success in life**



Margaret (Right) performing a passing-out ceremony



Margaret (Sitting, Third from Right) and her students in a group photograph

Later, an officer, Ukpong by name, a police Public Relations Officer, arrived at the center. When he was about to pass, Margaret greeted him and introduced herself. He turned and asked her to follow him in his car. He took her away to the amazement of others who were at that Military Intelligence office. As he drove the car, Margaret felt some air of relief, thinking that she was going to his house and that her release would be effected possibly from there. As events later proved, that belief was erroneous and her hopes misplaced.²²

The car eventually drove her out of Umuahia town. After about thirty minutes, the car drove into a big courtyard much larger than where she was at Umuahia. It stopped and Ukpong came down and beckoned on her to come down also. She thought they were going to find something to eat. She followed him. He took her into an office where she was handed over to some officials. Then she looked round and realized that she was in another military intelligence station, this time a detention camp. As she sat on a chair in the station, she peered across to the rooms nearby and noticed that so many other people were already detained there.²³

Then she saw Barrister Araka, an Onitsha lawyer, saunter along the corridor of the inner apartments. Later, Chief Eyo Otu Eyo, once a Principal Secretary, emerged from one of the rooms, casually dressed and looking unkempt and worried. Other inmates strolled outside the courtyard lazily, talking in a low voice. Margaret beckoned at Chief Eyo to come nearer. When he came nearer and recognized her he was shocked. Margaret told him quietly that she was tired and thirsty and wanted where to get something to drink to assuage her thirst; even water would do. Chief Eyo asked her who brought her there and she mentioned the man's name, Ukpong. Chief Eyo smiled and said that the man was the police Public Relations Officer attached to the Center; that the center was a detention camp; there was no provision for drinks or drinking water; the detainees there always drank like cows from

the tap, standing, a few yards away, by using their mouth directly on the water tap or by using their hands to get enough water to sip. He took Margaret to the tap and taught her what to do. She did so and drank enough water from both her hands curved round the water tap. Chief Eyo regretted that there was no more food that evening. Food might be served her the following day. So far, for two days and two nights, Margaret had no food nor drink. She passed through rough times as if under dry fasting for a nation that was in travail.

She enquired and found out that the new place of detention was Government College at Umudike village.²⁴

At about 9 p.m., an official arrived and took her particulars. He later checked her into one of the rooms at the far end of the first block of houses in the detention camp. He left her to take care of herself there *until further notice*. There she was to remain for about one year and four months, that is, September 1967 to 31 December 1968. Like the *Prisoner of Zender*, there was no trial, no conviction; there was no interrogation, no pronouncement of sentence; and yet there was incarceration and total deprivation of liberty.

Margaret passed the first night at Umudike sleepless. Occasionally, however, she knelt down and prayed for herself and for the inmates of Umudike detention camp.

The next day, that is the third day of arrest, Margaret was given food for the first time. This was the menu for the day:

Morning

Bread, tea or coffee; two eggs, butter, sausage and milk.

Lunch

Gari with okro soup or melon (egusi) soup along with two or three pieces of meat.

Dinner

Rice and stew with meat or boiled yam with stew and meat.²⁵

Other inmates in the detention camp, usually referred to mockingly as *V.I.P. Detention Camp*, were similarly fed. From her judgement, the menu for each day was rich and satisfactory. This practice continued for about six months and then stopped. After the first six months, the inmates were no longer catered for regularly. Any day they were fed once was regarded as a special day. In her words:

At first they gave us nice food as already stated, bread, tea, coffee, eggs, butter, sausage, gari and soup, *okro* or *egusi* with meat. But this lasted for the first six months before the authorities stopped giving us such food. After Nigeria had applied her economic blockade, the Authority stopped giving us such food. They revised their menu. The day we ate once that was a special day. Quite often we remained from morning till night without food.²⁶

On the fourth day, she became a little more inquisitive about the inmates of the detention camp and the surrounding areas. She got in touch again with Chief Eyo Otu Eyo and later met Dr. Ukpong, the former Senior Medical Officer at Aba. She and Chief Eyo were from Calabar province while Dr. Ukpong was from Ikot Ekpene in Annang province. As other inmates were introduced or mentioned by name, She noticed that the majority of the detainees in the detention camp were from the loathed Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers State Area.²⁷ Dr. Ukpong recounted how he was arrested. He was before his arrest and detention, the senior Medical Officer at the General Hospital, Aba. His wife and children were at Ikot Ekpene, less than forty kilometers from Aba. After working hours on Fridays, he would drive home to see them and ensure that they had food and other necessities. Early on Monday morning he would return to Aba to work for the week. As he drove towards Ikot Ekpene, he was stopped on the way, arrested and taken away for detention. Eventually, he found himself at the Umudike

Detention Camp.²⁸

Another lady, one Dodo Meyer of 98 Bonny Street, Port-Harcourt, was also there. She mentioned Rivers people in the detention camp, how she was arrested and eventually brought to the same detention camp.²⁹

As days went by, Margaret made more acquaintances with the inmates of the Umudike Detention Camp. She also observed the presence in that camp of several indigenes of Onitsha and Onitsha province. Apart from Barrister Araka, there was Chike Obi, the famous professor of Mathematics. He insisted on knowing the reasons for his arrest and detention; but, no one afforded him an answer. He went on hunger strike for several days in protest against what he termed *the inhumanity of man to man*.³⁰

One Okereke, a senior Manager at Kingsway Stores, Port-Harcourt, was arrested and also detained there. As he narrated to the inmates, the cause of his arrest was that he took photographs when Biafran troops invaded and took over Port-Harcourt after Federal troops had landed in Bonny and occupied the town. He did not remain for long at Umudike Detention Camp before he was removed to another unnamed detention camp or prison. Margaret did not see nor hear about him again until the end of the Nigerian civil war. Okereke, she heard after the war, later became the Public Relations Officer at the Niger House, Lagos.

At Umudike Detention Camp, there were over one hundred inmates herded in rooms in about five blocks of buildings in a large courtyard with a big fence and two iron fence in front and two behind. There were guards, night and day, on sentry duties, armed to the teeth and ferocious in appearance. They seemed to have orders to shoot at sight any inmates who proved to be funny or attempted to escape from the detention camp.³¹

In one of the rooms close to where Margaret was detained,

there was a very old man of about eighty years from Onitsha area. He was also a detainee. According to this man, he had several grown-up and educated children, some engineers, others doctors, teachers and business men. He was linked with Ukpabi Asika, then Administrator of the East Central State, one of the twelve states of Nigeria created on 27 May 1967. He was left virtually uncared for. He hobbled around to fend for himself, to wash and dry his dresses, quite often in great pains. Margaret approached him and spoke very kindly to him, consoling him and praying for his safety. Later, she decided to help him because whenever he wanted to wash his dresses, he could hardly bend down, without pains and extreme difficulty on account of old age and prolonged waist pains. The man was also eventually removed from Umudike Detention Camp and transferred to a prison yard *for better security*. Margaret prayed that she should not be removed to a new prison yard. God heard her prayers and nobody removed her.³²

Umudike Detention Camp was a rat-infested place. Margaret spent hours some days chasing and killing rats to the amusement of the inmates and the delight of the neighbouring Umudike villagers who quickly carried away dead rats for a meal. The rats, according to her, were very stubborn and mischievous. As she remarked:

A rat would sometimes carry my dress to hide in the ceiling. I chased the rats in my room, in the ceilings and along the corridor. As I killed some and carried them to throw away across the road, the villagers passing by would request to have them. I surrendered them to the villagers for their meal.³³

In the early hours of 31 December 1968, Federal troops began to shell towards Umuahia. The sound was deafening and frightening. All the inmates scrambled to their feet and rushed outside. The guards were, for the first time since she arrived at Umudike, ready to discuss about the welfare of the inmates. The villagers from Umudike and other neighbouring villagers began to

collect a few necessities. There, to her greatest surprise, was a lady from Umuahia who recognized her as the proprietress of the Windsor Domestic Science Institute at Aba, where she trained as a seamstress and a Home Economist before the Nigerian civil war. She hugged her former proprietress and beckoned at other women to come and see "Chief Margaret Expo, the indomitable woman politician, once a teacher and proprietress of many women". Women flocked round her until a scene was almost created. The police orderly protested and the women gradually dispersed. The woman who saw Margaret first promised to visit her in her hotel the following day.³⁷

In the evening of the following day, the woman called, as promised, in the hotel and advised her to be prepared to set up a sewing center. She offered to help as far as she could. The woman hired machines and brought these to her, arranged a sewing center very close to the hotel where Margaret was living. She later brought apprentices to her. Thus, Margaret resumed her trade without delay. She sewed all sorts of clothes and dresses as well as Army uniforms for Biafran soldiers and Militia men. It was a brisk and successful business. But, unfortunately, this business was not to last.

Late in April 1969, Federal troops entered Umuahia; it fell after heavy fighting. Margaret thought that with its fall, as the Capital of Biafra, Biafrans would surrender and declare for peace so that detainees would regain their freedom. But, as it turned out, that was not the case. Rather than surrender, the Biafrans launched a counter-offensive, not on Umuahia but on Owerri. Federal troops surrendered to Biafran troops.³⁸ This singular incident more than any other reason probably helped to prolong her final release from house arrest for long. Margaret went to market and, on her way back, discovered that Kanu's hotel where she was living had been bombed and one end of it totally shattered. The news spread that Margaret was in the hotel and had been buried alive. On her arrival at the scene of the incident, there

was jubilation. The police orderly contacted his officer in -charge and a lorry was arranged which evacuated her and other detainees around to another detention camp at Oriagu, fifteen miles from Umudike.³⁹

Before leaving Umuahia, Margaret went to the woman benefactor, her former student, and thanked her. Margaret surrendered the hired machines to her, paid off the bills and the balance of the allowances due to apprentices and other workers recruited to help her set up business in Umuahia. She then departed with the police to the new destination at Oriagu.⁴⁰

At Oriagu, Margaret saw straggling refugees and collected their names. She went to the nearest rehabilitation center at Okigwe to ask for relief for herself and others on her list. Fortunately, she saw the officer-in-charge, Samuel Mbakwe, who gripped her in joy and helped her.⁴¹ Mbakwe also gave her the relief for other refugees on her list and appointed her the team leader for that set of refugees. He promised to set up a sub-distribution center nearer their camp with Margaret as the officer-in charge.⁴² She was happy to note that ten years afterwards, Samuel Mbakwe, became the Governor of Imo State of Nigeria.

At this point, the police escort relaxed. He became more useful to Margaret in the relief distribution duty newly assigned her. She found the new task very rewarding and challenging. She saw herself rendering social services, not political duty, to hundreds and later thousands of refugees, men and women. The refugees were an admixture of people from the various parts of Eastern Nigeria including the Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers (COR) State area. The materials for distribution included *Formula I*, *Formula II*, egg yolk, milk, stockfish, rice, and a variety of other protein food. It seemed as if she had struck another busy social service.⁴³

But, the local people in and around the area grouped themselves together and wrote a petition against her. Their

petition stated, among other things, that Margaret was not an indigene of their area and had no right to be appointed a sub-distribution officer for their area; that, not being an indigene of the area, she was not serving the refugees in the area well; she was also not serving the villagers from the neighbouring villages, at all. They recommended that she be relieved of the duty with immediate effect. When Margaret heard of this petition, she also collected another petition from the refugees themselves emphasizing that the relief was specifically meant for them and not the villagers and that they were satisfied with her services so far. Margaret also appealed to the Coordinator, Samuel Mbakwe, and a former Minister, S.E.Imoke, who was living nearby to intervene on her behalf and put things straight.⁴⁴ Both men gave notice to the villagers and the refugees of their intention to address them jointly. The meeting was held successfully. Thereafter, there was no further problem for several months. She continued to discharge her duty to the victims of the Biafra crisis until the surrender of Biafra was announced.⁴⁵

Margaret bought a small pocket radio and an earphone from the small savings she was able to make at Umuahia. Every day, she would go into a near-by cassava bush, a hidden corner, toilet or bathroom pretending that she was going to ease herself. There she would tune in Radio Nigeria or a British Broadcasting Corporation station or the Voice of America to hear the latest news about the Nigerian Civil War. On 12 January 1970, she tuned in Radio Nigeria and heard an announcement to the effect that Biafra had surrendered unconditionally; that Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu had fled from Nigeria and that Col. Philip Effiong was negotiating for peace. She was overwhelmed with joy but she could not laugh nor rejoice in view of a possible last-minute attack from Biafran fleeing soldiers or irate fanatics who might want to wreak vengeance on her. She remained composed. The police escort had deserted her unceremoniously and no one seemed to bother about her whereabouts, any more. It was a moment of joy but she remained calm waiting for unfolding events. At last, what

she was expecting came true.

Early on 13 January 1970, she tuned in Radio Nigeria again, this time openly. A small crowd gathered round her but did not hear any sound from the radio. With her earphone, Margaret collected enough information for all. The summary was that Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria's Head of State, had granted amnesty to all Nigerians who were caught behind the Biafran line; that everyone should return to his or her home; that Nigerian soldiers were ready to help any one in difficulty. Margaret shouted *O God, thou are great. Thank you Lord, for keeping me alive to see this day. Glory be to your Holy Name. So, I am free at last*". She beat her chest, got ready to go; but, some soldiers arrived and stopped her and others from leaving the place. Margaret's heart was in her mouth again.⁴⁶

A young Nigerian army officer alighted from a military vehicle and asked, *Who is Mrs. Margaret Ekpo?* Margaret could not hide herself. She came forward boldly and introduced herself by her name. The young officer asked her to take all her belongings and follow him to his Commanding officer. The Commanding officer would like to see her at once. Margaret picked up her suitcase and other belongings and followed the officer in an army jeep.

She was taken back to Oriagu to see the Nigerian Army Commanding Officer in the same building where a few months before she was detained on arrival. At Oriagu, the Commanding officer wanted to know whether she was Mrs. Margaret Ekpo. She confirmed that she was. The officer informed her that the Nigerian Army was informed that she was dead. Margaret, beaming with smile, denied that she ever died. She informed the commanding officer what actually happened. The Nigerian Army bombing at Mkpoko Lane, Umuahia, was quite successful. It hit the target and destroyed the building where she was residing; but, fortunately, she was then at the market. Many persons thought that she was

killed and buried in the house by one of the bombs. The commanding officer entertained her briefly and asked her to be ready to return to Aba in an Army vehicle that day.

He later provided a vehicle for the journey; but, unfortunately, on the way the vehicle broke down. She and other returnees in the vehicle had to walk for about fifteen miles to Umuahia. Margaret, tired and sore with swollen legs, managed to reach a nearby refugee camp in Umuahia where she hoped she would rest and spend the night.

It occurred to Margaret that the best thing to do was to go to Umuahia market and see whether she could catch a glimpse of her former student for any help she might afford. When she arrived at the market, her former student was not there. Rather, a woman who proved to be very unfriendly mistook her for someone else who had had some quarrel with her. She began to abuse Margaret, throw dust at her and with the help of her friends, seized Margaret's head-gear, claiming that it was hers. Margaret was very much embarrassed. She wished she had never gone to that market that day. The lady walked away while Margaret stood there disconsolate.⁴⁷

After a few minutes, a Nigerian Army captain drove to the market in a kitcar with the lady. Surprisingly, rather than cause more trouble, the army captain arrived on the scene and began to apologize to her on behalf of his wife, a Mid-Westerner (Edo lady). Margaret was touched and wanted to know who the army officer was. He introduced himself to her as a *South-Easterner* like her. He had come to request her to accompany him to Ohafia where he was living and was about to return. He promised to send Margaret to Uturu from where she could return to *South-Eastern State* or any where she might choose. Margaret followed the Army Captain and his wife, collected her belongings from the refugee camp and left for Ohafia with them. She was told that it was the wife of the captain who narrated what she did to one *Mrs.*

edge to others and, as a politician, to campaign and mobilize Nigerian people, especially Nigerian women.

Margaret was well exposed. As a politician, she travelled through the length and breadth of Nigeria. She also travelled to many countries outside Nigeria. In 1953, 1954, 1957 and 1958, she attended the London Constitutional Conferences as an adviser under the umbrella of the N.C.N.C. In the early 1960s, Margaret attended the International Inter-parliamentary Conference in Italy. In 1962, she represented Nigeria during the independence anniversary of Gabon. In Libreville, on that occasion, she was given a red-carpet treatment as Nigeria's representative. In 1963, she participated in the International Women's Conference held in Moscow. In 1964, she attended the International Women's Conference held in Quebec in Canada. She undertook other travels abroad.²⁸

The significance of her numerous travels within and outside Nigeria lies in the fact that she was able to gain a lot in terms of exposure. During her political days, she effectively used this exposure to serve her country very well in and outside Nigeria.

As a result of her considerable exposure, she was able to organize and address political rallies effectively. Although women were considered very difficult to mobilize, Margaret was able to do so in Eastern Nigeria in particular and elsewhere in Nigeria.

Her debates in the Eastern House of Assembly also touched on socio-cultural issues which reflected the extent of her exposure and interest. In the debate in the Eastern House of Assembly on 29 September 1964, Margaret noted:

We were very happy when we had the T.V. station at Aba. But what is happening now? I am made to understand that Aba T.V. station will soon become a sub-station when the high frequency transmitter station is finished at Okigwe. The programs will be controlled from Enugu... We have not got

enough live programs in Aba. What we have always are cowboy pictures. They do us more harm than good because they only serve to increase the number of rogues in the whole of the Region.²⁹

From the above, it could be stated that Margaret was very concerned about enhancing the level of morality in the society. She vehemently discouraged the display of immoral phonographic and other films that could corrupt and debase societal values.

In the Eastern House of Assembly debate of 26 March 1965 Margaret also noted:

... Unfortunately, it is rumored now that live-shows are going to be taken away from Aba and that only recorded shows like films would remain. Instead of doing this we are of the opinion that the whole Television should be taken away. At Aba we have Nigerian live-shows, Nigerian dances...³⁰

According to her, she had received more than ten telegrams from the people of Aba urging her to register their opposition to the alleged proposal to remove live programs which portrayed mainly Nigerian culture and dances.³¹ In the House, Margaret read one of the telegrammes:

Hon. Mrs. Ekpo House of Assembly Enugu Aba public vehemently oppose scrapping indigenous dances...³²

As already illustrated above, it is evident that Margaret jealously guarded and helped to promote the development of Nigerian culture. She abhorred, condemned and avoided all obstacles that she considered a hindrance to her effort to help to advance Nigeria's socio-cultural development.

Margaret was a strong believer in merit. She would not accept anything she did not deserve. She accepted the chieftaincy title with which she was honoured when she became a member of the Eastern House of Chiefs in 1953, because she felt she deserved

it. Apart from that chieftaincy title, she purposely refused to accept any other. she rejected all other chieftaincy titles that were offered her by different communities, including her home town, Creek Town. In her own words:

I condemn the proliferation of chieftaincy titles in Nigeria. I turned down every other traditional chieftaincy title offered me even from my home town, Creek Town. This is because these days money is usually offered by recipients to the conferring body. I cannot see myself doing this. Chieftaincy titles should be conferred purely on merit.³³

From the above statement, one could readily see that Margaret's strong views on indiscriminate and money-oriented chieftaincy awards in Nigeria were very remarkable. For Margaret, award of honours and titles is an aspect of Nigerian culture that ought to be preserved and treated with the seriousness and respect they deserve.

After the Nigerian Civil War, as a business woman, Margaret exhibited very significant social and cultural traits that reflected her age and the life-style at the time. She was in her late fifties at this time. She was still very fashionable. As a seamstress, although she made very attractive designs for her customers, particularly members of the younger generation, she had become somewhat conservative in her dress styles.³⁴ Although she no longer wore the flashy and flamboyant dresses she used to wear in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, her dress styles in the 1970s and 1980s still reflected a remarkable level of sophistication. Margaret still wore English dresses; when occasion demanded, she dressed in Nigeria traditional attire. Though now an elder stateswoman, her past has continued to influence her dress patterns in the 1990s.³⁵

During the 1970s and 1980s, she still permed her hair in European styles. Once in a while, she got her hair plaited or braided. She wore European hats whenever she went to church and

tied the traditional headgear whenever she attended local and traditional functions.³⁶ Once in a while she covered her head with headscarf.³⁷

As a business woman, in Lagos, Margaret did not discriminate in terms of food. As in her political days, she ate whatever dish that came her way. She still does. As regards dance, although she occasionally listened to traditional music, she still loved the ballroom dance. By this time, her attendance of ballroom dances had drastically diminished,³⁸ possibly, as a result of advancement in age and a very busy business schedule. In Calabar, where she has eventually retired, she does not attend ballroom dances any longer due to age.³⁹

Even in business, Margaret held on to her Christian faith. She regularly attended All-saints Anglican Church in Lagos. On retirement to Calabar, she has not relented in practising Christianity. She attends the Holy Trinity Anglican Cathedral in Calabar regularly.

At present, Margaret is a member of many social and cultural organizations. She is a member of the National Council of Women's Societies. She is also a member of Women in Nigeria (WIN). She finds these women's organizations very attractive because they are very much involved in the struggle to uplift the status of women in the country. She is a member of the Nigerian Red Cross Society. Margaret is currently the president of *Nkori Uforo Iban*. This is a socio-cultural union of progressive women comprising the three ethnic groups in Calabar Municipality, namely, the Efik, the Qua and the Efut.⁴⁰

Margaret is now seventy nine years old. She has advanced in age; but, she has left for her fellow Nigerians, particularly women, ideas, socio-cultural traditions and legacies which will long endure. More will be said in the next few chapters about Margaret's idea and legacies.

6

Socio-Economic Concerns

Apart from the political dimension, Margaret Ekpo's life and work also reflected far-reaching social and economic changes in Nigeria. In this context, the socio-economic changes, which may be associated with Margaret's life and work, fall broadly into two perspectives: changes effected by Margaret in Eastern Nigeria as a member of the Eastern House of Assembly between 1961 and 1966 and changes associated with her life after the Nigerian civil, particularly in the 1970's.

Margaret's contributions to the debate of the House touched on various social and economic problems affecting Eastern Nigeria in particular and Nigeria in general. More significant is the fact that her debates and discussions, quite often, led to motions adopted in the House in support of her view.

Attempts will be made here, first, to highlight some of her important debates directed to social change. Thereafter, debates which touched and concerned economic issues will be briefly discussed.

On 21 April 1961, Margaret called on the Government of Eastern Nigeria to effect some social services in the Region. She requested that the Government should consider providing grants to the Association for Motherless children. In her own words:

...The State in which I saw the orphans in the Aba hospital was very much pathetic. I inquired from the Nursing Sister in charge what was wrong with those children who looked very

sickly and tiny. She replied that they were not sick, but hungry. She revealed that the vote for their milk had long exhausted and that the only people who came to their rescue were the Association for Motherless children who got a present of \$25 from the Nigerian Brewery, Aba, and thereby brought over a hundred tins of 'Cow and Gate' milk for those unfortunate children... Nobody knows what these children will grow up to be in future and I am strongly appealing to the Government to consider giving grants to this Association for Motherless Children in due course to help them continue the good work they are doing.¹

Apart from drawing the attention of Members of the House to the problems of the motherless children, she also directed their attention to the problems of the unemployed youths in the society. According to her:

The Hon. the Premier, Dr. M. I. Okpara, has always been laying emphasis on agriculture and I congratulate him and his Government on this noble cause. I hope that these projects will soon come into effect in order that some of the thousands of school-leavers who have just obtained their standard 6 certificates can be absorbed, and by so doing, I am sure, the present unemployment problem sweeping into the Region, will be minimized.²

Also, on the issue of unemployed youths, Margaret in the debate of 20 April, 1965, stated:

Let the Minister and the Government find a way of creating vacancy in order to absorb these young school leavers into the Navy, the Police, and the Army. These school leavers will be taught some trade and within a short time, they will come out, start working, and the Government will get tax from their salaries. To catch these young boys and put them into the prisons is not a profit, it is a loss. We pay for their food in the prisons with the money we want so badly.³

Margaret's social debates in the Eastern House of Assembly also touched on very vital aspects of education, ranging from issues like scholarship awards to enhancement of the standard of

education. In the debate of 19 September 1963, she strongly expressed her opinion on the scholarship issue when she noted:

Talking about scholarships brings me to a very vital issue I want to put before the Minister of Education... I met a lot of our Eastern young men and women in Moscow studying, and most of them did not pass through the usual channel. Before I left those shores, I went to the Russian Embassy in Lagos, and they made me to understand that their Government gives our Government forty-five scholarships every year... I wonder whether the Minister of Education does know about this so that if we seize the opportunity of these scholarships it may help us to send our boys and girls to Russia. If we do not send our boys and girls through the right channel, how can we safeguard them...? So I will advise the Minister of Education to try to snatch some of these scholarships and send our boys and girls to study in Russia.⁴

On the issue of scholarship award, Margaret, on 17 September 1963, in the House asked the Minister of Health:

How many radiologists, pathologists and police surgeons are in the public service of Eastern Nigeria? If none, what arrangements are being made to award scholarships to deserving students to qualify in these fields?⁵

The Minister of Health replied that government had only one radiologist and no police surgeon. He stated further that, although the Ministry had trained an indigenous officer as a pathologist, this officer eventually left to work in the Lagos Medical School. He then explained that In-service Training Scheme was available every year for Medical officers and that there were already eighteen officers in the United Kingdom pursuing specialist courses.⁶ From all indications, Margaret was satisfied with the Minister's explanation. However, the questions and answers on the floor of the House did not fail to stimulate further interest in manpower development in Nigeria.

She was very concerned about the welfare of school

children in particular and Nigerian people in general. Mrs. Ekpo expressed this concern on 29 september 1964 when she observed that:

In this very House the Minister of works promised that the level crossing at the cemetery and Okigwe roads in Eziuku quarters would be built. But up till now, we are still losing school children-train crushing our people and grinding them like corn. I call on the Minister to come to the aid of Aba town.⁷

Hon. E. Oriji of the NCNC, Ikwerre Central, immediately rose to support the Bill which later gained the support of other members of the House and was enacted into Law for the Region. Arising from this law, several parts of Eastern Nigeria received level-crossing gates along railway lines.

Still on her concern for the welfare of people, on 28 September 1964, in the House, Margaret asked the Minister for Health why female nurses who had worked and gained experience in Nigeria before leaving for further training overseas should, on their return, fully qualified, be appointed as staff nurses instead of being promoted or appointed direct as Nursing sisters.⁸

In reply, the Minister for Health stated:

The Nigerian Nurses Association refused that such female nurses should be promoted direct to Nursing Sisters, rather the Association suggested that such cases could be promoted to Assistant Nursing Sisters. This view was accepted by Government.⁹

Margaret could only be pacified after such a detailed and elaborate explanation from the Minister of Health himself. As a further demonstration of her concern for the people's welfare, Mrs. Ekpo, in the debate of 28 September 1964, asked the Minister of Town Planning what arrangements he was making to compensate the people whose houses were destroyed during the

last dangerous erosion in Aba.¹⁰ She used Aba as a case in point for the whole of the former Eastern Region.

In reply, the Minister of Town Planning stated that payment of *ex-gratia* compensation had already commenced and that was being done through the office of the District Engineer in Aba.¹¹ This response effectively answered Margaret's question and helped to calm her nerves and those of other members concerned by the growing erosion menace in the Region. It is on record that Margaret would hardly relax in the House until her questions were properly answered.

On 23 November 1965, Mrs. Ekpo drew the attention of the House to the fact that several schools in Eastern Nigeria were in great need of peace corps volunteers in order to boost the size of the teaching personnel. She also requested to be briefed about efforts made by the Minister of Education to ensure that grants were made available to deserving schools to get their science laboratories well equipped, especially at a time that emphasis was being laid on the teaching of science in school.¹²

The Minister for Education did his best to satisfy her that all necessary efforts were being made by his Ministry to enhance the teaching of science in schools. Margaret directed attention specifically to the need to promote the study of science and technology in Nigeria.

Margaret was also very much concerned about the welfare of workers. She clearly expressed her delight in the improvement of workers' condition on 20 April 1965, in the House in the following words:

...I want to touch on a few points, and the first one is on the Morgan Commission. Mr. Speaker, you will see that anything that touches on workers in Nigeria is important and I congratulate the Government for paying Morgan Commission salary scales to all the workers.¹³

As a further demonstration of her concern for workers, Margaret observed:

You will note that complaints are always brought to this Hon. House that teachers are not paid; it appears that when the Minister gives out grants to schools the proprietors make use of this grant and then allow the teachers to go hungry.¹⁴

As one who had been a teacher previously, she was concerned with the deplorable condition of teachers in Nigeria. She expressed her conviction without equivocation. In the words of one C.U.O.O. Adi, NCNC Awka Central:

I agree with what she says. It is the correct position of things.¹⁵

Her observation was subsequently accepted by a large number of members of the House. Even the Minister for Education Dr. S. E. Imoke agreed with Margaret, but noted:

*Mr. Speaker, while it is true that a few managers of schools misuse the funds given by Government, I would not be happy to have a generalized statement.*¹⁶

Her fight for the cause of workers was not limited to a particular category, that is, teachers. It extended to other professions, including journalists. In the debate of 28 April 1965, Margaret addressed the House on the plight of journalists thus:

*I just want to draw the Minister's attention to the reporters and journalists in his Ministry. They are more or less relegated to the background. The journalists in other broadcasting organizations are better placed than these young men and women. But for these young men and women under his Ministry, the voice of Eastern Nigeria could not have been heard during the last Federal Elections and during the strike. The Minister should look into their salaries and conditions of service.*¹⁷

Margaret's concern towards upliftment of the social life of the

people also extended to the Health sector. On several occasions, she demanded for improvement of Health services in the Region. For instance, on 28 April 1965, in her debate, she expressed shock at the amount earmarked for school Health Services. According to her:

I noticed that instead of this money for this school health being increased it has been decreased from £8,500 to £6,000; how is he (the Minister of Health) going to manage it? I want the Minister to see that enough money is voted for that.¹⁸

She, however, expressed appreciation to the Minister for Health because some money had been earmarked lump sum for grants-in-aid for some of the voluntary agencies and private hospitals. She also indicated that she had three of such private hospitals in her constituency and hoped that the amount would be expended on more private hospitals.¹⁹

Margaret's concern for the welfare of the common people also extended to the plight of her colleagues in the Eastern House of Assembly. In the Debate of 12 December 1962, she stated:

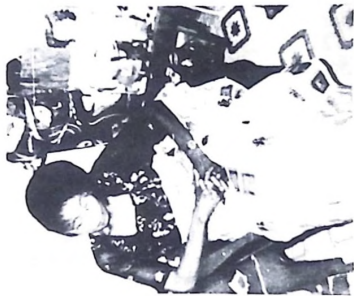
I want to talk about the position of members of this Hon. House... In the Federal Parliament where they earn more than we do here, when they attend meetings each Member is allocated a room and a kitchen and everything to himself... But here in the East we travel all the way to Enugu to attend meetings of the House, and are paid £3:3s per night minus feeding. Considering the austerity measures, ten per cent cut in our salaries, car advances, tax deductions, all these place heavy burden on our shoulders. I want to put it on record that the Minister of Finance should treat us as Hon. Members and provide us free quarters when we are attending meetings of the House.²⁰

It is interesting to note that Margaret's demands were looked into and a positive response granted to a large extent. On 18 September 1963, in the House, Margaret expressed her appreciation to this effect thus:

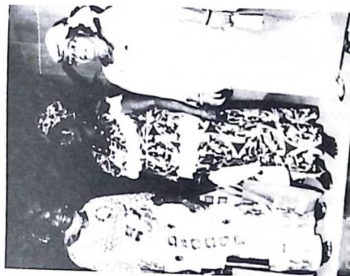
6. MARGARET EKPO - HER LATER YEARS



Margaret in a relaxing mood



Margaret in a thoughtful mood



Margaret in the company of her friends



Margaret in a calm mood

Mr. Speaker, I beg to give my thanks and gratitude to this Hon. House and the Minister of Finance for the efforts they have so far made to see to the housing accommodation of the Members who are attending this Hon. House. I am one of those who used to call on the Government to make things easier for us and to make us look as honourable as our counterparts in the Federal Parliament. Hon. Members here will agree with me and are very happy over the present good arrangements.²¹

Margaret was also very much concerned about the welfare of her fellow women in the society. It had been noted, in an earlier chapter, that she fought very hard to ensure that women from Eastern Nigeria were recruited into the Nigeria police Force, which hitherto had been the exclusive preserve of Nigerian men. On 17 September 1963, in the House, she asked the Minister of Education why married women were no longer admitted into Teacher Training Colleges.²² The Minister replied that there was no regulation barring married women from Teacher Training Colleges. He, however, stated that available records from his office showed that female students used their maiden names when they apply for entry into training colleges.²³ From then on, there was no further attempt to discriminate against married female students in admission into Teachers Training Colleges.

Margaret also fought for emancipation of women by calling for the enfranchisement of womenfolk in Nigeria.²⁴ Her struggle for the granting of the franchise to women had already been discussed in previous chapters and so need not delay one here. What may be noted here is that Margaret's effort towards emancipation of Nigerian women was national in outlook.

Mrs. Ekpo's debates in the house also touched on very vital economic issues affecting Eastern Nigeria in particular and Nigeria in general. In the debate of 6 December 1961, she made the following remarks:

Government should do all it can to establish more and encou-

rage existing industries in the Region. If one goes to the kingsway stores one will see a lot of imported China wares. This should be stopped and the manufacture of our locally made wares encouraged. I have got some wares in my house made at the Okigwe industry and these wares prove suitable. I am appealing to the Government to develop the pottery industry at Okigwe and those in other areas and therefore swarm all the shops in the Region with our locally made wares.²⁵

Mrs. Ekpo's clarion call for promotion of local industries was very commendable and far-sighted. It however appeared that not much came out of her laudable proposals. According to her, her call was more or less not heeded since massive importation of such commodities continued unabated. Margaret believed that the unpatriotic attitude of importing all sorts of goods from Overseas countries continued unchecked because many people felt that they would make much more profit importing goods than buying from local producers. She also believed that many members of the Legislature and the Executive preferred to import goods in order to get huge undeclared rebates or "kick-backs" rather than purchase from local manufacturers who did not have much to offer in terms of "kick-backs".²⁶ During the debate of 13 November 1962, Margaret drew the attention of the House to the carelessness of the licensing office which had led to loss of revenue by Government. According to her:

Here in this Region we are looking for Money. But it is astonishing that if you have not got your vehicle licence and you run down to the Licensing Office on a Saturday... the Authorities will tell you that they do not issue licences on Saturdays; but you can drive to Lagos or Ibadan and licence your car there and that money has gone somewhere out of the Region.²⁷

After putting forward the question, members of the House agreed to debate it. The Bill was accordingly read a second time and committed to a committee of the whole House. The Bill was immediately considered in committee, was reported without

amendment, read the third time, and passed.²⁸ The passing of this Bill was a very significant development. It portrayed Margaret not only as a very active member of the Eastern House of Assembly but also as having contributed tremendously to the economic development of Eastern Nigeria in particular and Nigeria in general.

As a further demonstration of her desire for the economic development of the Region, Margaret called on the Government of Eastern Nigeria to embark on an *Economic Development Tour*. In her own words:

...I want now to call on the Government that immediately after the Federal Elections, the Government of Eastern Nigeria should undertake what I would call "Economic Development Tour". I know, Sir, that our people are always prepared to contribute in a small way if they are told... So I want the Hon. Premier, the President of the NCNC, to go out with all his Ministers on this tour. We want some money for development... as soon as we have formed the Government of the Federation of Nigeria after the forthcoming elections, ... should immediately go on an economic development tour of Eastern Nigeria.²⁹

In her concern for the economic development of Eastern Nigeria, she also noted:

... Aba Urban roads now are death traps. The money given to the council is not sufficient... If we use our little amount to repair our cars spoilt by these bad roads, where shall we get the money for the Six-year Development Plan to assist the Government. I am therefore calling on the Minister to... relieve Aba urban township and other townships in this Region from this plague.³⁰

Margaret's observation above was very significant then in the sense that she realized the importance of a good road network to the economic development of any town, region or country. The availability of an efficient transport system depended largely on

Margaret Ekpo. The husband was annoyed and decided to intervene, restore peace between them and offered help to Margaret to enable her, a fellow South-Easterner, return home at the end of the crisis.⁴⁸

Uturu was the headquarters of the refugees from South-Eastern State. The Army captain believed that once he sent Margaret to Uturu, she would be able to return to South Eastern State. He, therefore, gave her a room where she would sleep, later took her out for light refreshment and told her a lot of stories about Nigeria to make her forget her plight and feel at home. Later, they returned home for a sumptuous dinner. The wife apologized to her and returned the head tie which she had wrongfully seized in the market as her property. Margaret received it, but, gave it back to her as a present. She spent a pleasant night with the couple.⁴⁹

After breakfast, the next morning, Margaret was ready for the journey to Uturu. The army captain made a vehicle available; it took her to Uturu from where she was, later, at her own request, conveyed to Enugu rather than South-Eastern State for a flight to Lagos to rejoin her sister and trace the whereabouts of her husband who before the Nigerian civil war was ill.⁵⁰

On arrival at Enugu, Margaret was introduced to the Divisional Officer, Enugu, who gave her a place to sit down and wait. She remained there till 3 p.m., but, no action was taken by the Officer. She enquired about Dr. Akanu Ibiam and was informed that he was no longer in Enugu. As the Divisional Officer was getting ready to go home, she went to see him and find out what arrangement he had made to enable her get a flight from Enugu to Lagos that day or the following day. The Officer was very highly incensed by her enquiries. He retorted angrily, *I am disappointed that people who ought to know better had brought you to Enugu rather than send you to South-Eastern State. I have no place for you here and no arrangement for your travels.*

He then walked away on her. Before he entered his car, he stopped and shouted at her, "will you like to stay in a nearby refugee camp until your matter is sorted out"? Margaret composed but equally disappointed by his behavior and attitude towards an important national duty entrusted to him, replied calm, "D.O., no, thank you". Margaret, however, decided to fend for herself.

She quickly walked into the street and made her way with weak but nimble steps towards the Army Barracks, Enugu. That was Enugu where she had served Nigeria as a Chief and as a member of the House of Assembly, a politician and a frontline woman leader. There was no taxi, no bus, to help her. Enugu, after the devastations of the Nigerian Civil War, was beginning to receive a fresh lease of life as a State Capital.⁵¹

About eight Kilometers away from the Divisional Office, she met an Assistant Superintendent of police, and from him, enquired about the Army Barracks in order to get her bearing correct. The Police Officer wanted to know who she was and whom she was looking for there. She briefly told him her name, her encounter with the Divisional Officer, and how, as a last resort, she had decided to see the Commanding Officer, Enugu, Col. (later General) Murtala Mohammed, in person and request for assistance. She was sure that the Commanding Officer would help her. The police officer also introduced himself as a person from South-Eastern State but advised her not to go into the Army Barracks at that time because she would not be able to see the Commanding Officer in his office then. He offered very kindly to take her to his house and look after her until the following morning. He also offered to get a vehicle to convey her to the Army Barracks in the morning to enable her see the Commanding Officer. She accepted these offers and accompanied the superior police officer to his house where she was looked after very well by the superior police officer and his wife.

The next day, the police officer arranged a police van to

take her to the Army Barracks. The van conveyed her to the Army Barracks where she saw Col. Murtala Mohammed, the Commanding Officer, Nigerian Army, Enugu.⁵² The Commanding Officer listened to her request and approved that an arrangement be made immediately to enable her take the morning flight to Lagos. A telephone call was made to the Airport; but, unfortunately, the only available flight had departed a few minutes before. The Commanding Officer, on hearing this report, directed that an Army vehicle should convey her to Lagos immediately. At about 11.a.m., she thanked the Army Commander and left in an Army Land Rover provided to convey her to Lagos *via* Agbor and Benin.⁵³

At Agbor, the Army Land Rover developed a fault and eventually broke down. She was able to secure a place in a public transport vehicle, a peugeot Station wagon, which conveyed her to Lagos. On arrival in Lagos, she rejoined her sister at 17 City Way, now 17 Mohammed Way, and there was merriment. She later wrote to thank the Commanding Officer, Nigerian Army, Enugu, for his patriotism and cooperation.⁵⁴

5

Socio-Cultural Interests

The life and work of Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo also contributed to far-reaching social and cultural changes which should not be ignored in any significant work about women and socio-cultural development in Nigeria. These contributions were made in three stages, that is, during her pre-political years; her years as a politician and member of the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs and Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly; and in the post Civil war decade.

Before her years in politics, Margaret had developed a keen interest in cultural ideas, cultural borrowing, adaptation and syncretism. She also hoped that, through her humble effort, Nigerian culture and traditions, particularly among Nigerian women, could be developed and transmitted throughout Eastern Nigeria and beyond. For her, culture was not a static thing. It was subject to change and development. Indeed, without a direct intervention and gradual control, she felt, Nigerian women, especially those in Eastern Nigeria might lose their firm grip on the rich Nigerian cultural heritage of the past. Her efforts in the preservation, borrowing, adaptation and syncretizing of Nigerian culture can be illustrated in various ways.

Cultural borrowing in this regard was reflected in Margaret's marriage and church wedding. It was a way of creating a life-long union of a religious family. Although church wedding had been going on at Aba, Margaret's wedding ceremony was one of

the earliest society weddings that was ever witnessed at Aba. As had been stated in an earlier chapter, Margaret's wedding took place at saint Michael's Anglican Church, Aba. It was accompanied by all the pomp and pageantry that denoted the importance of Christian wedlock between a medical doctor and a school teacher. It helped among other things to popularize christian wedding at Aba and other parts of Eastern Nigeria.

Through some of her dresses, for example, gowns worn during ball-room dances, society weddings and parties, Margaret helped to reinforce the essence of cultural borrowing among her fellow women. In her business life, also at Aba, both as a teacher and a promoter of Windsor Domestic Science Centre, she taught the lesson that Nigerian women could benefit immensely from European culture and business life. Margaret's concept of cultural borrowing was reflected in other areas such as her adoption of Western hair fashion, film show attendance, attendance of foot-ball matches and ball-room dances. The details of these have been highlighted in the subsequent parts of this chapter.

She also helped to reinforce the need for cultural change through adaptation. This was reflected in her mode of dress: Nigerian dresses sewn in her business centre; those worn by her to political campaigns, party meetings, Eastern House of Chief and later Eastern House of Assembly.

She also demonstrated this in her food pattern which was simple but rich. She ate African and European dishes as occasion demanded.

Her tremendous role for cultural change through adaptation was also reflected in the way she decorated her home, that is, by a combination of both African and European decor; European and African music; European and African manners, the details of which have been highlighted further below.

The lessons were far-reaching. A product of colonial society, Margaret had part of her education in Britain. But, she hated borrowing English culture hook, line and sinker. Her principle was like that of late Mazi Mbonu Ojike, "boycott the boy-cottables". For her, Nigerian culture and tradition, as much as possible, should be preferred in business, politics and society in the spirit of the new nationalism whose wind was then blowing across the country in the late 1950's as well as in the spirit of independence which began in 1960. Nigerians, like other Africans must, as far as possible, not allow themselves to become white men in black skins.

As a school teacher, Margaret's socio-cultural traits in terms of her dress style, hairdo, dishes, dance pattern and christian belief, reflected aspects of Western European culture. As a teacher, she dressed in English fashion and according to her *that was the fad at the time*.¹ Margaret was a very fashionable young lady.² She attended film shows in cinema halls in order to watch European films and copy European dress styles. She was a very good seamstress and she made her own clothes. Usually, she sewed her clothes exactly as the ones she saw at film shows.³

As a teacher, Margaret quite often dressed her hair in European style. She used stretching comb to stretch her hair thereby changing the hair texture from the normal woolly to long and straightened hair strands. With straightened hairs, she was able to dress and adjust her hairs in different European styles.⁴ At times, she used curling pins to curl her hair and this usually gave her a curly look. She was able to copy effectively the European hair styles because she was lucky to be endowed with very massive and long hairs. Like her dress style, Margaret copied much of her hair styles from European films which she watched in cinemas.⁵ She sometimes also wore European hats to church services.

As regards her menu, from her childhood even up to the

period of her teaching career, Margaret loved eating rice. She, indeed, cherished that rare grain which was considered an European food and thus very special diet, at that time. Rice was then considered as European food and the preserve of the rich and the elite classes in Nigerian society. Not many people ate rice because it was also considered expensive. In many homes in Nigeria, rice was only eaten on sundays or on important occasions. Many families rather ate meals of yam, cocoyam, gari, assorted cassava dishes, beans and assorted vegetables.⁷ Thus, for Margaret to have preferred to eat rice, as her favourite meal at that time, is an indication that she believed that she was of the elite group.

Margaret's dance pattern as a teacher also reflected aspects of borrowed European culture. She loved ball-room dance.⁸ This might have been a quiet response to her father's dislike for traditional dances. Margaret's father who was a reverend gentleman detested traditional dances and rather loved ballroom dances.⁹ His hatred for traditional dances, perhaps, arose from the effects of European Christian Missionary education and doctrines which then espoused European culture but at the same time saw nothing good in African culture. European missionaries at the time condemned many aspects of African culture and considered them derogatory and barbaric. Thus, Africans who embraced christian religious faith were made to discard almost all facets of African culture, including African dances and plays. Thus, Margaret's father debarred his children from attending traditional dancing sessions.¹⁰

Although Margaret's father loved ballroom dances, he did not encourage his children to attend such dancing sessions. Rather, he debarred them from such exposures.¹¹ Rev. Ekpenyong Efa, her father, it will be recalled, was a very strict disciplinarian. However, Margaret, who loved ballroom dancing, usually slipped out of home to attend dancing sessions, without her father's knowledge.¹² She had her method of taking excuses from her father. According to her:

S. MARGARET EKPO AND HER FAMILY

THANKSGIVING SERVICE
UNVEILING AND DEDICATION CEREMONY
IN THE TOMBSTONE OF
LATE ETUBOM SAMPSON EKPEYONG
AND
MIDAM INYING SAMPSON EKPEYONG



at Apostolic Church, Creek Town
on Sunday, 18th December, 1977 by 9.00 a.m.

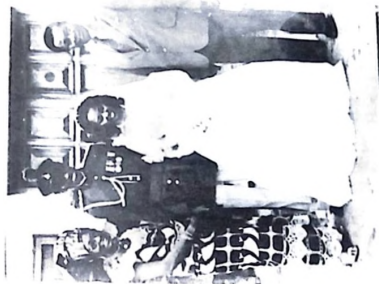
Margaret's Parents



Margaret (Sitting Extreme Left) and her family
members



**Margaret (Right) and her immediate elder sister,
Late Mrs. Grace Chuksuras**



**Margaret (Left) at her son's (Retired Major Ekpo's)
wedding**



**Margaret's daughter-in-law standing
and Margaret's grandchildren at their
birthday party**



Margaret's grand-daughter in London



Margaret 's grand-sons



Margaret feeding one of her grand-children



Margaret's husband, Dr. J. U. Ekpo

I usually slipped out to attend ballroom dance. At times I would leave my bed and place pillows and cloths on the bed. I would then cover the cloths and pillows with my wrapper in order to deceive my father that I was still in bed.¹³

Her interest in ballroom dance was passionate. It will also be recalled that it was during such a session that she met her husband, Dr. John Udo Ekpo.

As a teacher, Margaret was a devoted christian. From childhood up to the early 1930s when she became a teacher, she was of the presbyterian denomination, same as her father's. Although she started as a presbyterian, she ended up as an Anglican. Many reasons have been proffered for this change. When Margaret's father, Rev. Ekpenyong Efa, was at Esin Ufot (now in Odukpani Local Government Area), in the early 1930's, he fell ill. He was so ill that many people thought that he was going to die. Meanwhile there was a vision at the Apostolic Church in Ile-Ife revealing the illness of Margaret's father. One Babalola of the Apostolic Faith in Ile-Ife was directed in this vision to come to Creek town to pray for her father. According to Margaret:

...They came to Creek Town; prayed for my father, gave him holy water and holy oil. My father had faith and was healed within two days.¹⁴

Despite the miraculous feat performed by the Apostolic Faith, Margaret's father did not resign from the presbyterian Church. However, the presbyterian Church was not happy with Rev. Ekpenyong Efa's association with the Apostolic group. The presbyterian Church therefore accused him of decamping to another christian religious group and subsequently dismissed him from the presbyterian Church.¹⁵ Thereafter, Margaret's father left the presbyterian Church and became a member of the Apostolic Faith. Eventually, Margaret's father introduced the Apostolic Church to Creek Town. Creek town therefore became the first

town where the Apostolic Faith was introduced in Eastern Nigeria. Margaret, her mother, all her brothers and sisters eventually became members of the Apostolic Church.¹⁶ Margaret remained a strong member of the Apostolic Church until 1935 when she was transferred to the Holy Trinity school in Calabar.

The Holy Trinity school belonged to the Anglican church. So, Margaret's change to Anglicanism might have started here. In 1936, she was transferred to Saint Michael's school, Aba, and this was also an Anglican school. At Aba, there was no Apostolic Church and, as a result, Margaret attended Saint Michael's Church, an Anglican Church. This would explain how she became a member of the Anglican Church. After the Nigerian Civil War, she attended All-Saints Anglican Church in Lagos. When she finally returned to Calabar, she started attending Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Calabar.

From the account, so far, it is clear that Margaret was not very rigid in her Christian religious faith. She applied flexibility and tolerance in order to suit her purpose and programmes in religious matters.

While Margaret was a teacher at the Saint Michael's school, Aba, she organized a number of social activities for Saint Michael's Anglican Church. She organized Sunday school sessions and sing-song sessions in the church. She also helped to organize concerts and drama in the Church, especially during festive seasons such as Christmas and Easter periods.¹⁷ In doing all this, cultural borrowing, adaptation and syncretism were her watchwords. As a politician, Margaret exhibited examples with caution in her style of dressing. She did not go outright to dress as Europeans in the way she had tried to do when she was a school teacher. The reason for this change was political. This was a period when most Nigerians were fighting against British colonialism.¹⁸ During this period, prominent Nigerians were protesting against all forms of colonial domination. People like Mbonu Ojike

were preaching the doctrine of "boycott the boycottables". Thus, Margaret's mode of dressing reflected the climate of opinion and the political mood at the time.

As a politician, Margaret wore European or English dresses only when she attended Government or official functions such as cocktail parties, dinner parties, state banquets, coronation and empire day activities. She also wore English dresses when she travelled overseas. But, during political campaign tours, political rallies and meetings, she wore traditional attires. The traditional attires she loved most were *george or Indian wrappers* worn freely or with blouses. She also tied large head-ties on her head.

She preferred traditional attires during political gatherings in order to identify with the local people. By identifying with the local people she found it easy to interact and communicate with them effectively.

Margaret's hair styles also reflected the nature of her audience. When attending Government official functions, she preferred to dress her hair in European styles. She also dressed her hair in European styles whenever she travelled out of the country. She wore gowns and European hats during church services as occasions demanded. But, during political gatherings, she preferred to cover her head with head-scarf or the traditional headgear.²⁰ At other times, Margaret plaited her hair in popular traditional styles.

As regards her menu, Margaret did not exhibit any form of discrimination during her days as a political activist. She ate all types of food, including European and African dishes. At official functions and when she travelled out of the country, she ate mainly European meals. But, at political meetings and within the confines of her home, she ate mainly traditional dishes. By this time in her life, her craze for rice as her favourite dish, had diminished.²¹ She altered and changed her tastes and life style as circumstances

demanded.

As a politician, Margaret's ability to eat almost all types of food stood her in good stead. It served her needs at the time and enabled her adapt herself to any situation no matter how difficult. During political campaign tours, political rallies and meetings, she was able to cope effectively because she was capable of eating any meal served. Also, throughout the period of her detention during the Nigerian Civil War, she was able to stay alive because she did not discriminate in terms of dishes. She ate every meal that came her way.²² This is a lesson, she thought, many Nigerians should learn, whether they are politicians or not, in order to survive any harsh condition in which they could find themselves. This is particularly necessary in these days of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP).

In terms of dancing, as a politician, Margaret's pattern did not change from what she had learned previously. Her interest in ballroom dance did not decline, irrespective of the fact that, during this period, there was a strong desire by Nigerians to condemn almost every aspect of colonialism. She continued to attend ballroom dances with her husband.²³ In this case, she continued to reflect the culture of the British though she was fighting against British colonialism and its evils.

Margaret confessed that she could hardly dance to any traditional tune or music. She cannot even now dance the traditional Efik dance called *Ekombi*.²⁴ As has been observed earlier, this could be attributed to the way she was brought up by her father who had debarred her and the rest of her brothers and sisters from participating in traditional dances, which, unfortunately, he had regarded as *Satanic dances*.

As a politician, Margaret did not relent in her christian faith.²⁵ In spite of the fact that christianity was a British legacy, she continued to embrace and cherish its doctrines as universal

but rather on an objection to wasteful spending on expensive cars. On several occasions, Margaret called for massive patronage of local commodities. She believed that that would enhance local production and subsequently facilitate economic development. For instance, on 20 April 1965, in the House, she observed:

With regard to the Ministry of Commerce, the other time Government went overseas and imported sheet metal window industrialists. I want to tell the Hon. Minister of Commerce that when he goes round the Region, he will see all these people making metal windows, doors, fences, gates. The fellow who is responsible for all this is stationed at Aba. Why cannot Government make use of this man, take all the people he has trained, get them together, give them money to start their own and start an industry here...³³

On this same issue, she stated:

I want to ask all our Hon. Members, including Parliamentary Secretaries, how many of them are patronizing the Ministry of Commerce products. I have been to their houses. They prefer to go and buy imported materials... window blinds, cushions, etc. Let us start to patronize our products... and then we will put money into the pockets of the Ministry of Commerce and they will use the money to organize all these small local industries.³⁴

Margaret was advocating the policy of self-reliance over two decades before it was adopted as a national policy. In the debate of 26 April 1965, she further observed:

The school children are being provided with dry milk from overseas. I would have liked to see the Ministry of Agriculture taking good care of this Obudu ranch to see that we have fresh milk from Obudu.³⁵

Obudu Cattle Ranch, located in the present Cross River State, in spite of Margaret's advocacy, has remained largely undeveloped. Mrs. Ekpo had a very absorbing interest in Economic Development. She called for the siting of industries in localities where

the necessary raw materials were available. In her own words: "the Iron and Steel industry should be sited where you have the raw materials plentiful".³⁶ This would facilitate production processes and reduce excessive overhead costs. In other words, transportation of raw materials from its source to the production centre would take less time and cost less money to any government wishing to establish extractive and other industries. As it happened, Margaret's admonition seemed to fall on deaf ears in Nigeria.

In order to facilitate economic development further in the Region and Nigeria as a whole, Margaret called for exposure of the National Economic Plan to all Nigerians in order that Regions might study it and see to what extent it could affect or be adapted in their areas. According to Margaret:

Now I come to the question of the National Economic Council. Here, we send in our Ministers and officials in the Ministry of Economic Planning. I quite believe that Nigeria cannot be planned as four or five economic units. Nigeria can only be successfully planned as one economic unit... But the great danger... in this country, is that a lot of politics is coming into our economic planning... I do not see why our Minister of Economic Planning should not insist on our receiving the National Economic Plan. We want it so that... We can study it and see to what extent it affects our own Region. Afterall, our Regional Plan should be complementary to the National Plan so that the country may produce with comparative advantage... If we misplan... in future we will be plunged into a situation where we will be very sorry...³⁷

Again, Margaret's advocacy for integrated and progressive economic planning and development went virtually unheeded. Nigeria's situation today, as she saw it then, could have been avoided many decades ago.

Mrs. Ekpo strongly condemned the duplication of industries in the Eastern Region. According to her, this could disrupt the economic enhancement of the Region. In her own words:

...Where we stress very much for an industry, proper consideration must be given so that when the industry is sited anywhere in this Region, there should be no duplication of it somewhere... If we have one small industry here and one small industry there... all for one market, the question is that we are duplicating managers, we are duplicating factories, we are spending more and the output is not going to be commensurate with the effort we have put in the... We have got to be very, very careful, because any little bit of politics we play is going to come on us like a boomerang.³⁸

Margaret, at this point, was more than prophetic. Her statesman-like fears then later came true not only in Eastern Nigeria but also in Nigeria as a whole.

Apart from her contributions to strategies for better Economic Development of the Eastern Region of Nigeria during her membership of the Eastern House of Assembly, Margaret also did a lot to enhance practically her economic life and those of a number of young women in the area. During the early 1950's, Margaret established a number of business concerns in Aba. One of these, as one would recall, was the Windsor Sewing and Domestic Science Institute located at Hundred Foot Road, Aba.³⁹ Another business concern of hers was the Windsor hotel. All her business outfits in Aba were named after *Windsor*, a name with a romantic background already explained in an earlier chapter.

As the proprietress of Windsor Sewing Institute, Mrs. Ekpo exhibited traits of a very strong business acumen. The Institute was very efficiently organized and, as a result, she was able to attract many customers and students, thus generating substantial revenue. It is on record that many young women flocked to Windsor Institute to study sewing and domestic science. Apart from housewives, the Institute admitted a large number of working class women and traders.

The Institute was organized and run like a conventional school, with teachers. Admission of students into the school was

done as it is done in conventional schools. Admission notices were properly displayed in newspapers. For instance, the *Eastern States Express* of 17 December 1953, reported:

According to information, students seeking admission into the Institute should report in the office of the Institute on Saturday, 9 January 1954.⁴⁰

In some cases, closing dates were also advertised. In the same newspaper, for instance, the following advertisement was made:

The Windsor Sewing Institute run by Mrs. M. U. Ekpo of Hundred Foot Road will close for the Christmas holidays on December 22, 1953 to reopen on January 11, 1954.⁴¹

Few private schools regulated admission and vacation procedures in Nigeria to the extent that Margaret's Windsor Institute did. It was exemplary.

The effective use of the print media by Mrs. Ekpo demonstrated her high level of business understanding and concern for students' welfare. At that time, she knew that an effective advertisement was a prerequisite of an efficient business outfit. Thus, with the use of newspapers, she was able to disseminate information easily to her customers and students and thus helped a great deal in promoting efficiency and discipline in the running of the Institute, which she regarded not as a mere local affair but a national forum for women development and education.

Margaret did not ignore the public relations aspects of private business. Thus, she did not ignore any favourable opportunity to put in goodwill messages in newspapers, especially, during anniversaries: Christmas, New year and Easter seasons:

On behalf of the Institute, the proprietress extends to all customers, Christmas greeting and goodwill.⁴²

During the early 1950s, Windsor Sewing Institute grew from strength to strength as a result of devotion to duty and hardwork on the part of Margaret. The *Eastern States Express* once reported in 1953:

The Windsor Sewing Institute is still forging ahead in its work of training young women in dress making, knitting and fancy work.⁴³

Margaret knew the importance of the Press, cooperated with and readily enjoyed its goodwill and concern in promoting women affairs.

The Institute operated both boarding and Day schools, similar to what obtained in conventional schools. Evidence to support this is found in the *Eastern State Express* of January 1953:

According to Mrs. M.U. Ekpo, proprietress of the Institute,... classes will open on January 12 and intending students are requested to be in the compound not later than January 10. Day students are expected to report at 8 a.m. of the opening day.⁴⁴

On completion of their courses, final year students were awarded certificates. For example, before the close of the last term in 1952, the following students were awarded certificates: Mrs. Norah Adimora, Grace Nwagu, Fanny Wabara, Georginia Mbokwe, Dianah John, Lydia Mohimi, Harriet Etumua and Nelly Stephens, among others.⁴⁵

Once in a while, Margaret offered teaching appointments to very brilliant graduating students. Early in 1953, she appointed three of the newly-graduated girls as tutors. These were Mrs. Lydia Mohimi, Harriet Etumua and Nelly Stephens.⁴⁶ At the same time, she awarded scholarships to three girls who had just graduated from her school. These girls were Mrs. Lydia Mohimi, Matilda Joseph (both day students) and Bernicy Atasi (a full

boarder).⁴⁷ There is need to note that Margaret used these and several other strategies as incentives in order to inculcate in her students the spirit of hardwork and competition and to encourage women education in Nigeria in her own small way. Thus, students were made to understand that, in order to get appointments as tutors in Windsor Institute and in order to gain scholarship awards, they just had to work very hard in their studies.

From what has been stated so far, it could be observed that Margaret did not only enhance her personal economic life but her economic activities touched the lives of many women in Nigeria. In other words, her activities in this regard affected the lives of many women and changed their economic status. Several women who graduated from Windsor Institute were able to establish various means of livelihood and inculcated the culture of self-reliance. While some became tutors in the Institute, others moved out to various parts of Nigeria to establish their own business outfits.

Windsor Sewing Institute operated effectively until the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War in 1967 when it went out of operation after the arrest and detention of Margaret by the Biafrans. Thus, throughout the period of the Civil War between 1967 and 1970, Margaret was in detention and this period witnessed an eclipse in her economic endeavours. However, a few months after the war in 1970, Margaret moved over to Lagos and settled there. In 1970, she organized a sewing institute in Lagos along the lines of Windsor Institute. But, she changed the name from Windsor Sewing Institute to Marg's Boutique in the late 1970's.

After the Nigerian Civil War, Margaret stayed in Calabar briefly before going to settle in Lagos. While in Calabar and as a "returnee", she applied to then South Eastern State Government for a loan in order to revive and operate her sewing business, as she did before the war. She was invited for an interview and asked to

submit an estimate. Margaret requested for a loan of five thousand pounds (£5,000) as seed money for her business. It took the South-Eastern State Government over one year to send a reply to Margaret's application. In this letter, rather than grant her the loan which she requested for, the South Eastern State Government then demanded that she should:

- (1) submit the list of her houses in Aba within seven days;
- (2) surrender her insurance policy;
- (3) get three persons to sign as guarantors.⁴⁸

This letter was signed by Chief Udo Inyang, then Hon. Commissioner for Finance and Chairman of the Loans Board in the South Eastern State.⁴⁹

Margaret was greatly angered by the strange response she got from her State Government which had declared a policy of an *open-door* to resettle returnees. In her own words, "I felt bad because it was coming from my state".⁵⁰

After this frustrating incident, Margaret decided to leave Calabar for Lagos.

In a chance encounter, Margaret met a representative of the Director, PZ, with a factory in Ilupeju, Lagos. She accepted an invitation to visit their firm. There she met a Greek business man called Papa Dimolos. He recalled how Margaret had helped his firm. But all Margaret could recall was how, as representative for Aba North Constituency in the Eastern House of Assembly, she had regarded matters concerning all the industries in Aba as matters under her constituency. As a result, businessmen and industrialists used to bring their problems to her to solve. On a number of occasions, she took their cases and problems to Lagos

to discuss and sort out with the Federal Minister of Finance, Chief Festus Okoti-Eboh, and the Federal Minister of Commerce and Industry, Raymond Njoku. Margaret did this for the people without demanding gratifications. In her own words:

"I did not ask them for a penny. I did this because the people in this constituency voted me into office".⁵¹

Papa Dimolos business interests extended to Aba. He was, therefore, full of gratitudes through generous gifts which, as Margaret noted, during her Ilupeju visit, included four sewing machines, one ceiling fan, one standing fan, cosmetics, rolls of textile materials, and an envelope containing the sum of ₦175. She used part of these unexpected gifts to set up her *Marg's Boutique* in Lagos.

Apart from enhancing the standard of living of members of her family, Margaret also enhanced the economic status of and radiated her influence on many women in Lagos and its environs. Many of the women who trained in her sewing centre (Marg's Boutique in Lagos) eventually learnt to stand on their feet rather than depend solely on their husbands as breadwinners. On graduation, many of them established sewing shops and were able to earn a living.

7

Back To Her Roots in Retirement

After several decades of meritorious services to Nigeria, Chief (Mrs.) Ekpo later returned to her roots. She is passing the rest of her life in Calabar and Creek Town in Cross River State. She reminds present-day Nigerian politicians and leaders of an inescapable truth: *Home, Sweet home at last*. Occasionally, she hums the song of the pilgrims:

Home again, Home again
When shall I see my home?
When shall I see my native Land
And I'll never forget my home.¹

Every teacher of Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo's day was familiar with this song. However, in her retired life, the song means more to her. She seems, through that song, to console herself that when all else had been forgotten, one thing that cannot be forgotten is the home, a man's or a woman's final resting place. Furthermore, When everyone seems to have abandoned and forgotten her, one community that has not forgotten her is Cross River State.

By that song she also warned politicians to remember their *home-base*, the people who voted them into power and the communities that nurtured and brought them up. In her view, it is not uncommon to find very successful politicians these days who, in the flush of power and success, tend to forget their *home-base*. They tend to ignore their communities while absorbed in national development far away from home. In her view, that is wrong.

Charity need not begin from home, but it must not forget to reach the home, she concluded. Without being unnecessarily parochial, a politician must regard it as a sacred duty to remember his home base.

Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo illustrates her view of grass-roots politics by the allegory of the ladder. In her view, a person who used a ladder to climb to the top of a tree and later threw it away, may not find it easy to come down from the tree. Even if one comes down, he or she may never climb the tree again.

Margaret extended the concept of the home-base to women and the development process in Nigeria. She illustrated her limited effort in mobilizing rural women, market women and women in industry. When the time came, for women to support her, they did their best. They did so believing that she gave them selfless service. She wore their own type of dress; ate their own type of food; and shared thought with them. Like Julius Ceasar, when the poor cried, Margaret wept with them and shared their grief and sufferings.²

Margaret expressed her gratitude to Nigerian women organizations for remembering to invite her to important celebrations, for honouring her with several awards, prizes and certificates. She commended Women in Nigeria (WIN) for naming a women's Centre after her in Calabar. Above all, she expressed her profound gratitude to Her Excellency, Mrs. Veronica Ebri, wife of Cross River State Governor, the Better Life program in Cross River State and the Government of Cross State River State for taking care of her in old age, and for immortalizing her name by the Government Women Education Centre (along the Airport Road, Calabar), named after her. According to her:

The Government of Cross River State and the Better Life program have made a good arrangement to help me in my old age. I am given an allowance of N500.00 (five hundred naira) every month. I have a typewriter and a secretary placed at my

disposal in my house here. You see, this is wonderful. I also express my gratitude to Mrs. Maryam Babangida, wife of President Ibrahim Babangida and National Chairperson of the National Advisory Council of the National Commission for Women, for donating to me a 505 peugeot saloon car, for my use. No other Government had done so before.³

With her simple life-style, she seems satisfied with what others are willing to do for her in her happy retirement. This great woman leader and Nigerian activist deserves whatever gratitude she can get from Nigerians, men and women alike.

8

Reflections and Recommendations

Margaret still reflects on a number of issues, expresses her views and makes suggestions on current affairs. Her ideas ranged from political and constitutional development, economic affairs, socio-cultural issues to women mobilization and emancipation.¹

Margaret noted that so many political and constitutional changes had taken place and are still taking place in Nigeria; that older politicians are now somewhat confused. However, she did not see any reason for banning politicians from participating in the politics of the new order in the Third Republic. It was unfair, she said, to deprive any group of politicians of their fundamental human rights, including freedom of association enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution since 1960.² She hoped that Nigerians would, by now, have observed the evils brought about by that approach to the politics of this period in Nigeria.³

Margaret also condemned the system of detention without trial that was becoming rampant in the country. She advised the leaders of the nation to desist from such practices.⁴ Rather, they should cultivate the habit of reposing confidence in the law courts. Any citizen, no matter how highly placed, should not consider himself or herself to be above the law. If a citizen committed a recognized offence, that citizen should be brought quickly before the law courts and tried and punished or acquitted. A situation in which Nigerian citizens were detained for as many as two years and over, without trial, was not proper in a country that was gradually developing as a model of democracy in Africa.

Margaret, reflecting on her own bitter experiences during the Nigerian Civil War by the Biafrans, remarked:

I have passed through the experience. I know what I am talking about. Detention without trial is arbitrary exercise of power and authority over less privileged Nigerians. It is a curse particularly in a nation that professes to be setting a model of modern democracy in the African continent. It is de-humanizing; it is undemocratic; it is a bitter experience for the victims. Nigeria should be prevailed upon to stop that practice which was popularized by Hitler.⁵

Margaret also reflected on the Presidential system of Government now in vogue in Nigeria and commented on it.⁶ She, however, viewed it as a very costly system of Government and suggested that the cost of running the system should be cut down drastically. In her view, the Presidential system of Government is more costly to run efficiently than the Parliamentary system or *Westminster Model*. It is a system of Government more familiar and suitable to the wealthiest countries of the world. It did not seem to her to be suitable to Nigeria at this stage of her development. She prescribed a two-phase transformation. First, a modified model of the Presidential system of Government should be adopted with an admixture of the Parliamentary system, where necessary, in order to reduce cost, for example, in the Houses of Representatives and the Assemblies. At this stage, the principle of separation of powers would not be practised in full.

Secondly, the next stage would follow after, at least, half a century of practice. The full machinery of the Presidential system of Government would then be installed. A new system needed gradual steps in its introduction. The Presidential system of Government could not be an exception. Margaret considered it a mistake that the entire Presidential system of Government machinery was installed at the same time in 1979 and again in 1992. Though the gap of one year was allowed up to 1993 for the operation of the new system at the Federal Government level, it did not seem to be enough for the old wounds to heal and new

lessons to be learned. Evidently, politicians had learned nothing and forgotten nothing. The only way they could learn would be by a gradual process over a period of not less than half a century. The American Presidential system was not installed fully at once. It was installed in stages by gradual *amendments*, Margaret concluded.⁷

Another way to success, Margaret believed, in the practice of the new Presidential system of Government, was to chart a program spread over a period of about one hundred years. Every ten years, a new structure would be put in place and a new procedure would be adopted. By the end of, at least, three generations, the machinery of Presidential system of Government would be fully introduced, explained and made to work satisfactorily.⁸

During the gestation period suggested above, a rotational Presidential system of Government should be tried, Margaret further suggested, to reduce cost, spread the benefits of the new system nation-wide and engender confidence among all Nigerians, whether they belong to the majority or minority groups in the country. The machinery of the rotational Presidential system of Government, in Margaret's view, would be less cumbersome, less costly but more satisfactory for all shades of opinion and groups in Nigeria. For example, there could be six zones. If there were thirty States, as at present, then five States would belong to one Zone. If Nigeria had thirty six States, then each zone would comprise six States. Only one Zone would qualify to produce a President. Others would have to wait for their turn.

A table of rotation would be carefully worked out, adopted and systematically applied to the Zones in Nigeria in a clock-wise order. This would complement the system of War Against Indiscipline (WAI). In Margaret's view, also, there should be two Vice-presidents so that a political balance would be created whenever a choice of a President was allocated to one Zone of the Country.

The present system of triple elections to the Presidency, that is, party pre-primary elections, national primaries and then a presidential election was too costly and wasteful to a nation in a hurry to develop but is now under a great burden of depressing national debt. Margaret called for a review and a change for the better. As the matter stood at the moment, the Presidency seemed to politicians a national cake for only a few opulent personalities in Nigeria to grab. Other less privileged Nigerians could hardly afford to participate in the Presidential elections purely because of lack of money. In any case, Nigeria was the worse for it because there was no guarantee that only the richest citizens could be the best Governors and Presidents. Women were also the worse for it because, unless specially sponsored, many of them could not afford to stand such elections in the foreseeable future. Minority people of Nigeria would also be out of the show for the same reason unless officially nominated to a second-fiddle post. If care was not taken, the Presidential system might, in future degenerate to a plutocracy or Government of the few richest citizens of Nigeria with the paid or *lobbied* masses serving as voters or on-lookers. The outcome would be disastrous for Nigeria in the years ahead.

Margaret also reflected on the balloting system in Nigeria and expressed the view that the ballot had always been the most powerful weapon of political, economic and socio-cultural change which the citizens of any democratic nation of the world had always possessed and wielded. Nigeria should aim at inculcating in her citizens the political education of how to use the ballot box as an instrument of political change.

Margaret outlined some of the basic conditions which should be observed concerning political education involving the franchise. First, the principle of adult suffrage should be maintained throughout Nigeria. In some parts of the country, women are not allowed to vote openly. That practice should change. If two-thirds of the entire population of Nigeria would vote, candi-

dates for elections would find it difficult to bribe them. Therefore, adult suffrage, when popularized and practised in full, should serve as an anti-corruption weapon. It is shameful, she said, to see at the moment that some of the Nigerian masses who have their voting cards, sell them.

Secondly, for the success of adult suffrage, there should be established centres for political education at the State, Local Government and ward levels and not only at Abuja, and other state-capitals as at present. The virtues and methods of voting should be taught as a serious affair to all citizens and the long-term benefits of exercising the franchise without bribery and corrupt practices as was rampant in the First Republic and the subsequent regimes, military and civilian, should be inculcated in all citizens. The Nigerian electorate should be taught, among other things, that the ballot box is the weapon against bad government, weapon for avoiding incessant military coups, and the weapon for forcing the pace of political, economic and socio-cultural changes to suit the taste and wishes of Nigerian citizens. By balloting in the correct way, she said, an ineffective Government could be overthrown after four years of existence in office. Nigerians would no longer need military *coups* to force a bad government to vacate office, Margaret concluded.

Thirdly, Margaret advised that those in authority should regard the open ballot system as a stop-gap or half-way measure subject to a final transformation to the secret ballot system which is the true democratic process throughout the world. She concluded:

Other countries practised the open ballot system. But, they quickly abandoned it as soon as they felt mature enough to throw it overboard. The open ballot system should be seen and regarded as a half measure, a gradual step, in spite of its problems, towards the final goal: the Secret ballot system.⁹

In reviewing the Nigerian economy, Margaret felt totally

disappointed with the way it had been allowed to degenerate. She wished this and subsequent regimes would act fast to check the deteriorating state of affairs. She illustrated her views and made some suggestions for improvement of the situation.

In her view, oil is the root of Nigeria's present economic decay. Oil brought to Nigeria a mixed bag of good and evil, Margaret emphasized. With a little more care, however, Nigeria would have reaped in full the benefits of the oil boom while avoiding most of its sad consequences. Margaret referred to President Shehu Shagari's Budget Speech of January 1981 to support her views:

We have observed that since the era of the so-called *oil-boom* in this country there has been the misguided impression that money was no problem to the Government. Against this background, project costs were often inflated. Designs were produced not primarily to suit our needs of society but to satisfy the taste of designers and engineers handling them. Invariably, the designs were over-coasted, equipment and machinery for the projects over-priced.¹⁰

Agriculture, the erstwhile mainstay of Nigeria's economy, had been virtually abandoned. Sporadic efforts to revive it by way of *Operation Feed the Nation* (1976)¹¹, *The Green Revolution* (1980)¹², the *Federal Buffer Stock Program* (1981)¹³ and the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (1987) Programme¹⁴ were made in good faith. But, Margaret saw all of them except the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) Programs as failures which had been openly acknowledged. DFRRI Programs had made commendable progress all over the country. DFRRI had shown a lot of drive and commitment and had been distinguished from the other programmes by a decentralized but coordinated structure, continuous funding and State, Local Government and Community participation. She envisaged that the next administration might adopt DFRRI as a continuing national programme.

She also stressed continuity in official policies and programmes. This is so, at least, with regard to the *Environmental Sanitation* aspect of the programme, held once every month, that is, on the last Saturday of every month from 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. from Buhari's regime until today. Margaret invited all Nigerians to return to Agriculture in a more serious manner. She recollected that the University of Nigeria Nsukka, was established with the proceeds of agricultural enterprises and the profit made by the defunct Marketing Board in Eastern Nigeria.¹⁵

Margaret saw the mono-commodity economy which now firmly grips Nigeria as an open-ended process which might lead directly to national calamity. It ruined Ghana under the Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah. It ruined other countries of the world or kept them down as perpetually dependent nations economically when, in fact, they were supposed to be politically and economically independent.

Margaret expressed her concern about the indiscriminate devaluation of the Naira in Nigeria and cried out:

Now our Naira is worth nothing. It is like a scrap of paper. You can buy little or nothing with it in Nigeria. Abroad, it has no value and nothing to support it. The fall of Naira is the fall of the country into the hands of Nigeria's enemies. Sometimes our economists call it one thing. At another time, they call it another thing: devaluation, de-regulation, "global world depression" "exposing Naira to the free market to find its level" and so on. Is this what goes on everywhere? Was this what happened in the days of the Nigerian pound? Something is going wrong. Our leaders should attend to the Naira urgently so as to save this nation from total collapse. God forbid that we should collapse as a nation!¹⁶

Margaret's comments on some of the remedies Nigeria had adopted so far to stem the rising tide of Nigeria's economic woes were equally instructive. In her humble view, Nigeria's approach to external debts deserved to be looked into very carefully and

reviewed quickly. Nigeria, she said, has over-borrowed. Nigeria, therefore, should stop borrowing and attend to the nation's present debt burden and future predicaments. How can a country that is thirty-two years old owe thirty or more billion naira to other countries? At that rate, how could the country survive? Margaret, in an attempt to suggest remedies, wished that Nigerian Governments should learn to look inwards and cut their coat according to their cloth. Debtor-nations, all over the world, Margaret concluded, were economically dependent nations. There could hardly be true political freedom in the presence of a crippling debt burden.

She then suggested that Nigeria should draw up a plan of development that would be realistic and consistent with her economic aspirations, growth patterns and total earnings. Nigeria should spread her development and growth trends over several decades or years. For Margaret, it would be better for Nigeria to grow gradually but steadily over the years without increasing her external debts unnecessarily than to accelerate internal growth trends unduly accumulate external debts and mortgage the political and economic future of generations of Nigerians yet unborn. Margaret regretted that regime after regime in Nigeria had contributed to this unhappy development; but, the situation had worsened since the second Republic. She hoped that the situation would be checked without further delay and a popular education undertaken to teach the Nigerian populace the evils of any debt burden.

Another devastating experiment on Nigeria's economy, Margaret pointed out, was the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). In Margaret's view, SAP was no more than an economic chain cast around the neck of Nigeria as a developing country by the capitalist nations of the world. Those countries could not get Nigeria round into the stranglehold of the chain until she had become one of the heaviest debtor nations of the world. Nigeria, as they saw her, had started an experiment to become one of the producers of iron and steel, petro-chemical industry and fertilizer

industry; had banned wheat from her approved list of import commodities; and, above all, had gone all out to search for and establish a new capital in the heart of the nation to guarantee her security and more orderly development.

Margaret, therefore, warned Nigeria to beware of her so-called *friendly countries*. Developed nations Margaret reflected, were in the habit of protecting their own economic self interest while stretching forth the olive branch.

Nations called *friendly* today could be friendly because they were available for exploitation. As soon as the avenues for exploitation had come to an end, or seem threatened, the reactions of the developed nations of the world were usually sharp and unpredictable. Accordingly, Margaret reminded Nigerians of the instances of Ghana, Iraq, Cuba and Korea, to mention but a few. It was a situation which recalled the adage *friends today; enemies tomorrow*, Margaret concluded.¹⁷

Margaret also briefly reviewed the idea of privatization and commercialization and called the practice in Nigeria another noose around Nigeria's neck in the trend of exploitation of her by the capitalist nations of the world. The developed countries, she emphasized, were polarized between capitalism and socialism. In their search for friends, the developed countries made sure that they won allies to their camps. They tied their loans, aids and support to certain conditionalities - SAP, external debt, devaluation of national currencies and privatization/commercialization, among others.

After the political Bureau Report, Margaret recalled, Nigeria seemed to have taken a stand on world ideologies and had rejected any of them by declaring that she would not work on the basis of a *national ideology*.¹⁸ In Margaret's view that was a dangerous stand. It was as dangerous as the nation's stand on non-alignment in the days of the First Republic. If Nigeria had been

pardoned or ignored in her early years, at the maturity age of thirty-two years now, her posture seemed unexceptionable to the industrialized countries of the world. The developed nations had to offer Nigeria a challenge. For them, it was a do or die option, Margaret stressed convincingly.

It seemed to her, however, that when the level of debt on Nigeria's hands grew, Nigeria then did not have a more viable alternative than to succumb to the wishes of those nations. Repudiation of her loans, as some had suggested, could mean death for Nigeria economically. Acceptance of more loans and rescheduling arrangements in the circumstances seemed to have become part and parcel of Nigeria's sacrifice for immediate short-term economic recovery and survival. Privatization and Commercialization also became Nigeria's open declaration that she had abandoned her post-political Bureau non-ideological posture which was frowned at and considered by the capitalist nations as a threat to the emergence of the new world order built around capitalism and having the American nation as the Midwife-in-Chief of the new world order.

At the point where Nigeria then stood, Margaret reflected further, this country could go all out to search for a more viable alternative to the make-shift measures she had adopted with sad consequences for her citizenry when she was in utter distress and under pressure. Nigeria, Margaret advised, should look inwards and find viable options for replacing the much-hated SAP, the poorly coordinated and capitalist-oriented privatization and commercialization program and the poor-yielding Debt-Equity Conversion programme, and so on. In her view, revival of agriculture, non-oil sector export products and introduction and spread of small-scale and cottage industries around the country as America and Britain had done in the nineteenth century would help Nigeria improve her lot. Privatization and Commercialization without replacement by small-scale industries was to lure increased poverty for the nation.

Furthermore, Margaret insisted, Nigeria must stop borrowing more foreign money, take stock of her external debts and begin gradually to reduce them. Nigeria should attend to existing Capital projects scattered all over the country. These, she said, were an eye sore and a sign of planlessness. A nation with a consolidated plan would not behave like that, Margaret concluded:

Our country Nigeria should take its time so that it may not swallow more than it can chew. If the States of the Federation of Nigeria take time to plan and follow their plans, there will be less problem. The rate of borrowing is too high. The country, to my mind, wastes too much money, quite often on unnecessary projects. Contractors are made to have much more than they should have. Inflation is seen visibly everywhere.

Another point. Governments do not finish their projects. They build half way; then they abandon those projects and expect the in-coming Government to complete the work. In addition, some Governments abandon on-going jobs and create new ones.¹⁹

Prescribing the modalities for small-scale industrial development, as one of the panaceas for reviving the ailing Nigerian economy, Margaret stressed:

I think that building new but small-scale industries can help Nigeria. It helped Britain and America to grow. But, building of the industries should be planned and controlled, perhaps one at a time. Government must not rush too much. They should start and finish one before they embark on another. They should not abandon the industries half-way for other in-coming Governments to complete at a greater expense. Rome was not built in a day, but we Nigerians want to build Rome in one hour.²⁰

One urgent task Nigeria should take on hand, Margaret also suggested, was how to find viable alternatives to SAP. Another urgent task was how to replace the large, old and outmoded industries with new, small and viable industries that could serve as

a direct Government commitment, a joint effort between the Government and Local Government or Government and private individuals and organizations or between Government and foreign partners. Education of Nigerians about how to operate small-scale industrial enterprises successfully must be guided, encouraged, stimulated by Government and Local Governments and their agencies as a national task. It should not be abandoned solely to individual caprices or to individuals who have no capital of their own to invest but who merely serve as fronts for large foreign concerns, she concluded.

Margaret endorsed Nigeria's stand on three main Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. A nation without her own languages is one without its own culture because culture follows languages very closely. However, she also suggested that the present position should be regarded as an interim position with a possibility for future development. The present position adopted by Nigeria involved the use of three main languages in national communication side by side with English as an interim official language or *lingua franca*.²¹

Margaret suggested three further steps which should be taken between now and the next hundred years to consolidate the on-going cultural revolution in Nigeria. First, the present arrangement whereby three languages are used in official communications along with English should continue for, at least, another fifty years. Thereafter, each of the three languages should be adopted as official languages in the States where they are predominantly in use. The period of fifty years preceding this change should involve planning, functional education, book production, seminars and workshops on the writing and effective use of the languages at official levels. During the same period, English should be used as a second language for official or Parliamentary purposes. In order to achieve success, all civil servants holding important appointments should be made to pass an examination in those languages. The languages should be offered at two levels - lower and higher. Margaret believed that, if whitemen could come

to Nigeria and learn, master, use and write in Nigerian languages, Nigerians should be patriotic enough to learn one of the languages of their own country. If Nigerians could learn English language and feel proud about it, they should equally learn and feel proud about one of Nigeria's main languages. Margaret noted that these languages were already being taught in schools but suggested that they should be made compulsory at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.

Secondly, English should, during the second stage, be withdrawn and replaced with any other approved Nigerian language. If the education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels were enforced and public servants made to learn the languages compulsorily, then the changes envisaged in the States Houses of Assembly and the National Assembly might not be an insuperable task. Fifty years, Margaret believed, would involve one and a half generations of Nigerians in the proposed drive for a national language.

Thirdly, the second period of fifty years in Nigeria should be devoted to the process of introducing one central language which, like the popularly discussed WAZOBIA, would be an admixture of four groups of languages as follows: 25 per cent Hausa; 25 per cent Igbo; 25 per cent Yoruba; and 25 per cent from ten to twenty other fairly large language groups in the East, West and Northern parts of Nigeria.²²

The English example, Margaret pointed out, was instructive. America, while adopting English as a foreign language, had modified it quite considerably to indicate clearly the Americanness of the American version of the English language. The English language itself grew gradually over several centuries by an admixture of several other languages: Latin, French, German, Anglo-Saxon and so on.²³

Margaret explained her interest in music, both European

and African, dancing and singing. She felt that the time had come for a greater emphasis on African, particularly Nigerian, traditional music. As far as Margaret was concerned, language, music and culture were triplets. The effort to develop Nigerian languages and culture would not be complete without a careful attention being paid to Nigerian music. She, therefore, suggested that Nigerian music should be consciously developed through the medium of Nigerian schools, colleges and universities, Nigerian Centre for Arts and Culture and the State cultural centres, throughout Nigeria. Nigerian universities should develop and offer music, especially, Nigerian traditional music, in the same way that African history, literature and Theatre Arts were being offered. Music, she concluded, could help in making the nation great in the same way sports had done. She paid tribute to African musicians especially to Miriam Makeba of South Africa, Israel Nwoba, Rex Jim Lawson and Hubert Ogunde of Nigeria, who helped to popularize the Nigerian brand of highlife music.²⁴ In connection with the growth of Efik version of highlife and other forms of music, she also paid glowing tributes to Inyang Henshaw of Cross River State. Nigeria, she emphasized, must work harder to make music a vehicle for national development.

Nigeria was already gripped by foreign culture, Margaret lamented. While Nigerians were making effort to build an impressive nation, their country was gradually succumbing to the invasion of foreign cultures. Margaret referred to Nigeria's food, diet, houses, interior decorative styles, dresses, drinks, and so on, and called for a halt to unnecessary cultural borrowing and adaptation of foreign cultures, customs and traditions. "If Nigeria's elites, men and women would agree, the rest of us in Nigeria would also agree that Nigeria's traditional dresses should be used consciously to promote Nigeria's culture and reduce waste of foreign exchange," Margaret suggested. In her view, Nigerians should learn to wear "made in Nigeria" dresses as Indians, Chinese and other nationals do. In the developed countries of the world, she said, it had become a part of the war waged by the

peoples themselves to sustain their national economy. They had extended the practice to their cars, household materials and other materials they use. Margaret called on all Nigerians to learn by these examples of other nations.

In connection with *Drug Abuse*, a rampant national malaise, Margaret called on all Nigerians, especially, Nigerian youths, to stop the habit of using drugs indiscriminately, using dangerous drugs, such as *marijuana*, cocaine or cigarette-smoking. All should heed the warnings by the Federal Government concerning drug abuse and cigarette-smoking and change their habits, Margaret advised.

Margaret also called on the Federal Government of Nigeria to look into the Education system in Nigeria more carefully again. In connection with the existing Education Policy (6-3-3-4) system, she remarked that some effort was made to redesign the nation's education program in the way the Colonial Government did in the early years of this century. But, somewhere along the line, the lofty ideals were abandoned.²⁵ Then, schools took their studies very seriously. But, they regarded their theoretical studies as only one part of their assignment. They also took the practical side of their studies very seriously. The Hope Waddel Training Institution in Calabar had a special workshop for teaching carpentry and joinery, woodwork, mechanical and printing trades as well as tailoring in the Colonial days.²⁶ Pupils were prepared in such a manner that there was no misfit among them. A pupil, Margaret observed, might be very efficient in theoretical work, another might show excellence in practical work while yet another might be outstanding in both the theoretical and practical aspects of the School's curriculum. But, these days, Margaret lamented, the situation had changed for the worse. Pupils buy brooms to present as their *handwork* and their teachers accept the brooms and award them examination marks. Between the teacher and the pupils what went on was a type of collusive action. The teacher would not teach the practical lessons as was done in Margaret's days.

Rather, the teacher would be prepared to receive materials purchased from markets and shops and award excellent examination marks for them. The pupils now compete with each other on how to buy the most expensive materials for presentation as *handwork*, *woodwork* and so on. Margaret felt that the situation was getting out of hand and was already making a mockery of the glorified curriculum of the new education policy (6-3-3-4) system.²⁷ Government should make a timely intervention and arrest the situation to avoid total chaos, Margaret pleaded. She concluded:

Education today is a sham. I taught with the little I knew but I did not attend any Secondary School or Teacher Training College.

The curriculum that was used in those days was different from what we have today. Education in those days prepared children for life, that is, life of self-employment or gainful employment by employers.²⁸

Reflecting further on the new education system, Margaret thought that the system had not fared well in the secondary schools. Most secondary schools had no workshops. Few which had workshops either had not installed the desired equipments or had no teachers to teach in the workshops. The education system today is a sham,²⁹ Margaret concluded. She wished she would have time to send a note to the Minister of Education. Margaret then asked: "What is the 6-3-3-4 system"? She attempted to answer this obliquely:

Under the new system, our children cannot spell even their own names. Teachers are not ready to take pains to help the children in their education. Infant method which was a special area of teaching has been neglected. Teachers said that they wanted to be paid as Civil Servants. Government has done so. What next? But, I hate the idea of not paying teachers their salaries as and when due. Teachers should be paid well and in time too, whether by Government, Local Government or any body. Do they want teachers to steal or to teach on an

empty stomach? The whole thing is like a vicious circle. There is need for an urgent remedy.³⁰

Commenting on Nigeria's University system, Margaret emphasized that the ultimate goal of education, these days, seemed to be university education. In her time, there was no University in Nigeria. There were Universities in other countries. Those who had the money or the opportunity attended Universities. However, the Nigerian education system in their time tried deliberately to take care of everyone, that is, both those who wanted to go to universities and those who could not reach there. She concluded:

It was not everyone who could reach the university level of education in my time. However, everyone who could go to the university overseas did so. Others attended other institutions like the Yaba College. The basic education system took care of the rest of Nigerian children properly. A standard six holder in those days was in many ways better than a WASC, GCE or SSC holder of today. That is the kind of education, I am talking about - education for life; education for a healthy society.³¹

She also lamented the deteriorating situation in Nigerian universities - Incessant conflicts between Government and University teachers; conflicts between Academic and Non-Academic Staff; incessant closure of universities as well as other tertiary institutions. She appealed to the Federal and State Governments to look into and check the situation in the interest of qualitative education in Nigeria.

Concerning women mobilization and emancipation, Margaret lauded Mrs. Maryam Babangida, Nigeria's First Lady, for her unprecedented effort to mobilize Nigerian women at all levels, in all States and communities throughout Nigeria. Her effort was a major break-through in women mobilization and emancipation. Through her efforts, rural women in particular and all other categories of women had come together not only in their

various groups but also as active organizations under the umbrella of the Better Life Programme initiated by the First Lady. For the first time in Nigerian history a National Commission for Women had been established with branches set up and fully staffed and funded in every State of the Federation of Nigeria.³² For the first time also in the history of women mobilization in Nigeria, women in rural areas had been mobilized and given active encouragement to participate in national, State and Local Government development efforts directed specifically to assist womenfolk. The achievements of the Better Life Programme and the National Commission for Women, from what Margaret had observed in person, were too numerous to recount. The seeds which the Women's Programme of Margaret's time had sown, like the mustard seed, were those the women programmes of today had fully watered. It was left for God to help the Programme grow and make Nigerian women what they should be in the context of Nigerian development and world affairs. Margaret felt satisfied that her labours and those of other fore-runners of the women leaders today were not in vain.

Margaret had four pieces of advice to offer the Women Organizations in Nigeria today. First, Nigerian women should do everything possible to ensure that every succeeding Government would inherit the Better Life Programme and the National Commission for Women as a continuing program. In fact, the National Commission for Women should be entrenched in the new Nigerian Constitution. In Nigeria, new Governments had often discarded on-going projects and experiments. This should not be so in respect of the Better Life Programme.

Secondly, whenever many Nigerian women were given positions of leadership, Margaret observed, they had often lost their heads. This should not be so. Rather, they should regard themselves as servants of the people; assume a humble posture; wear cheap and inexpensive apparels so as not to frighten or discourage their conscientious followers, especially the true rural women; they should shun flamboyant life-styles, extravagance and

unnecessary showmanship. Extravagance, Margaret warned, could easily lead those women who did not have enough wealth to various vices such as stealing, quarrelling with their husbands, pushing cocaine and going to jail.

Thirdly, women leaders should learn worthy lessons from the Nigerian heroines of 1929: the virtues of selfless service, courage and bravery and honesty in saying "no" to a very unworthy or oppressive cause.³³

Fourthly, Women organizations should take urgent steps to form a single women's front which should embrace all others. This should be done not by informal association but rather by law and structural re-organisation. Margaret would like to see the National Commission for Women play such a coordinating role for all women organizations throughout Nigeria. When such a law had been made, it would be possible for the National Commission to stand up as a parent body for all other women organizations and programmes in Nigeria. Concerning its future, Margaret has the following advice for the Better Life Programme:

The Better Life Programme is quite a good thing. But, the Programme should be prepared for more successes and more challenges in the years ahead. The Programme has come; it has seen, and conquered. But, in the next stage, the programme should be prepared to go down to the grassroots, that is, right inside the villages for identification with rural women proper. The task ahead is great. Rural women need rural roads, water, light and other amenities to have a sense of belonging. I wish the Better Life Programme a huge success.³⁴

Margaret outlined her commitments to Better Life Programme. At the initial stages of the Programme, she recalled, swinging her head from side to side, with an air of approval, she attended most of its inaugural ceremonies. She also accompanied Mrs. Jane Okon-Eyo, the wife of the former Secretary to the Military Government of Cross River State, and Dr. Stella A. Effah-Attoe,

former Cross River State Commissioner for Education, and other women to form and open various branches in the State. Wherever she went, women recognized her and were very happy to see her. They seemed to see in her the representative of women of the old order standing side by side with the enterprising women of the new order in the struggle for women emancipation in Nigeria. They saw, at once, the old order yielding place to the new and God Himself fulfilling the aspirations of women throughout Nigeria. They saw the vision of the new age with the signs of complete women emancipation from men's hardened chauvinism almost in sight at this time. They saw a new direction of change and every woman participant always felt happy. Margaret hoped that, in no distant future, Nigerian women would be fully mobilized and emancipated.

9

Women Emancipation: An Assessment of a New Era

A name among Nigerian women during the closing decade of the twentieth century, which is unforgettable is that of Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo, fondly called by her admirers Margaret Ekpo or "Mma Ekpo". That name often evokes in Nigeria and abroad a feeling associated with a great experiment by Nigerian women during the colonial era, the subsequent periods of the First Republic and the Nigerian Civil War. It brings to her admirers reminiscences of women activism and achievements; the capability, the power and force which Nigerian women could put in the field of national development when organized and the exemplary roles played by her as the foremost Nigerian woman leader of her time in matters concerning Nigerian politics and society. Some aspects of her role had already been discussed briefly in the preceding chapters of this book.

Here, however, an opportunity has been taken to examine briefly three very important questions concerning Nigerian women, Nigerian women's emancipation movement and the role played by Margaret Ekpo in these respects. How justifiable are some of the current views and perspectives about Nigerian women and their emancipation movement? How many phases of the movement have Nigerian women encountered so far and what are the future prospects of the movement? What roles, if any, did Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo play in helping to lay the foundation of women emancipation movement in Nigeria during the last fifty years?

Nina Mba and other scholars and authors have commented adequately on the nature, meaning and scope of Nigerian women organisations for emancipation or "liberation" of their fellow women from oppression or subordination. Therefore, these issues need not delay one here.¹ Rather, attention will be focused on some aspect of the current views and perspectives about Nigerian women's emancipation movement with a view to clarifying them further. Sometimes, during debates, seminars or conference on women and development in Nigeria, many Nigerians prefer to assess but eventually overlook the past or treat the past as if it has nothing to offer the present in connection with the efforts being made by Nigerian women individually or through Nigerian women's emancipation movement. Others prefer to ignore the past entirely by seeking to focus attention on the present day and by allowing the future to take care of itself. Perhaps, this is not the appropriate place to comment, in detail, on the bewildering views and perspectives about Nigerian women's emancipation movement. However, efforts will be made here, briefly, to clarify some of the views and perspectives that tend to become more complex and confusing as the debate makes increasing progress.

So far, the debate about Nigeria's women emancipation movement could be summarized broadly under two main views: negative and positive. Each of these views has, at least, two inherent perspectives to support it. The negative view is sometimes termed the "linear view" or in Esther Boserup's terminology, the "structural - functional" view.² The positive view has also two perspectives one of which is an extension of the other as will be illustrated further below.

The first perspective of the negative or linear view seems to emphasize that women are naturally subordinate to men in every African society, including Nigeria; that this has been so in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods in Nigeria; that some Nigerian women, particularly the educated elites, often, make a conscious effort here and there, and from time to time, to upset the

status quo and to seek, in recent time, to raise the status and position of women in their own society above what it should be; that those women who do so, often, end up creating complex problems for themselves, their families and their fellow women. This perspective about women and their emancipation movement cuts across the entire African continent and so is not confined to Nigeria alone. In Ghana, Nigeria's neighbour, Matthew Ayinde, a Ghanaian scholar, encountered this perspective in the course of his fieldwork between 1972 and 1974. He discovered, during his interviews, that the bulk of Ghanaian women accepted this perspective almost without question. Speaking for her fellow Ghanaian women, a Ghanaian woman leader, in the course of the interview by Ayinde, stressed this point of view:

"Women who talk of liberation seem to forget that they were born to be subordinate to men. Many modern families have been wrecked by the attitude of females who have found this hard to accept. Such is the case with a large number of educated women. You can see them treat their husbands with a heavy hand, and keep the house and the purse strings under strict control. They actually dominate the man. His relations are kept at a distance, while they (educated women) become ever more arrogant".³

The whole argument is probably premised on "the law of nature", some religious beliefs, effect of perpetuation in families or traditional and customary beliefs, most of which had been transmitted or handed down from parents to children for centuries. The perspective had gone unquestioned seriously for so long that it now seems second nature to its adherents.

In Zambia, in 1974, a similar view was expressed openly during the National Conference of the Council of Catholic Women held in Lusaka. In its communique, the Conference admonished all African women in general, their conference participants and members in particular thus:

The woman worker ought to know that her income is only a

supplement to her husband's income: she ought to be fully aware of her responsibilities as a mother and a wife and never neglect them for the sake of extra-domestic work.⁴

This perspective of the negative or linear view has been commented upon in several authoritative works and has been found to be very popular among African women, particularly, the rural and less privileged women who form the bulk of their gender. It has also been severely criticized as unrealistic. Professor P. K. Makinwa,⁵ Professor Bolanle Awe,⁶ who was once the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women in Nigeria, Edwin and Bene Madunagu,⁷ to mention but a few, have expressed their objections or reservations to this perspective in no uncertain terms. Makinwa, for example concluded her objections thus:

There is both increased subordination and dependence as happens whenever women cannot work and have access to a private income while ubiquitous women traders and the handful of women in top level wage-earning jobs present examples of increased female autonomy and self sufficiency.⁸

In her view, this perspective has been over-generalized.

Edwin and Bene Madunagu are of the view also that whatever its origins, subordination is not a permanent condition for women. It would disappear from the Nigerian society as soon as the state of communism was attained. They concluded in the following Marxian language:

Marxists have always believed that all forms of social and domestic oppression - including the specific oppression of women - would end with the attainment of communism.⁹

They were expressing their views in a paper presented at the "Women in Nigeria" Seminar held at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, in 1982.

Another participant at the same seminar, Hauwa Sani

Dangogo, affirmed the concept of subordination in Nigeria, viewed it as commonplace but strongly objected to the view that women's subordination in Nigeria was a gender issue. She believed that it was rather a class issue, a universal and world-wide issue not created by people who were bent on fuelling class divisions. She concluded thus:

While the system of class relations of the masses, as opposed to the bourgeoisie, is an appropriate way, of classifying our society, I find it difficult to identify with the view and see the subjugation or exploitation of women in this country, and in the world as a whole, as the handiwork of people bent on fuelling class divisions.¹⁰

Unfortunately, Dangogo did not explain the sources of the subordination. Perhaps, she and some other participants believed, as Edwin and Bene Madunagu did, that it arose from capitalism or materialism over which Nigerian men had greater control or, as Esther Boserup had suggested, based on her impression on the entire African societies, that it arose from colonial situations as opposed to modern and post-independence economies of African societies.¹¹

Though current and somewhat popular, this perspective seems very difficult to uphold. It tends to abandon women entirely in the hands of fortune, render them victims of the laws of nature and denies them a right to equal opportunity in Nigerian affairs. It tends to make women second class citizens who, for one reason or another, had been consigned for ever to a perpetual position of subordination in Nigeria. This perspective is contrary to the Nigerian constitution which provides for equal right and opportunity for all Nigerian citizens and freedom from discrimination on the grounds of sex, place of origin, religion or political opinion.¹² This view is, to say the least, unconstitutional. It ought to be reviewed. As may be noted further below, it was one of the perspectives which Margaret Ekpo fought against relentlessly throughout her political life.

The second perspective of the negative or linear view is also worthy of note. It emphasizes the concept of women's subordination as natural and real but suggests that while this has been so, women had already become aware of this factor in their lives and were beginning to fight to improve their status, position and role. It also stresses that this seems to be one of the underlying reasons why Nigerian women now believe that, through their own effort and the assistance of Governments of Nigeria, Federal, State and Local governments, they are hopeful of success and are bound, some day, to change the situation completely. For example, during the "Women in Nigeria" seminar in Zaria, in 1982, participants examined the conditions of Nigerian women and their efforts towards emancipation and identified four inherent position in this perspective. They concluded thus:

To sum up, the four positions presented are as follows: The first was that women's and men's biological differences are reflected in the organisation of society, and thus society treats women as subordinate to men. Second, that all women are oppressed because they are oppressed, but not all women, only those who are members of oppressed classes; and finally, that women are oppressed both as members of subordinate classes and as members of a socially inferior gender group.¹³

The majority of participants accepted the least position as the appropriate situation applicable to women's position in Nigeria, namely, "that class exploitation and gender subordination interact with each other to define women's position".¹⁴ They then called for a concerted action to change the situation as defined.

A number of prominent women organizations in Nigeria, the Better Life Programme, National Council of women's Societies, Women in Nigeria, the Media Women, Professional and other numerous women's organisations in Nigeria, now tend to hold a similar view. They continue to emphasize *subordination* and *oppression* as the main problems which face Nigerian women's emancipation movement. They identify men as the main source and architects of these problems. They hope that, through their

effort and the cooperation and support of the governments of the Federation of Nigeria, women would eventually remove the main stumbling blocks on the way of Nigerian women's emancipation. Most of the women's organisation also believe, quite erroneously, that this is the only stage in the lives of Nigerian women when the struggle for women emancipation in Nigeria is being waged in a realistic manner. Some even go so far as to say that now is the beginning of the true women's emancipation movement and struggle; and that other preceding movements and struggle were a mere parody of the great drama.

This perspective, though seemingly popular, also harbours several false assumptions within it. Some of them are mentioned here. It tends to identify men also as the source of women's subordination and oppression. Consequently, how to deal with men in Nigerian society tends to be the central focus of Nigerian women's emancipation organisations today. It either denies or de-emphasizes the importance of other factors, such as forces in Nigerian society as possible causes of women's problems. Therefore, little or no effort is directed towards such factors. These factors include neo-colonialism, capitalism of the new economic order, materialism and some aspects of the recent indiscriminate application of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in Nigerian society, that is "SAP without a" human face".¹⁵

What is more, its adherents believe that, in order to attain the appropriate state of equality with men, in Third Republic politics and in all electable positions, there should be no fixed number or percentage of seats reserved for women contestants. Rather, women should compete with men. Women adherents of this perspective tend to accept the conclusions of the Federal Military Government on the recommendations of the *Political Bureau Report* without further question. That conclusion states under these two categories:

Women in Nigeria

Full involvement of women in politics is one method of

defending and promoting women's interests in society. They can participate fully if they are members of the legislative and executive arms of government. Further reason, the Bureau recommends the allocation of five percent of the legislative seats to women in all the three tiers of government. This five percent seats allocated to women is to be filled by nomination through the political parties.¹⁶

Comment

Government does not accept this recommendation in consonance with the decision in Chapter VI.¹⁷

In Chapter VI, the government White Paper on the *Political Bureau Report* deals with "Political and constitutional systems". In paragraph 94 of chapter VI of the White Paper, Government accepted that representation on the basis of equality of states at the upper chamber (senate) and/or population basis at the lower chamber (House of Representatives) should operate as in the 1979 constitution. Government, therefore, upheld "population" as a general matter but did not go further to break it down or consider gender issues with regard to the population figures of the several states.

Consequently, the struggle for sorting out the details of representation by population, in terms of males and females, was lost. The 1989 constitution has no remedy for it too. Women organisations do not seem to realize the significance and implication of this factor for the success of Nigerian women's emancipation movement. The perspective, in this regard, fails to take into consideration the strategies adopted by Margaret Ekpo, between 1950 and 1966, that is, to secure influence and position through graduated nomination to posts in important bodies.

The importance of nominated position cannot be over-emphasized in the women's struggle for emancipation in the Third World. Such positions serve as training grounds for higher and more complicated positions. They recreate the image of the holder and popularize her before the eyes of her male counterparts and

the Nigerian electorate. They also afford the holder of the nominated positions an opportunity to improve her areas of contact and financial capability, experience and strategies before being exposed to the whims and caprices of the Nigerian electorate. This perspective therefore deserves also to be reconsidered.

Equally important is the second view, the positive or the two-dimensional view. As already stated above, this view has also two perspectives. The first perspective of the second view states, among other things, that women, had always occupied a high position in Nigerian society; had attained a high status and played very important roles in every African society including Nigeria; that the roles by women in African societies generally were complementary. For example, in agrarian and traditional societies, such roles had enabled women to complement the efforts of their menfolk in farming and cash crop production; that, unfortunately, the status, positions and roles played by women later declined and a gap was thus created between men and women.

A variety of opinions have also been expressed about the origins and the main causes of the decline, the effect of the decline (subordination and oppression by men) and the means of restoring women to their pristine greatness. Boserup had suggested that this perspective could be termed *historical dialectical* perspective.¹⁸ The perspective emphasizes, among other things, that colonialism, capitalism and materialism, rather than men in society, are the causative factors for the progressive decline of women's status, position and influence. In other words, forces, rather than men in Nigerian society, are to blame for the condition in which women have found themselves.

The perspective hopes that, some day, women would gradually regain their lost status, positions and influence in Africa, including Nigeria. It does not share the views of Marxists that the state of equilibrium between men and women in Nigerian society can only be reached when the state of communism has been

attained and capitalism swept away.

This perspective also appeals to several groups of people in general and Nigerian women's emancipation organisations in particular. The better Life Programme, National Council of Women's Societies, Women in Nigeria, the Media Women and a host of other women organizations committed to Nigerian women's emancipation struggle seem to share this perspective also.

However, like the preceding perspectives, it is not free from defect. While some women groups or some members among them point at men as the sole causal factor, as in the earlier perspectives, others who accept this perspective point to forces in the society, past and present, and tend to ignore or de-emphasize men as a causal factor. The perspective is also defective in another respect. For example, it emphasizes forces in Nigerian society, past and present, and tend to overlook the fact that, in spite of the effect of colonialism and neo-colonialism, women like Margaret Ekpo made a success of their crusade for Nigerian women's emancipation in the foundation years of the new era of Nigerian women's emancipation movement. The perspective does not recognize the fact that there is a *new era* of Nigerian women's emancipation movement and that what is meant by this term had a turning-point concerning which more will be said further here.

The second perspective of the second view, like the preceding perspective, emphasizes the high status, position and roles of Nigerian women in their society in the past and present; the complementary nature of women's roles and the fact that those roles had continued unabated until a decline-set in and a gap was created between men and women in Nigerian society. This perspective points not to men or forces in the society as the basic cause of the decline. Rather, it points to women themselves as the main causal factor. It emphasizes that, in several societies in Nigeria, it was women themselves who had posed problems for their fellow women in position of authority and influence.

Sometimes, women caused the problem alone. At other times, they caused the problem by combining with men to bring about problems and the downfall of their fellow women in positions of power. Sule Bello emphasized this salient point at the "women in Nigeria" Seminar in Zaria in 1982 in the following words:

If we take a look at the history of Borno, Benin and Zaria, we see that at certain times women occupied high if not the highest positions as members of the dominant classes. Yet women in the lower classes, together with other members, resolutely opposed and overthrew them.¹⁹

This second perspective has a lot to commend it. It identifies not forces and not men in Nigerian society as the main causes of the gap between men and women. Rather, it points to women themselves and emphasizes the need to look inwards. However, like the preceding perspectives, this perspective of the second view is equally defective. It disregards forces as causal factors of women's decline and the gap between men and women in Nigerian society. It also does not take into consideration the role men had played in and are still playing causing the decline and the gap between men and women in Nigeria. Neither does it examine the process of change and development through time as well as the turning-point of the new era of Nigerian women's emancipation movement. This view ought also to be reviewed.

A third view, is proposed here: that is, a three-dimensional view concerning women's emancipation movement in Nigeria. The three-dimensional, or pragmatic, view states, among other things, that every nation passes through three main stages in the process of its development. These comprise an early stage or the classical phase, an intermediate stage or the neo-classical or human relations phase; and a later or fully-developed stage or systems-phase. In the Nigerian context, the early stage or classical phase stretched from pre-colonial times to about the middle of 1950, the intermediate stage or the human relations phase started about the middle of 1950 and has been going on until now; the fully-

developed stage or systems - Phase, which is currently in vogue in the industrialised countries of the world, is still far out of sight. It will be reached some day.²⁰

The perspective emphasizes some of the characteristics of Nigerian women's emancipation movement during the first two phases, the classical and the human relations phases, which it has enjoyed. In the classical phase, the movement was characterized by a complete absence of coordinated and effective leadership; haphazard and sporadic organisations for women's emancipation through market associations and self-help, *Osusu* (credit and thrift) local associations or organizations and fissiparous tendencies to mention but a few. It was also characterized by violence, particularly during World War I, inter-War years, and the immediate post-World War II era. As will be mentioned later, the movements achieved important successes in spite of their limitations and handicaps.

In the human relations phase, though the Nigerian women's emancipation movement retained some of the attributes of its old phase, such as fissiparous tendencies, it is better organised, coordinated and largely devoid of violence. The movement had learnt to use negotiated settlement as a means of attainment of its goals; cooperation with men or men's organisations to achieve effectiveness; and a search for political party and Government support at the Federal, State, and Local Government levels as a means of consolidating women's success, propaganda and grass-roots mobilization. Above all, it has learnt to take market or rural women into partnership in its struggle; sponsor its women leaders into high positions of influence and authority in order to give women and women's organisations a strong voice in Nigeria's national affairs. During the later years, it has created, or caused to be created by law, a central statutory organisation, the National Commission for Women, to help coordinate women's affairs at the Federal, State, and Local Government levels. For the first time, in the history of the movement, rural women have become

involved to an extent that is perhaps unheard of before.²¹

The perspective also identifies the entire Nigerian women's emancipation movement with the Nigerian situation, with Nigerian men, forces of change and development and also with Government support and cooperation. It also indicates that the movement entered its second phase not in 1929, 1960, 1975, or 1985; but rather, in 1950, which it regards as the turning-point of the new era.

One need not lay an undue emphasis on dates as watersheds in history. One need not also regard a single event as the only cause of a major change in historical development. Mono-causal explanation in history should always be avoided. As Professor J. F. Ade Ajayi had once rightly pointed out, with reference to the year 1960, when Nigeria became independent:

There is no magic about the date itself. It is almost fortuitous that independence came in 1960 and not in 1955 or 1962. Some of the changes implied by independence have been foreshadowed for years past, whilst others will not be realized for years to come.²²

Perhaps, a similar view may be expressed about the significance of the years 1929, 1960, 1975 and 1985 in considering the progress and the turning-point of the new era of Nigerian women's emancipation movement. Some scholars and authors may prefer to regard these dates as constituting the turning-point of the new era of Nigerian women's emancipation movement. This is not quite correct.

For example, until 1972, the women of South Eastern Nigeria who rose against the colonial Administration in Nigeria were disposed of as mere victims of the *Aba Riot*. Fortunately, however, in that year, Professor A. E. Afigbo, in his epoch-making book, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in South Eastern Nigeria 1891-1929*,²³ corrected this old impression. He drew

attention to the correct significance of that event in the history of women's emancipation movement in Nigeria as follows:

Professor Gailey has recently published a book on the riot entitled: *The Road to Aba*. My view of this book is appearing elsewhere. Here, however, one can only point out that Professor Gailey followed the British Administration and other later writers on the subject in referring to the movements as *Aba Riot*. This is misleading and at times has created the impression that the episode was centred in Aba. The riot did not start at Aba and did not reach its peak there. The women did not and do not refer to it as the "Aba Riot". They call it *Ogu Umunwanyi* meaning *Women's War*. There is probably still a place for a full scale study of the episode based on an intensive use of local sources and traditions.²⁴

These remarks are very important and noteworthy. Several authors, journalists and other writers usually associate Margaret Ekpo with this great event. However, as indicated in the preceding sections of this book, Margaret Ekpo did not take part in that great event, an important aspect of Nigerian women's emancipation struggle during the Inter-War years. In 1986, the *Media Women in Nigeria* and the National Council of Women's societies had commemorated the events of 1929.²⁵ In 1990 and 1991 the National Commission for Museums and Monuments had also organised seminars on the *Women's War*, among other things, to emphasize the significance of that great event as an important milestone in the progress and development of Nigerian women's emancipation movement.²⁶ An epitaph has been written and a commemorative plaque raised at Ikot Abasi (formerly Opobo Divisional Headquarters) in honour of the fallen heroines of 1929. These are right steps in the right direction.

Our view on the significance of the events of 1929 has been expressed elsewhere.²⁷ Here, one may state that, as important as those events of 1929 were, they did not constitute a turning-point in the progress and development of Nigerian women's emancipation movement. The new characteristics and traces of the old

phase of the movement were still clearly visible at this stage: lack of coordinated leadership; violence as a part of women's expressiveness; dichotomy between the movement and the Government in power; and lack of political party support.

However, the events sounded a warning that was loud and clear, namely that women in Nigeria constituted a force to be reckoned with in national development; that when organised, women could make things to happen; that women's movements, without a properly coordinated leadership, were doomed to failure; and that violence, in place of negotiated settlement, pressure and propaganda, would be irrelevant in dealing with the Government machinery in the new era. The events also pointed to the need for new strategies in the next stage of the struggle, that is, the need to secure Government and political party support for the success of Nigerian women's emancipation movement. Thus, what the movement of 1929 lacked, the movement from 1950 in the new era was to seek and exploit in a large measure.

Lord Passfield, then Secretary of State for the Colonies, confessed, in a despatch of 1931, that the events of 1929 were unprecedented in history: not only of Nigeria but also of the entire British Empire. He concluded thus:

The situation with which the various officers were confronted was without precedent, so far as I can judge, I might almost say, in the history of the British Empire. Disturbances in which the women have taken the foremost or the only part are not unknown here and elsewhere in the Empire, but administrative, police and military officers in Nigeria could hardly anticipate demonstrations by hundreds or even thousands of native women - sometimes accompanied by men, sometimes apparently entirely by themselves, developing in some cases at any rate, into definite attacks on the property of government or of private individuals and in some cases threatening life.²⁸

In spite of their unprecedented nature, however, these events did not constitute a turning-point of the new era. They

never brought an end to total clashes between women movements and Government or local authorities. They never brought any change of heart among Government officials or a clearly new policy direction in handling Nigerian men and women who agitated for a right to participate fully in the society or a right to universal franchise for men and women.

In 1948, just about two decades after these events, another crisis, the Egba Women's War, shook the fabric of the Nigerian society with various forms of violence in Abeokuta area.

A year afterwards, in 1949, the wives of miners in Iva Valley in Enugu engaged in a series of sporadic demonstrations in and around Enugu. Later the Enugu Colliery massacre took place and some of the women demonstrators became widows. The circumstances and some of the consequences of the Enugu Colliery Massacre, the Fitzgerald Commission Report and the colonial White Papers on it have been discussed elsewhere and so need not delay one here.²⁹

What is being emphasized here is that the 1929 Women's movement was a part of the old era. So, in the main, were those of 1948 and 1949. The events of 1929 and 1948 never brought about a new era in the progress and development of Nigerian women's emancipation movement. But, fortunately, the events of 1949 did and the old era collapsed. More will be said about this subsequently.

It could also be said that the events of 1960, 1975 and 1985 did not bring about a new era in the development of Nigerian women's emancipation movement. Whereas it is true that 1960 constitutes a significant milestone in the progress and development of Nigeria, it did not bring about a turning-point in the development and progress of the Nigerian women's emancipation movement. Most of the women who came into prominence, from 1960 to the end of the Nigerian Civil War, were women who had been

trained and brought up in the 1950's or earlier or had occupied significant positions of one type or another since then. The strategies adopted by women since 1970 were also fashioned and developed in the 1950's.

Similarly, 1975 and 1985 did not bring about a new era. The years are very important in the history of Nigerian women's emancipation movement.³⁰ They brought new dimensions into the movement.²⁶ From then on, one new change or the other has been introduced to reinforce and improve the movement: Better Life Programme, creation of National Commission for Women as a statutory body, provision of effective and coordinated leadership at the Federal, State and Local Government levels, and involvement of rural women as a highly organised and mobilized force. These years constitute significant progress from the situation in the past, largely in terms of means and methods.

As we have stated above, there is no magic in dates themselves. However,, if there is any date at all which may be regarded as the one that marked the turning-point of the new era of Nigerian women's emancipation movement, it is emphatically 1950. For it was in that year that the Fitzgerald Commission of Enquiry set up by the colonial Government to investigate the Colliery incident, and the White Papers issued by the Colonial Government on it, brought about a *turning-point*. Other aspects of this issue have been discussed elsewhere.³¹ Here, only the aspects of the impact of the incident and its aftermath that touch and concern Nigerian women's emancipation movement will be recalled.

At Aba, in the heat of the Enugu Colliery Massacre, Margaret Ekpo demonstrated the need for absolute faith in and cooperation with Nigerian women and Women's organisations in handling national development affairs. Under her able leadership, Aba (Ekeoha) Market Women Association boycotted the market which remained closed for several days. Similar actions were

taken by women throughout Eastern Nigeria. Under her able leadership, women throughout Eastern Nigeria declared a *Day of National Mourning* for the victims of the Enugu Colliery Massacre and drew sympathy throughout Nigeria and abroad for the unfortunate widows of the deceased miners, those wounded or affected otherwise. The incident and the action by women shook Nigeria and reverberated across the seas. Again, as in 1929 and 1948, Nigerian women taught colonial authorities in Nigeria that Nigerian women, when organised, could constitute a force to be reckoned with in national matters.

However, Margaret Ekpo took this lesson one more step further. She became a member representing Nigerian women in a *Committee for Public Safety*, set up by the leading politicians and members of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, which was later renamed the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (N.C.N.C). Through this Committee, Margaret Ekpo demonstrated the need for men and women to work together in all cases of national development whether under colonial administration or under any Government whatever even after the independence of Nigeria. She worked side by side with her male counterparts or the Committee, enjoyed and retained their confidence, suffered with them detention for alleged acts of *Sabotage* and the shame and disgrace which the Acting Resident in charge of Owerri Providence, F. R. Kay, inflicted on her and her male counterparts at Aba as *suspects* and *ring-leaders*.³² She was later released along with them and *bound over to keep the peace*.³³

She was undaunted. She and the members of the committee for public safety called for *independence now* and signed a memorandum of protest which they presented before the Fitzgerald Commission of Enquiry, when that commission visited Aba.³⁴ She felt that was a great moment for Nigerian women, a moment for a call to duty and a moment to accept the mantle of challenge as a woman nationalist leader to join her male compatriots to wrest

Nigeria from the hands of Britain. Nigeria shook.

That was also a moment for sober reflections and change of strategies in the struggle for Nigerian women's emancipation. That incident left for her and, through her, for future Nigerian women's emancipation movements, several enduring lessons. These include the need for grassroots organisation among Nigerian women; the need for effective and fearless leadership; consistent effort to link women organisations with men in the search for cooperation concerning national development; a continuous effort to seek and retain political party and Government support for women organizations in Nigeria in the search for Women's emancipation; avoidance of violence and the intensive use of negotiated settlement and peaceful means by women organisations as a new strategy for attaining their goals.

That incident also taught Margaret Ekpo and, through her, left behind for Nigerian women other lessons concerned with how to strive for and attain and retain high status, position and role by using their leaders a links in their mobilisation efforts.³⁵ For Margaret Ekpo, as for Nigerian women leaders today, attainment of very high status and position in Nigerian society is a prerequisite for effective leadership of the rural and urban masses alike. On her part, Margaret Ekpo successfully laid down this example for posterity. She not only became a nationalist leader, among women; she also became an adviser to the N.C.N.C. delegation to the constitutional conferences in Nigeria and overseas; a chief with a special seat in the Eastern House of Chief; and, later, an elected member of the Eastern House of Assembly, representing Aba Urban North constituency.³⁶

Furthermore, Margaret Ekpo had to form *Women's Wings* of political parties as a "grand design" for merger of women's emancipation movements with the N.C.N.C. Other women in Western and Northern Nigeria later followed her footsteps. She realized, in time, that the future progress of Nigerian women's

emancipation movement lay partly in the hands of Nigerian women themselves. They needed a strong voice in the councils and Assemblies of the Nigerian nation, in the nation's civil service, industries and other important sectors of national life. She laid the foundation for this important role for women.

As has been stated above, the Fitzgerald Commission of Inquiry was set up to investigate the Enugu incident and make recommendations to the Colonial government. The Commission in 1949 and early 1950 toured various parts of Nigeria. The Commission, while at Aba, could not fail to be touched by the call initiated by Margaret Ekpo and her fellow members of the committee for public safety for "*grant of independence now*". At Ibadan, where the Constitutional Conference termed the *epoch-making conference* by Professor T. O. Elias, was sitting, the Commission's visit provided that Conference with an excellent opportunity to make radical recommendations which helped to lay the foundations of a new era of national development in which both men and women and the Nigerian women's emancipation movement began to play an increasing role in national affairs.³⁷

For example, the commission called on Britain to have a change of heart towards Nigerians, men and women. It called on Britain to grant independence to Nigeria as soon as it was practicable. It also advocated for training and retraining of Nigerians, men and women, without exception or discrimination as a practical policy and as a commitment to prepare them for a new role in the impending new era that was, among other things, to usher in independence.

Above all, the commission called on Britain to treat Africans in Nigeria henceforth in a manner that would no longer make that ugly incident to recur or the bloodshed at Enugu look like a mere waste of human lives. These policy recommendations were accepted and implemented in full without sex or gender discrimination. They were applied to both men and women alike

and they opened the avenue for both sexes in Nigeria to learn to cooperate, hencefore, in the task of national development and in all political, economic and socio-cultural affairs.³⁸

Thus, when independence eventually came in 1960, there were on-going processes of integration of men and women in national affairs; opportunities had become available for women to participate at various levels of national development; Nigerian women's emancipation movement had demonstrated a new force and drive towards a new direction; the voice of women had begun to be heard in a loud and clear manner in several policy organs of Nigeria. These trends have continued with varying degrees of intensity.

10

Legacies

Perhaps, few Nigerian women can justifiably lay claim to as many legacies for their countrymen and women as Margaret. She, herself, in a recent interview, commented on this aspect of her active life in the service of Nigeria. These included the legacies of *One Nigeria*, public probity; women in politics; women and franchise, women in business, professions and industry, women and leadership; mobilization and the struggle for emancipation of women¹

This assessment of Margaret's legacies, as summarized above, will begin with the concept of *One Nigeria*. Born in 1914, the year of the Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria, Margaret, without being superstitious about stars and belief in predestination, regarded the events of that year as guidelines underscoring her future political action.² Throughout her family life, in her choice of place of residence after marriage and in her political career, she demonstrated, in a practical manner, the concept of *One Nigeria*. As an Efik woman, in spite of protests from friends and relations, she readily married Dr. J.U. Ekpo, an Ibibio from the present Akwa Ibom State.³ By that marriage, she taught her fellow Efik men and women that for the unity of Nigeria and the survival of the Nigerian nation, all ethnic groups must learn to love and respect one another; they must learn to understand that true love knows no ethnic boundaries; and, above all, that the national integration process could hardly progress beyond the *Paper Amalgamation* of 1914 without a meaningful effort among Nigerians themselves who must consciously help to break down

ethnic barriers through inter-ethnic marriages and other forms of cultural association. By her marriage, Margaret not only maintained a well-known family tradition, she went further to set an example, whose lessons will long endure not only among the Efik and the Ibibio of South Eastern Nigeria but also among all other Nigerians.

The Federal Government has, since the end of the Nigerian Civil War, initiated bold moves to encourage inter-ethnic marriage among Nigerian youths, for example, among members of the National Youth Service Corps.⁴ It has also established several Federal Government Colleges, now styled "Unity Schools", to further encourage inter-ethnic association.⁵ Margaret was one of the few Nigerians of her time to set this worthy example for Nigerian youths to follow.

After Margaret's marriage to Dr. J. U. Ekpo, she made Aba her second home. It was at Aba that she became the President of Aba Women's Association; there she became a top woman leader in the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC); there she was appointed a Chief in the Eastern House of Chiefs, and there she was elected to represent Aba urban in the Eastern House of Assembly.⁶ Until then never in the history of Nigerian politics had any Nigerian woman gained so much influence and risen meteorically to political prominence outside her home-base and without the support of her ethnic group and her kith and kin. Margaret became synonymous with the word *Aba* and, in terms of politics and women mobilization, references began to be made to her as Margaret Ekpo of Aba throughout Nigeria.⁷

Margaret's humble efforts also reinforced the concept of *One Nigeria* in, at least, five other directions. First, it struck a blow at the concept of *tribalism* as an instrument of national unity. For *tribalism* was, and should be, regarded as a deadly canker-worm in Nigeria's body-politic. The people of Aba responded favourably to Margaret's call for a change of heart, a movement

away from the old direction and a gradual but steady advance towards a new national goal, Nigeria Unity.

Secondly, her effort became a shining example of how to answer practically the Nigerian *national question* of citizenship and nationality". In other words, she afforded a direct answer to the burning question at the 1958 Constitutional Conferences about the extent of residential qualifications in the determination of citizenship rights and national privileges to Nigerians. How that question was settled may be found in Nigeria's Independence Constitution of 1960. Subsequent constitutions have since adopted those provisions which guaranteed equal rights to all citizens of Nigeria as well as the right to life and property, right to live and work anywhere, right to vote and be voted for subject to certain residential qualifications. It may be noted that other Nigerians contributed practically similar answers to this questions. In these matters, Margaret rose to prominence in politics and society far away from her place of origin.

Thirdly, Margaret's career also illustrated the fact that, for achievement of Nigerian Unity in the true sense of the term, both the majority and the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria must learn to love one another, to co-exist as Nigerian peoples, and to work together to achieve peace and progress at home and abroad. The minorities, she believes, need the majorities and *vice versa*.

Margaret believed in the principles of state creation and the state system of administration in Nigeria. She, therefore, supported these principles in spite of her place of domicile and later persecutions and detention during the Nigerian Civil War. She also believed that, through state creation, the identity of the minority groups in Nigeria would be recognized; their effort and cooperation would be better elicited and utilized to greater national advantage. Besides, the minorities would be offered the opportunity to develop at their own pace in Nigeria without the obvious restrictions of other groups.

Fourthly, as has been illustrated in a previous chapter, Margaret hated secession and rebuffed it when it was attempted in Eastern Nigeria. For her, secession was another name for suppression of the minority peoples of Eastern Nigeria; for denying them recognition and a considerable autonomy in a state or states of their own;⁸ and for consigning them to a position of inferiority as the submerged nationalities of Eastern Europe and other continents.⁹

Equally, for Margaret, secession in its Nigerian context, was a re-affirmation of the principles advocated and stated in the Willinks Commission Report and the white Paper on it by the majorities that there were no minorities in Eastern Nigeria.¹⁰ Thus, in her view, the Nigerian Civil War was, at once, a war for Nigerian Unity, and a war for determination whether or not the minority groups in Nigeria, in general, and those in Eastern Nigeria would long endure. She was happy to join others in suffering during that national crisis. At its end, she joined others in singing the song of Nigerian Unity. She was obviously pleased to witness the triumph of the principle of co-existence between the majority and minority groups in Nigeria when the Nigerian Civil War came to an end.

Fifthly, Margaret admired the principle of *Federal Character* and *Local Government spread* which had emerged as a corollary to the principles of preservation of Nigerian Unity and unity in diversity.¹¹ The new principle was enshrined in Nigeria's 1979 Constitution to protect all states in general and the minority states in particular from unwarranted control of any one state by another through the backdoor, that is, through the monopoly of top political and civil service or Local Government posts to the exclusion of the indigenes of other states. Margaret, however, saw this development as a welcome departure from previous traditions which gradually lost public support.

Margaret, however, was also aware of unfavourable public

reactions to the implementation of the principle of *Federal Character*. She, therefore, agreed with the warning contained in a section of the Report of the Political Bureau:

We wish to emphasize that the disabilities experienced by the above groups in the Nigerian society are incompatible with the emphasis on social justice in the new social order we have recommended in this Report. The disabilities of these groups, if not properly attended to, will continue to pose problems for peace, stability, national integration and socio-economic commitment to build a just and an egalitarian society¹.

Margaret also agreed with measures recommended by the Political Bureau to allay the fears and anxieties of aggrieved people over these matters:

- i. Government should, as a matter of conscious policy, undertake a fair sharing of national resources and allocation of economic and social projects across the country in accordance with the new philosophy of government.
- ii. Government should take steps to entrench and properly implement constitutional provisions and governmental policies of equal rights and equal opportunities for all Nigerians irrespective of indigeneity, sex, religion, etc.¹²

In Margaret's view, the present principle of Federal character and Local Government-spread should, as provided for in the Constitution, be used with great care to emphasize Nigerian unity, merit and full residential right. Margaret also agrees with the Political Bureau's recommendations in another respect:

To complement the above recommendations, laws should be promulgated which tie citizenship rights to either place of birth or residence. In this connection, there is need to adopt a policy of **FULL RESIDENCY RIGHT** For Nigerians wherever they may reside, provided such Nigerians are made to

fulfill minimum residency requirements. We recommend 10 years. Residency rights must include all rights which are normally available to *traditional indigenes* of the state.¹⁴

Margaret was not happy that, in adopting and adapting the American Constitution for its own purpose since 1979, Nigeria forgot to deal with this aspect of the burning question about Nigerian citizenship and nationality. She observed:

In our time, we had no federal character. A Nigerian was a Nigerian. He or she could live and work anywhere and vote and he voted for anywhere. Those who have adopted the principle of Federal character and local government spread still have a duty to discharge, that is, to do it as it is done in America or modify it.¹⁵

Margaret fervently believed in the theory and practice of *public probity*. She recalled, with gratitude to God, the opportunity given her to serve Nigerians selflessly. Then, she was able to serve the nation as a teacher though paid a meager salary; she was entrusted with heavy responsibilities of teaching and nurturing the youths of Nigeria. The salary was small but she managed her affairs within the framework of her earnings. After school, she sewed dresses for neighbours and their children and earned additional income for her upkeep. She was in favour of giving more remuneration to teachers whom she termed *the nation's manufacturers of manpower*. However, she regretted that many teachers were no longer working within the ethics of the profession. Some had even thrown public probity to the winds.

Margaret also looked back to her political days with pride. Those were the days of high public probity. As a politician, she regarded politics as a part-time service. She and the politicians of her days, represented their constituencies in the House of Assembly for a given number of days.¹⁶ They debated issues before them and, at the end of the session of the House of Assembly, returned to their homes, attended to the electorate, and maintained their private homes and jobs. In those days, Government was not

called upon to pay for *constituency allowances* or for *constituency offices*, some of which did not exist. Where they existed, as was the case during the Second Republic, they were, in most cases, the same as the residential houses or offices of the politicians concerned.¹⁷

Thus, Government ended up hiring individual politicians' houses or business offices to serve them as their *constituency offices*. Government also provided the politicians of the second republic with four or five domestic servants as well as quarters for *temporary* occupation during sessions of the National or State Houses of Assembly. Definitely, this was an improvement on the pre-Nigerian Civil War situation of the First Republic when members of the House of Assembly were allowed to fend for themselves and claim night allowances in lieu of temporary accommodation.¹⁸

Margaret believed that they served the nation then on the basis of patriotism and public probity. In spite of the frugal fringe-benefits they were paid, they did their best in the interest of the nation by rendering their services with a high degree of honesty and a sense of commitment to national duty.

There were contracts; but, they were not inflated as far as Margaret could recollect. They did not hear of *kick back* or *kick forwards* before and after contract awards. If they had done the sort of things that are being done these days, Margaret wondered whether the Nigerian state would have survived as a nation for the present generation to inherit. Some politicians of her own time died wretched. Others, such as Mazi Mbonu Ojike, the *Boycott King*, were very honest and had no house to call their own, Margaret emphasized. Chief Nyong Essien, a veteran member of the Eastern House of Chiefs then, died ever before his house was completed.¹⁹ Margaret's time was a period of patriotic service to the nation and a time for laying down, irrevocably, the legacy of public probity.²⁰

Concerning women in politics, Margaret noted that times had changed. Nigerian women are now in politics more than her time. In her own words:

In our time, few husbands ever permitted their wives to go into politics. Many women were also afraid of politics and politicians. They looked down on politics and regarded politicians as liars. Above all, politics was popularly considered a game fit for men only. Women in turn were looked down upon and considered only fit for the kitchen and family life only. Men, it was erroneously believed, knew what the game of politics was about. Therefore they alone could play it. They knew what to do and how to do it best.²¹

According to Margaret, her appearance on the Nigerian political scene in the early 1950's was like a thunder-bolt. It blasted men's hopes; it created new standards and awareness about the capabilities of women. It broke old myths and created new ones. At first, men treated Margaret with a measure of suspicion. But, soon afterwards, the suspicion gave way to greater trust, companionship and respect. To every one's greatest surprise, Margaret rose through various stages of political appointment and recognition within a decade or so. As was stated in a previous chapter, she became an adviser to the National Council of Nigerian Citizens and participated effectively in the constitutional conferences held in Nigeria and London. Later, she was appointed a woman member of the party's Executive Committee, various working committees, and then a member in the Eastern House of Chiefs.

Margaret's appointment as a member of the Eastern House of Chiefs broke an all-time record and set various tongues wagging. Accusations and counter-accusations were made against Margaret. Some saw nothing wrong about her appointment. Other felt that all the well-known traditions of Eastern Nigeria had been shattered by that appointment, the appointment of a woman to sit with prominent traditional rulers and chiefs in the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs. However, after a few months, every one settled down and allowed the chiefs to do their business. It was an

appointment which cut across politics and tradition. For Nigerian womanhood, it was a moment of joy, success and ecstasy beyond mention. Margaret sat among the most prominent paramount Rulers of Eastern Nigeria and among the first and second class chiefs of great repute. She did womanhood proud and left an enviable legacy for all times. That legacy left the door open for more Nigerian women to become chiefs: political, honorary and traditional chiefs in Nigeria. No one ever questions their appointment as chiefs now in Nigeria.

Margaret won the Eastern Nigeria election of 1961, and thus became the first woman member of the House of Assembly, representing Aba urban since Nigeria's independence. Another veteran woman politician, Chief (Mrs) Janet Mokelu, won a similar victory in Enugu urban. By that victory, Margaret reached the apogee of her political career in Eastern Nigeria. In the 1964/65 Eastern Nigeria election, Margaret repeated her victory and retained her seat in the House of Assembly while most male contestants and fellow former members of the Eastern House of Assembly lost their seats.

Now, it is becoming commonplace political practice for women to contest and win elections into state House of Assembly, Federal National Assembly and the senate. Women are also often seen in state and Federal Government cabinets holding political appointments as commissioners or ministers. Margaret believed that, as the NCNC flag-bearer and veteran woman politician in Aba urban North in the 1960's, she helped, in no small way, to lay down this legacy for Nigerian Women. She helped to open the door of political faith to all Nigerian women to vote and be voted for.

Margaret's abiding legacy in politics included issues concerning women and the franchise in Nigeria. In 1953, Margaret was elected the General Secretary of the Federation of women's organizations of Nigeria. Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti

was elected the National president.²² At that time, Nigerian women were excluded from exercising their franchise. There was no universal adult suffrage. At the conference of the organization held on 5 December 1953, at Abeokuta, their organization, by a resolution, demanded that *all women over 21 years in Nigeria be allowed to vote and be voted for at all elections in the country.*²³

Margaret decided to pass the resolution to all Governments of the Federation of Nigeria. She also followed up her action with the Government of Eastern Nigeria when she became a chief and a member of the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs, from 1954. After about four years, Margaret finally gained the ears of the Premier of Eastern Nigeria, his Executive Council and members of the NCNC party's official delegation to the London conference of 1958. How this happened was interesting.

As Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo recounted, she was appointed one of the advisers on the NCNC party delegation to the London Conference in 1958.²⁴ While in London, she observed the proposal in one of the conference papers that the Houses of Assembly in Nigeria, when established, would be for only elected members. There would be no room for special or nominated members any more. She was astonished. As that resolution stood, it meant, among other things, that the Houses of Assembly in Nigeria, when established, would be only for men because they alone could vote and be voted for by the electorates. During break and before the proposed resolution in question was tabled for discussion, Margaret lobbied almost all the important party representatives to understand that Nigerian women, particularly Eastern Nigerian women, would regard the NCNC as an anti-women party. She then advised the party to argue that there should be special members in those Houses of Assembly or otherwise women should be given an opportunity to vote and be voted for. She produced and circulated to members of the party copies of the resolution made by the Federation of Women's Organizations of Nigeria since 1953 demanding adult suffrage for all Nigerian

women of twenty-one years of age and above. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, now *Owelle* of Onitsha, who was then Premier of Eastern Nigeria, after consultation with party delegates, re-assured Margaret that the party would be progressive in handling the matter. The party would support the abolition of nominated or spacial members in the Houses of Assembly. However, on return to Nigeria, the party would introduce universal adult suffrage for men and women of twenty-one years of age and above. On return to Nigeria, Zik kept to his promise, placed a resolution before the Government and universal adult suffrage was quickly approved and introduced into Eastern Nigeria. Margaret was given the mandate to accompany a Government team to explain the new situation to the women of Eastern Nigeria. She gratefully accepted that historic assignment.

Margaret would also be remembered for another legacy for Nigerian womanhood, that is, combination of political activities with business and industry. Margaret's view was that there were other more prosperous business-women and ardent and successful industrialists in her time. However, her legacy, in this respect, could be viewed from, at least, three perspectives. First, she was the first female politician of her time to organize the Aba Market women association as a viable one, embracing all factions and groups of female traders and business proprietresses or agents. This association was registered and later linked with the National Council of Nigeria Citizens. It became a social, economic and political force to reckon with in mobilizing women.

Furthermore, as already discussed in an earlier chapter, Margaret set up the Windsor Domestic Science Institute not only to serve as a small-scale industry for dress-making, knitting and embroidery but also to provide women with a centre for the study of mothercraft, home economics, English and book-keeping for home management and for business. Female apprentices were enrolled, trained and awarded certificates on satisfactory completion of their training. As already stated elsewhere, this institute

marked not only Margaret's attempts to demonstrate the capability and force of women in business and industry; it was also a legacy for Nigerian women that their survival in Nigerian society would be in active participation in business, industry and in self-reliance. According to Margaret, no woman would be highly respected by her husband and by the society in which she lives if she has no visible profession, business or industry; no woman could contribute effectively to Nigeria's search for self-reliance and economic survival without a viable occupation, business or industry. Margaret felt happy to be associated with leaving this legacy to women in business and industrial promotion in Nigeria. Margaret was delighted that, in May 1992, she was able to donate one of her sewing machines preserved from the Lagos Sewing and Domestic Science Centre to the Women in Nigeria (WIN) Centre in Calabar, Cross River State, to serve as a memorial of her business legacy and an artefact for Nigerian womanhood.²⁵

As already stated, Margaret was appointed a Chief and also a member of the Eastern House of Chiefs. This was a remarkable honour bestowed not only on her but on Nigerian womanhood. By these twin appointments, Margaret broke an all-time record and set a standard which had not been broken in Nigeria. She was happy that she shared the honour with another veteran lady politician of no order, Chief (Mrs) Janet Mokelu.

Margaret saw nothing wrong with affording women an opportunity to become chiefs; political, honorary and traditional. Many women in Nigeria, she emphasized, were already chiefs of one type or the other. Margaret was satisfied that, in this regard, her toils and labours had not been in vain. She had shown the light. She hoped that Nigerian women would continue to follow.

Margaret viewed her position, as a chief, as one that entitled her also to leadership. As a chief, a member of the Eastern House of chiefs, and later, a member of the Eastern House of Assembly, Margaret considered herself a frontline leader among

Nigerian women of her time. She believed that, in this respect, also, she and other women in similar positions had, through personal example shown that no political, social or traditional height should be regarded as too great for a Nigerian woman to attain in her country.

Margaret was delighted to note that, already, in politics, civil service, local government, banks, industries, the universities, and in private and traditional affairs, women were not only maintaining but were already beating the records she and other women of her time had set. She hoped that, in no distant time from now, a lady President or Vice-President would emerge in Nigeria.

Margaret also took every opportunity to reflect on some of the problems facing womanhood in Nigeria with regard to attainment of the highest possible political position. First, Nigerian women, in spite of the progress recorded by the Better Life Programme, were not yet united as one body to fight women's cause. As in her own time, women are still divided among the political parties. As long as that position persisted, the fate of women would continue to be in the hands of men who, with unflinching zeal, still dominate the parties and party machinery sometimes for their selfish ends.²⁶

Secondly, at present, within each party, women supporters were still divided into factions. Thus, women had not developed a cohesive power within the parties to which they belonged and could hardly exert influence formidable enough to break through ranks already controlled by men. In that situation, women could only emerge if men showed sympathy and cooperation. Women were still at the mercy of male politicians. There was, therefore, need for greater efforts.

Thirdly, women had been found to be jealous of one another throughout Nigeria. There were occasions when, rather

than vote for their fellow women, women voters had preferred to vote for men. In order to succeed in politics, Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo warned women to learn to reconcile their political disagreements and prefer to adopt the practice of mass support for female candidates during elections.²⁷

Fourthly, in order to achieve women group support and cohesiveness, women politicians should learn to go with the masses rather than remain elitist and detached. They should show concern for the market women, the labouring classes and the jobless women.²⁸ The masses of women whom politicians neglect, often become the group that could give them the greatest support in their hour of need in politics.

Fifthly, women politicians and leaders must reflect on their own personality and life-style. These could stand them in good stead or mar their ambition as political, social or community leaders.²⁹

For Margaret, a lot of progress had been made by women either as a group or as individuals. The next decade would possibly see Nigerian women at the top positions in Nigeria. However, women must beware, Margaret warned. They must work harder and continue to organize themselves to achieve a formidable force that is united by their sex, their common plight as an oppressed group in Nigerian society and by the will to survive in a World that is still largely dominated by men.³⁰

Asked to summarize, in a word, her greatest legacy to Nigerian womanhood, Margaret answered, cryptically, *the struggle for women mobilization and emancipation in Nigeria*.³¹ In her view, all that she did, worked for and achieved, concerned the struggle to mobilize her fellow Nigerian women and to emancipate them from the clutches of male *chauvinism*, *the trappings of old beliefs, old attitudes and old traditions that had kept women as social slaves, kitchen hands and children breeders for men and*

to take her exit. Consequently, she has earned and retained the admiration of her countrymen and women.

As Nigeria makes progress though not without crisis and conflicts, towards the Third Republic, Margaret prays for Nigeria's success. In her quiet retirement, she has occupied a rear-guard position as one of Nigeria's eldest Stateswomen, yielding place effectively to new Nigerian women leaders and Nigerian politicians of the newbreed. Margaret still plays a commendable role. She, like a retired soldier, continues to give active support to the present women leaders in the best way possible. With a sense of pride, unalloyed loyalty to and patriotism for Nigeria as a nation-state, she admonishes and warns politicians and other leaders of the nation to uphold the principles of dialogue, the rule of law and the rules of political game generally in their efforts to build a democratic nation where no man shall be oppressed and of which, all well-meaning Nigerians will be proud. She is a front-line Nigerian nationalist.

Matthew Arnold, an English poet once rightly classified the human society of his time into three main categories: a group consisting of men and women, who chatter, love and hate, and in the end, die and are forgotten; a group comprising men and women who, like the ocean waves, bubble and foam in the moonlight solitude, and disappear at dawn when faced by the stark realities of nation-building; and another group, comprising men and women, who accept the challenges of nation-building, strive earnestly, and eventually record impressive successes for their own generation and for posterity.

Margaret Ekpo, undoubtedly, belongs to the third of Arnold's categories. By her life and work, she has evidently left behind her for the present generation of Nigerians, both men and women and for posterity, visible footprints in Nigerian politics and society to follow.

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5. A. K. Hart, op.cit
 6. A. J. H. Latham, op. cit., p. 10
 7. The Accord settled the dispute about Efik ruling families and introduced the rotation principle among them. "Report on the Commission of Inquiry (South-Eastern State Customs and Usages)", op.cit.
 8. Ibid: See also Latham, op.cit.
 9. H. M. Waddell, Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa, London, 1863; E.U. Aye Presbyterianism in Nigeria, Calabar, 1987.
 10. Ibid.
 11. Ibid, pp 57 - 60
 12. Waddell, op.cit; Aye, op.cit. pp 61 - 63
 13. Aye, ibid;
 14. Ibid
 15. Biddell, op.cit; Annual Reports on Calabar District, 1904 - 1925; Interview with Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo, 63 Dan Archibong Street, Calabar, 78 Years old, 15/12/91.

Chaper 2 - Early Years

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2. See Sunday Concord Newspaper, March 8th 1992 p.19.
3. Interview with Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo cited.
4. Ibid.
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7. Interview with Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo, conducted by Quality Senior Staff Writer, Lucy Okoku, contained in Quality Magazine, February 13, 1992, vol.9 No. 7, p. 35.
8. Interview with Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo, cited.
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10. Ibid, Also see Quality Magazine, February 13, 1992 Vol. 9, No. 7, p. 35.
11. Interview with Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo, cited.
12. Ibid.
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15. Ibid.
16. Ibid. Rev. Report Sampson Ekpenyong Efa (Margaret's Elder brother and a number of people attested to this fact.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Interview with Mr. Edward Ekpo (Mrs. Ekpo's first son), over 50 years of age, Calabar.
23. Interview with Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo.

Chapter 3 - Role in Nigeria's Political and Constitutional Development

1. Interview with Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo, cited.
2. Ibid. See also Quality Magazine, February 13, 1992, Vol.9, No. 7 p. 36.
3. Ibid.
4. Interview with Chief (Mrs.) Ekpo, op. cit.
5. Ibid.
6. See Quality Magazine, February 13, 1992, op.cit. p. 36.
7. This book is not available. Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo has misplaced her copy. The Publishers' name could not be got, but one sincerely believes that the book was a further stimulus to Nigerian women at the time since it focused mainly on racism and African personality among women.
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36. Eastern Nigeria Guardian, Monday, August 10, 1953. NAI.

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40. Ibid.
41. Report by the Resumed Nigeria Constitutional Conference held in London in September and October, 1958. See also Appendix for details of delegation. See, NAI, NC/B15.
42. Report by the ad-Hoc Meeting of the Nigeria Constitutional Conference held in Lagos, in February, 1958. For details see, NAI, NC/B16.
43. Interview with Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo, op.cit. See also Quality Magazine, February 13, 1992, Vol. 9 No. 7, p.37. Report by the Resumed Nigeria Constitutional Conference held in London September and October, 1958. See also NAI, NC/B15.
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49. Southern Nigeria Defender, 17 February, 1954, NAI.
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18. Ibid. Arthur A. Nwankwo's picturesque account of encounter between the various ethnic groups inside Biafra is very instructive. Arthur A. Nwankwo, op.cit., p. 97.
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 30. Ibid., 29th September 1964, p. 53, NAE.
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37. Ibid.
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39. Eastern state Express, December 17th, 1953. Also see Eastern State Express, January 7th, 1953, NAE.
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44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Interview with Chief (Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, cited.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

Chapter 7 - Back To Her Roots in Retirement

1. This is a marching song familiar to all teachers of the old generation in Nigeria.
2. Adapted from the funeral oration of Mark Antonio in Julius Caesar, a Shakespearean play.
3. Chief (Mrs) Margaret Expo was grateful to all her benefactors. However, it seems that there is need for more patronage from Federal and State Governments to enable her withstand the biting effect of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP).
4. For more about the peerage Act and women struggle for emancipation in Britain, see O. Hood Phillips, Constitutional and Administrative Law, London, Sweet and Maxwell, 1967.
5. For more about Chief (Mrs) Margaret Expo's strategies for winning adult suffrage for Nigerian women, see Chapter Ten.
6. Chief (Mrs) Margaret Expo, like other well meaning Nigerians, look forward with hope, for a successful Third Republic now re-scheduled to take effect from 27 August, 1993. She wished that God might spare her life to enter it with joy and gratitude.

Chapter 8 - Reflections and Recommendations

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27. Interview, op.cit.; Interview with E. U. Aye, 10/9/92; Prof. Eyo Bassey Eyo Ndem, 12/9/92 in Calabar. These time-honoured experts and professionals in education also confirmed the view about the quality of present-day education and its deteriorating nature in Nigeria.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
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32. Interview with Margaret Ekpo, op.cit. Prof. (Mrs.) Bolanle Awe, 23/5/92. She was then Chairperson of the National Commission for Women; and interview with Women Seminar Groups on Better Life Programme in Cross River State - 1988 - 1991. See also One Year After, Calabar, Better Life Publication, 1988, Report on Meet the Women Tour of the Rural Areas and the Launching of the programme on Better life for Rural Women in Cross River State, Calabar, Government printer, 1990. For similar views and comments, see Lagos State Government Report on the one-day programme for Better Life for Rural Women, Lagos, 1987; and General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, Third Year Broadcast to the Nation - Maintaining the Momentum of Change, Lagos, Domestic publicity Dept. Federal Ministry of information and Culture, 1988.
33. Interview with Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo, op.cit.

34. Ibid.

Chapter 9 - Women Emancipation: An Assessment of A New Era

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2. Esther Boserup, Women's Role in Economic Development London, George Allen and Unwin, 1970; See also Sharon W. Tiffany, "Models and the social Anthropology of women: A preliminary Assessment", in Man, Vol.13, 1978, pp. 34-51; A Oakley Women's Work: The House Wife, Past and Present, Vintage Books, New York, 1976.
3. Matthew Ayinde, "Who is an ideal Women", in Ideal Women, Sept. 1974.
4. Clara Sikeneta, "The progress by women in Zambia" Daily Mail, 20 December, 1974. for other perspectives concerning African women, see Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression, London, Zed Books Ltd, 1983.
5. P. K. Makinwa op.cit
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7. Edwin and Bene Madunagu "Conceptual Framework and Methodology; Marxism and the Question of Women's Liberation", in S. Bappa et al. (eds), op.cit., pp. 27-41d; Bene Madunagu, "Contemporary Positions and Experiences of Woman", Ibid., pp. 132-142.
8. P. Kofo makinwa, "The Role of Women in Nigeria's Socio-Economic Development", in F. I. A. Omu and P. K. makinwa (eds), op.cit., p. 215.
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10. Ibid., pp. 4-5 See also pp. 208-211.
11. Esther Boserup, op.cit.
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16. Government's views and comments on the Findings and Recommendations of the Political Bureau, Lagos, Federal Government printer, 1987, p. 54.
17. Ibid.
18. Esther Boserup, op. cit.
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21. Better Life Programme: What is it? Calabar, Cross River State publication, (undated); Report of the one-day programme for Better Life for the Rural Women in Lagos State, Lagos, Lagos State Government publication, 1987.
22. J. F. Ade Ajayi, Milestones in Nigerian History, London, Longman, 1980, p. 1.
23. London, Longman, 1972, p. 238 (Footnote).
24. Ibid.
25. A book was later launched to the honour of the fallen heroines. See, S. O. Jaja, Prof. Eyo B. Ndem, and K.

okon (eds), Women in Development: Calabar, Media Women publications, 1988.

26. The National Commission for Museum and Monuments held its seminar in Port Harcourt in 1989.
27. S. O. Jaja, "Women's War 1925-1929: An Episode in the British Administration of Nigeria", in Calabar Journal of Liberal Studies, Vol. 2, No.2, December 1991, pp. 22-34.
28. CMD 3784. Despatch from the Secretary of State regarding the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Disturbances of Aba and other places in Southern Nigeria: in November and December, 1929, H. M. S. O., 1931.
29. See S. O. Jaja "The Enugu Colliery Massacre in Retrospect: An episode in British Administration of Nigeria", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol.XI, Nos. 3 and 4, December, 1982 - June 1983, pp 86-106. and Nina Emma Mba, op.cit., pp. 168-173.
30. Better Life Programme: What is it? op. cit.
31. S. O. Jaja, Enugu Colliery Massacre", op.cit.
32. Ibid; Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo Interview (11/11/91) - 8/1/92). Jaja Nwachukwu, Ukoma and A Bell-Gam were listed as some of the members of the Committee. See also Nina Emma Mba, op.cit., pp. 168-173.
33. Ibid, Chief (Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, Interview, op.cit.
34. Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Disorder in the Eastern Provinces of Nigeria, London, (Colonial) No. 256). Despatched 22 May 1956, from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor of Nigeria, Colonial No. 257, pp. 13-14.

35. For the problems and controversies between Chief (Mrs. Margaret Ekpo and Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, her mentor cover this and other strategies, see Nina Emma Mba, op.cit. pp. 175-176. As a result of this national issue, that federation with political parties or not as well as a few other domestic issues of the society, Chief (Mrs.) Margaret, the National Secretary of the Society resigned. Eventually, her new strategies triumphed. In Northern Nigeria, the society and other women organizations formed an alliance with political parties, see also Rima Shawulu, The Story of Gambo Sawaba, Jos, Echo Communications press, 1990. pp. 65-67.
36. Mrs. Margaret Ekpo was also appointed Chief Trader of the Eastern Region, See West African Pilot, Nov., 30, 1953; N.C.N.C. Spokesman and Lecturer, Sapele and other towns of Nigeria, See West African Pilot, 1 October, 1953; General Secretary of Nigerian Women's Union, ibid, and Adviser to the N.C.N.C. delegation to the constitutional Conference in London, ibid, Her rise to power was gradual but steady.
37. Interview with Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, op.cit.
38. T. O. Elias, Nigeria: The Development of its Laws and Constitution, London, Stevens and Sons, 1967, p. 38.
39. Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo's legacies to Nigeria and Nigerian Women emancipation organizations in Chapter 10 will deal further with these issues.

Chapter 10 - Legacies

1. Interview with Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo 11/11/91 - 8/1/92 - 31/7/92.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

- 4.

Ibid. For a ministerial report card on the new National Education Policy and the performance of the Unity Schools, see Giant Strides, op. cit. pp 78 - 80.

Nigerian Daily Sketch, Friday, 29 January, 1965 NAE

7. She also known as the "Chief Trader of the Eastern Region", West African Pilot 30 November, 1953; "public lecturer and woman leader during her lecture at Sapele under the auspices of the N.C.N.C. on 3 October 1953, West African Pilot, 1 October, 1953; "Adviser to the N.C.N.C. delegation", West African Pilot, 8 September, 1953, and Mrs. M. U. Ekpo - well known nationalist of Aba" and chairperson of Aba branch of the League of Bribe Scorners", West African Pilot, 9 February, 1955.
8. On the Nigerian side, there were similar orgies for the peoples of the Eastern minority areas after liberation in Port Harcourt, Bonny, Ikot Ekpene, Aba, Opobo, Ahoada, Opobo and other areas. See Elechi Amadi, Sunset in Biafra, London, Heinemann, 1973, Chapters 13 and 14.

9. Z. A. B. Zeman. Prague Spring: A Report on Czechoslovakia. 1968, London, 1969; A. J. Zurcher, The Struggle to Unite Europe 1940 - 1958, New York, 1958.
10. Report of the Commission appointed to enquire into the fears of Minorities and the means of allaying them, CMD, 505, London, 1958.
11. Interview with Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo, op. cit. See also Report of the Political Bureau, op. cit., Chapter 11, pp 20.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid, Bureau Report, Chapter II, paragraph 21.
14. Ibid, Chapter II, paragraph 11.
15. Interview with Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo, op. cit.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Eastern Nigeria Guardian, 3 September, 1953
23. Ibid.

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24. Ibid. See also West African Pilot, 8 September, 1953.
 25. Interview with Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo, op. cit. The Authors also visited the new centre after the interviews.
 26. Interview, op. cit.
 27. Ibid. For a similar view see the recent call made on Nigerian women by the former First Lady, Mrs. Maryam Babangida that they should vote for a Presidential candidate who declared his support for Nigerian women.
 28. Interview with Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo, op. cit.
 29. Ibid.
 30. Ibid.
 31. Ibid.
 32. Ibid.
 33. Ibid.

Selected Bibliography

I. Primary Sources

(a) Oral Evidence

The collection of oral evidence from Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Ekpo started since 1986 but was systematized in 1991 and 1992. Evidence was also collected from the members of her family, friends, professionals and other members of the society in Cross River State, Abia, Enugu and Anambra States. Most of these informants volunteered information but would not like to be mentioned. Their feelings were respected. Their information was however, evaluated and found useful.

(b) Documentary Sources

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ii. Newswatch

iii. The Nigerian Magazine

iv. Quality Magazine

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i. The West African Pilot

ii. Eastern Nigeria Guardian

iii. Eastern States Express

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ANNEXURES

1953 list of those taking part in the Conference

ANNEX I

DELEGATES

Action Group

The Hon. Obafemi Awolowo, M.H.R.: Leader of Government and Minister of Local Government, Western Region.

Sir Adesoji Aderemi, K.B.E., C.M.G., M.H.R., The Oni of Ife.

Mr. S. L. Akintola, M.H.R.

Chief Arthur Prest, M.H.R.

Chief Bode Thomas, M.H.R.

Cameroons

The Hon. Dr. E. M. L. Endeley, M.H.R.: Central Minister of Labour

Mr. Kolawole Balogun

Mr. E. O. Eyo, M.H.R.

M. Bello Ijumu

Mr. K. O. Mbadiwe, M.H.R.

National Independence Party

The Hon. Eyo Ita, M.H.R.: Minister of Natural Resources,
Eastern Region.

The Hon. A.C. Nwapa, M.H.R.: Central Minister of Commerce
and Industries.

Northern Elements Progressive Union

M. Aminu Kano

Northern People's Congress

The Hon. Ahmadu, C.B.E., M.H.R., Sardauna of Sokoto:
Minister of Local Government and Community Development,
Northern Region.

Alhaji, The Hon. Usman Nagogo, C.M.G., C.B.E., M.H.R.,
Emir of Katsina: Central Minister without Portfolio.

The Hon. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, O.B.E., M.H.R.: Central
Minister of Natural Resources, Mines and Power.

M. Ibrahim Imam, M.H.R.

The Governor of Nigeria

Sir John Macpherson, G.C.M.G.

United Kingdom

The Right Hon. Oliver Lyttelton, D.S.O., M.C., M.P.: Secretary of State for the Colonies.

The Right Hon. Henry Hopkinson, C.M.G., M.P.: Minister of State for the Colonies (for the 19th and 20th Meetings only).

Sir Thomas Lloyd, G.C.M.G., K.C.B.: Permanent Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office.

Sir Charles Jeffries, K.C.M.G., O.B.E.: Deputy Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office.

Mr. W. L. Gorell Barnes, C.M.G.: Assistant Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office.

Mr. T. B. Williamson, C.M.G.: Assistant Secretary, Colonial Office.

ADVISERS**Action Group**

The Hon. S. O. Awokoya, M.H.R.: Minister of Education, Western Region.

Mr. L. J. Dosumu

Mr. Anthony Enahoro, M.H.P.

Mr. G. C. Nonyelu

The Obi of Idumuje *Ugboko*

The Hon. Olagbegi II, the Olowo of Owo: Minister without Portfolio, Western Region.

Mr. A. O. Rewane

Mr. S. O. Shonibare

Chief Romiti Williams

Cameroons

Mr. S. A. George, M.H.R.

The Rev. J. C. Kangsen, M.H.R.

National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons

Mr. T. N. P. Birabi, M.H.R.

Chief F. S. Edah

Mrs. Margaret Ekpo

Mr. E. G. Gundu, M.H.R.

Mr. N. N. Mbile, M.H.R.

Chief Yama Numa

Mr. V. A. Nwankwo

M. Mbonu Ojike

Mr. L. P. Ojukwu, O.B.E.

Chief H. Omo Osagie

Mr. D. C. Osadebay, M.H.R.

National Independence Party

The Hon. Okoi Arikpo, M.H.R.: Central Minister of Lands, Survey, Local Development and Communications.

Chief Davies Manuel

Mr. E. Njoku

Dr. E. U. Udoma, M.H.R.

Mr. J. A. Wachuku, M.H.R.

Northern Elements Progressive

M. Abubakar Zukogi

Northern People's Congress

Alhaji Shehu Ahmadu, M.H.R., Sarkin Shanu.

Mr. Benjamin Akiga, M.H.R.

M. Sa'ndu Alanamu, M.H.R.

The Hon. Aliyu, O.B.E., M.H.R., Makama Bida

M. Nuhu Bamalle

Abba Habib, M.H.R. Ajiyan Bama

M. Dauda Kwoi

Pastor David Lot, M.H.R.

Mr. G. U. Ohikere

Alhaji Sanda

United Kingdom

Mr. E. Melville, C.M.G.: Assistant Under-Secretary of State,
Colonial Office.

Mr. K. W. Blaxter, C.M.G.: Assistant Secretary, Colonial Office.

Mr. N.B.J. Huijsman: Principal, Colonial Office

Mr. I. Watt: Principal, Colonial Office

Mr. A. J. H. Haler: Press Officer, Colonial Office and other
advisers.

Legal Advisers

The Right Hon. Sir Sidney Abrahams, Q.C.

Mr. A. R. Rushfold.

Secretariat

Mr. A. R. J. Jabez-Smith: Cabinet Office

Mr. N. B. J. Huijsman: Colonial Office

Mr. T. R. H. Godden: Colonial Office

Miss. E. M. Ware: Colonial Office

Librarian

Miss. J. M. Cock: Commonwealth Relations Office

ANNEX II

Agreed Allocation of Subjects to the Central and Concurrent Lists

A. Subject for inclusion in the Central List

1. External Relations.
2. Passports and Visas.
3. Immigration and Emigration.
4. Citizenship, Naturalization of Aliens (including Deportation of Aliens).
5. Defence.
6. Atomic Energy.
7. Foreign Trade and the Establishment of Standards of Quality for Goods to be Exported out of Nigeria.
8. The regulation of Inter-Regional Trade and Commerce.
9. Copyright, patents and trade marks.
10. Customs.
11. Foreign Exchange.

12. Currency, Coinage and Legal Tender.
13. Banking.
14. Public Debt.
15. Raising of Loans for National Purposes.
16. Incorporated Companies Operating Throughout Nigeria.
17. Mining.
18. Railways, Harbours, Shipping, Civil Aviation, Grade A Trunk Roads and Inter-Regional Inland Waterways.
19. Postal Services, Post Office Savings Bank.
20. Telegraphs and Telephones. (It will be open to a Region to make administrative arrangements with the Centre for telephone services in that region which the Centre might not otherwise provide).
21. Central Broadcasting, Allocation of Times and Wavelengths for Broadcasting.
22. Water control affecting the supply of water to more than one Region.

1954 list of those taking part in the Conference

ANNEX I

DELEGATES

Action Group

The Hon. Obafemi Awolowo, M.H.R.: Leader of Government and Minister of Local Government, Western Region.

The Hon. Sir Adesoji Aderemi, K.B.E., C.M.G., M.H.R., The Oni of Ife, Central Minister without Portfolio.

Mr. S. L. Akintola, M.H.R., Central Minister of Health

Chief Arthur Prest, M.H.R., Central Minister of Communications

Mr. Ayotunde Rosiji.

Kamerun National Congress

Dr. E. M. L. Endeley.

National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons

The Hon. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe: Leader of Government and Minister of Local Government, Eastern Region.

Mr. Kolawole Balogun

Mr. E. O. Eyo, M.H.R.

The Hon. K. O. Mbadiwe, M.H.R.: Central Minister of Land and Natural Resources.

Mr. D. C. Osadebay, M.H.R.

National Independence Party

Professor Eyo Ita.

Mr. A.C. Nwapa.

Northern Elements Progressive Union

M. Aminu Kano

Northern People's Congress

The Hon. Ahmadu, C.B.E., M.H.R., Sardauna of Sokoto: Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Northern Region.

Alhaji, The Hon. Usman Nagogo, C.M.G., C.B.E., M.H.R., Emir of Katsina: Central Minister without Portfolio.

The Hon. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, O.B.E., M.H.R.: Central Minister of Transport.

The Hon. Mohammadu Ribadu, M.B.E., M.H.R.: Central Minister of Mines and Power.

M. Ibrahim Imam, M.H.R.

The Governor of Nigeria

Sir John Macpherson, G.C.M.G.

United Kingdom

The Right Hon. Oliver Lyttelton, D.S.O., M.C., M.P.: Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Mr. W. L. Gorell Barnes, C.M.G.: Assistant Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office.

Mr. A. R. Thomas, C.M.G.: Assistant Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office.

Mr. T. B. Williamson, C.M.G.: Assistant Secretary, Colonial Office.

ADVISERS**Action Group**

The Hon. S. O. Awokoya, M.H.R.: Minister of Education, Western Region.

Mr. L. J. Dosumu

Mr. Anthony Enahoro, M.H.R.

Mr. G. C. Nonyelu

The Obi of Idumuje Ugboko

Mrs. Tanimowo Ogunlesi

The Hon. Olagbegi II, the Olowo of Owo: Minister without Portfolio, Western Region.

Mr. A. O. Rewane

Mr. S. O. Shonibare

M. Mudi Sipikin

Chief Romiti Williams

Cameroons

Mr. S. A. George, M.H.R.

The Rev. J. C. Kangsen.

National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons

Chief F. S. Edah

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Mr. E. G. Gundu, M.H.R.

M. Bello Ijumu

Mr. N. N. Mbile, M.H.R.

Chief Yamu Numa

Mr. V. A. Nwankwo

M. Mbonu Ojike

Mr. L. P. Ojukwu, O.B.E.

Chief H. Omo Osagie

Chief J. T. Princewill-Amachree

National Independence Party

The Hon. Okoi Arikpo.

Chief Davies Manuel

Mr. E. Njoku

Dr. E. U. Udoma

Mr. J. A. Wachuku.

Northern Elements Progressive Union

M. Yerima Balla

Northern People's Congress

Alhaji Shehu Ahmadu, M.H.R., Madakin Kano.

Mr. Benjamin Akiga.

M. Sa'ndu Alanamu, M.H.R.

The Hon. Aliyu, O.B.E., M.H.R., Makama Bida: Minister of Education and Social Welfare, Northern Region.

M. Nuhu Bamalle

Abba Habib, M.H.R. Ajiyan Bama

M. Dauda Kwoi

Pastor David Lot, M.H.R.

Mr. G. U. Ohikere

Alhaji Sanda

United Kingdom

Mr. J. C. McPetrie, O.B.E., Assistant Legal Adviser, Colonial Office.

Advisers to the Governor of Nigeria

Mr. A. E. T. Benson, C.M.G., Chief Secretary

Mr. A. McKisack, O.C., Attorney-General

Mr. A. R. W. Robertson, C.M.G., C.B.E., Financial Secretary

Mr. R. F. A., Grey, O.B.E., Development Secretary

Public Relations Officer

Mr. J. Stocker

Secretaries

Mr. A. R. J. Jabez-Smith: Cabinet Office, Secretary-General

Mr. A.F.F.P. Newns, Secretary to the Council of Ministers,
Nigeria

Mr. D. A. Murphy, Western Region

Mr. B. Greatbath, M.B.E., Northern Region

Mr. E. G. Stumpenhusen-Payne, Eastern Region

1958 list of those taking part in the Conference

ANNEX I

DELEGATES

Action Group

The Hon. Obafemi Awolowo, M.H.A.: Premier, Western Region.

The Hon. Chief S. L. Akintola, M.H.R.

Mr. L. J. Dosunmu, M.H.R.

Mr. E. O. Eyo, M.H.A.

Mr. S. O. Ighodaro

Mr. S. G. Ikoku, M.H.A.

Mr. A. O. Lawson

The Hon. A. Rosiji, M.H.R.

The Hon. Chief F. R. A. Williams, M.H.A.

Kamerun National Congress

Mr. P. A. Aiyuk, M.H.R.

Mr. J. T. Ndze

Kamerun National Democratic Party

Mr. J. N. Foncha, M.H.A.

Kamerun People's Party

Mr. P. M. Kale

National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons

The Hon. R. A. Njoku, M.H.R.

The Hon. Dr. K. O. Mbadiwe, M.H.R.

The Hon. Dr. M. I. Okpara, M.H.A.

Alhaji Adegoke Adelabu, M.H.A.

Mr. M. E. Ogon

Mr. L. P. Ojukwu, O.B.E.

Mr. T. O. S. Benson, M.H.R.

Dr. Chike Obi

Mr. D. C. Osadebay, M.H.A.

Mr. B. Olwofoyeku

Northern Elements Progressive Union and Allied Parties

Malam Ibrahim Imam, M.H.A.

Malam Aminu Kano

Northern People's Congress

Alhaji the Hon. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, O.B.E., M.H.R.:
Prime Minister.

Alhaji the Hon. Ahmadu, C.B.E., M.H.R., Sardauna of Sokoto:
Premier, Northern Region.

Alhaji the Hon. Aliyu, O.B.E. M.H.A., Makama of Bida.

Alhaji the Hon. Isa Kaita, O.B.E., M.H.A., Madawaki of Katsina.

Alhaji the Hon. Muhammadu Ribadu, C.B.E., M.H.R.

Alhaji the Hon. Inuwa Wada, M.H.R.

Rivers

Mr. H. Biriye

United Middle Belt Congress

Mr. J. S. Tarka, M.H.B,

United National Independence Party

Dr. U. Udoma, M.H.R.

Chiefs - Northern Region

Sir Muhammadu Sanusi, K.B.E., C.M.G., M.H.C.: Emir of Katsina.

Western Region

Sir Adesoji Aderemi, K.B.E., C.M.G., M.H.C.: Oni of Ife

Oba Aladesanmi, M.H.C.: Ewi of Ado-Ekiti

Eastern Region

Chief S. E. Owukogu

The Governments in Nigeria

Sir James Robertson, G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., K.B.E.: Governor-General.

Sir Gawain Bell, K.C.M.G., C.B.E.; Governor, Northern Region.

Sir John Rankine, K.C.M.G., C.B.E.: Governor, Western Region.

Sir Robert Stapledon, K.C.M.G., C.B.E.: Governor, Eastern Region.

Mr. J. S. Dudding, Acting Commissioner of the Cameroons.

United Kingdom

Mr. C. G. Eastwood, C.M.G.: Assistant Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office.

Mr. A. R. Rushford.

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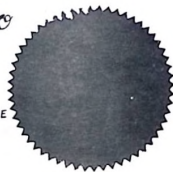
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Index

A

Aba General Hospital, 15
 Abiola, E. Ola, 202
 Aburi Accord, 47
 Action Group, 37
 Adekagba, Elizabeth, 36
 Adabo Town, 3, 9
 Adi, C.U.O.O., 90
 Afigbo, Prof. A.E., 139, 165, 170, 202
 African Club, 14
 Ajayi, F. Ade, 139, 144, 202
 Akpala, Agwu, 169
 Akpan, Chief, N. U., 63
 Akpasubi, Jackson, 9
 Allen, George, 192
 Amadi, Elechi, 177, 197
 Anglican Church, 73, 77
 Aniemekwo, Inyang Eyo (Margaret's Mother Maiden), 10
 Apostolic Church, 10, 76, 77
 Araka, Barrister, 57
 Archibong Town, 2
 Arnold, Matthew, 164
 Ashew, Chiechi, 193
 Asika, Ukpabi, 61
 Atai Adim, 3
 Atai, Ema, 3
 Atai, Iboku, 3
 Atai, Okpong, 3
 Awe, Prof. Bolanle, 130, 190, 192
 Awojobi, Prof. Ayodele, 188, 203
 Awolowo, Chief Obafemi, 52
 Aye, E. U. 165, 189, 190, 202
 Ayinde, Matthew, 129, 192
 Azikiwe, Dr. Nnamdi, 19, 22, 28, 34, 35, 51, 158

B

Babangida, General Ibrahim, 106, 190
 Babangida, Maryam, 106, 190
 Ball room dance, 14, 73, 75, 76, 84

B

Balogun, Kolawole, 28, 40
 Balogun, O. 40
 Bappa, S., 192, 194, 203
 Beecroft, Consul, 4
 Bello, Sule, 137, 194
 Biafra, Republic, 53, 54, 64, 101
 Biddell, A.W., 1, 165, 166
 Birabi, T. N. P., 28
 Blau, Peter M., 194
 Boserup, Esther, 128, 131, 135, 192, 193, 203
 Bribe Scorners League, 38
 Brzezinski, 7, 194, 203

C

Calabar, District, 1, 4, 5, 6, 7
 Caesar, Julius, 105, 186
 Coblam Town, 2, 3
 College of Technology, 45
 Collings, Rex, 178
 Colonial, 18, 19, 22, 23, 165
 Concord, Sunday Newspaper, 167, 180
 Conference, London, 30-34
 Nigerian Constitution, General, 37
 Coup, 47, 48, 111
 Creek Town, 1-4, 7, 8, 10, 12
 accord, 3
 genealogy, 2, 3,
 Cross Rivers State, 1
 Cutrufelli, Marla Ross, 192, 203

D

Dangogo, Hauwa Sani, 130, 131
 Detention Camp, 59, 60, 61, 62
 Oriagu, 65
 DFRRI, 112
 Dimolos, Papa, 102, 103
 Douglas, J. A., 7
 Drug Abuse, 121
 Dublin, Ireland, 16, 17

Dubois, W. E. B., 203
 Duke Town (Atakpa), 1, 6
 Grammar School, 7

E

Eastern House of Assembly, 27, 35,
 38, 82, 155
 Eastern Nigerian Guardian, 171, 172,
 173, 174, 198
 Eastern Nigerian Secession, 151
 Eastern States Express, 99, 100,
 171, 173, 184
 Ebril, Veronica, 105
 Edah, F. S., 28
 Edgerlay, Rev., 6
 Efa, Ekpeyong (Margaret's father's
 friend), 9, 10, 181
 Effah-Attah, Stella A., 125
 Effiong, Phillip, 68
 Elik Communities, 1, 2
 Efumua, Harriot, 100
 Egba Women's War, 142
 Egeonu, Virginia, 12
 Ejiofor, N. O., 188
 Ekombi, (dance), 79
 Ekpe, Esien, 3
 quotations, 31, 130
 Ekpe, Eyumba, 3
 Ekpo, Edward John, (Margaret's son),
 63, 181
 Ekpo, Eyo, (father to Rtd. Maj-Gen.
 Ekpo), 13
 Ekpo, John Udo (Margaret's hus-
 band), 13, 14, 16, 18, 20, 38
 Ekpo, Winston Eyo Udo (Margaret's
 son), 63, 181
 Eleazu, Uma, 187, 188, 204
 Elias, T. O., 146, 196, 203
 Ema, Atef, 2, 3
 Ema, Eyo, 2, 3
 Environmental Sanitation, 113
 Esan, Wureola (first female Senator),
 25
 Escher, Franklin, 178
 Esin, Ufof, 11
 Essien, Eniang, 39
 Essien, Uyong, 154
 European, 5, 15
 style, 83
 culture, 75
 women as I see them, 17, 22

Eyumba Town, 2
 Eyo Honesty II, 5, 6, 10
 Eyo, Otu, 57, 59

F

Favourite drink, 75, 78
 Federal Buffer Stock Programme, 112
 Federal Character, 151, 152
 Federal House of Representatives, 41
 Fitzgerald Commission of Inquiry, 23,
 142, 143, 144, 170

G

Guiley, Professor, 140
 George (wrapper for woman), 78
 Girl's Training Institute, 7, 12
 Green Revolution, The, 112
 Goldie, Rev., 6
 Government Women Education
 Centre, 105
 Gowon, Lt-Col. Yakubu (thun), 53,
 67
 Gundu, E. G., 28

H

Hart, A. K., 2, 3, 165
 Hausa-Fulani Oligarchy, 52
 Henshaw Town (Naidung), 2
 School, 7, 120
 Hitler, 108
 Holy Trinity School, 13, 77, 84
 Home base, 104
 Human Rights, 43

I

Ibiam, Dr. Akanu, 69
 Ikume, Bello, 28
 Ikoku, Alvan, 51
 Ikot-Eyo (Margaret husband's birth
 town), 15
 Imoke, S. E., 66, 90
 Inyang (Nee Nyu), 12
 Inyang, Chief Udo (Commissioner
 South Eastern State), 102
 Ita, Professor Eyo, 31, 37
 Iva Valley, 22, 142

J

Jaja, 23, 24, 165, 169, 170
 Jameson, Rev. William, 6
 John Holt, 20

K

- Kanu, A. K., 83
 Kay, F. R., 144
 Kayode, M. O., 189
 Kick-backs, 93, 154

L

- Ladipo, J. K., 38
 Latham, A. J. H., 2, 116, 204
 Lawson, Jim, 120
 Lincoln, Abraham, 46, 176
 Lingua Franca, 118
 Lord Passfield, 141
 Lucay, T., 194, 204

M

- Macaulay, Herbert, 19
 Macpherson, John, 29
 Mudunagu, Bene, 130, 131, 193
 Makeba, Miriam, 120
 Makiwa, P. K., 130, 192, 193
 Mary's Boutique, 102, 103
 Mazrui, Ali A., 205
 Mba, Nina Enima, 128, 170, 192, 204
 Mbudiwa, K. O., 28, 37
 Mbuikwe, Samuel, 65, 66
 Mburukom (Ambo), 3
 Mbiaba Town, 3
 Mbiye, N. N., 28
 Meyer, Dodo, 60
 Mode of dressing, 73, 74, 75
 Mohammed, Bala, 189, 205
 Mohammed, Col. Murtala (then), 70, 71
 Motomi, Lydia, 100
 Moku, Janet, 25, 42, 156, 159
 Morgan's Commission, 89
 Morphy, I. I., 42
 Motherless children, 85, 86

N

- National Archives, Ibadan (NAI), 171, 174
 National Archives, Enugu (NAE), 170, 174, 175, 177, 182
 National Commission for Women, 124, 125, 130, 138
 National Endowments, 115
 National Independence Party, 30
 N.C.N.C., 19, 27-30, 31-35, 37, 42,

144-147, 156, 157

- delegates, 33
 women's wing, 40

- Ndani, Eyo Bessay Eyo, 190, 194
 Netini, 1
 Newhall, Rev., 6
 Nigerian Civil War, 3, 46, 101, 127, 151
 Nigerian Constitution, 28, 107, 124, 172, 187
 Nigerian Daily Sketch, 197
 Nigerian Women's Union, 40
 Njoku, Raymond, 103
 Nkrumah, Osagyefo Kwame, 113
 Northern People's Congress, 29, 36
 Ntakidum, A. E., 165
 Numa, Yama, 28
 Nwachukwu, Jaja, 23
 Nwamba, Akwu Ibani, 11
 Nwankwo, Arthur, 176, 177, 205
 Nwankwo, V. A., 28
 Nwoba, Israel, 120
 NYSC, 149

O

- Obasanjo, General Olusogan, 193
 Oba, 1
 Obi, Professor Chike, 60
 Obisular, Okoro Afar (Margaret's father), 9, 10, 75
 Obo, Oka, 4
 Obungship of Calabar, 3
 Odukpani Local Govt. Area, 9
 Ollonry, H. K., 188
 Ogunde, Hubert, 120
 Ogunlebi, Tammowo, 32
 Ogunsoye, F. A., 192, 206
 Ojuko, James, 197
 Ojika, Mbonu, 19, 22, 28, 37, 74, 77, 154
 Ojukwu, Chukwuemeka, 48, 53, 66, 176
 Ojukwu, L. P., 28
 Okigbo, Pius N. C., 188
 Okpara, M. I., 86, 188
 Okoku, Lucky, 180
 Okon-Eyo, June, 125
 Okonywu, Chiu S. P., 189, 206
 Okoro Vincent (Margaret's first lover), 13
 Okotie-Ebuh, Festus, 103

- Okoyong, 1
 Oku Amilo, 3
 Oku, Ekei Ewien, 165
 Olagunju, Tunji, 188
 Olashore, Oludale, 188, 206
 Old Town (Obutong), 1, 2
 Onu, F. I. A., 193, 206
 Onyia, Mrs. (Murdered Wardress), 24
 Onwuteaka, V. C., 170
 Operation Feed the Nation, 112
 Orji, Hon. E., 88
 Osedebay, Denru, 28
 Osoigbo, H. Omo, 28
 O'shaughnessy, J., 194
- P**
 Phillips, O. Hood, 186, 187
 Political Bureau, 134, 152
 Presbyterian Missionaries, 4, 5, 6,
 Church, 11
 Presidential Government, 109
 Privatization and Commercialization,
 116
 Public Probity, 148, 153, 154
 P. Z. Director, 102
- Q**
 Quality Magazine, 167, 169, 170,
 174, 180
- R**
 Ransome-Kuti, Funmilayo, 25, 26,
 27, 36, 40, 156
 Roman Catholic Mission, 7
 Routage and Kenyan, 194
- S**
 Saboteur, 65
 SAP, 114, 115, 116, 117, 133, 186
 Setonic dance, 79
 Sawaba, Hujija Gambo, 26, 196
 Secession, 151
 Self-determination, 24, 33
 Shagan, Shehu, 112
 Shakespeare, Williams, 183
 Sikeneta, Clara, 192
 SNA, 28
 Summer Skill, Dr. Edity P.C., 31
 Southern Nigeria Defender, 173, 174
 St. Michael Anglican (Margaret's
 Wedding Church), 14, 16, 73
 Sunday Post, 174
 Sweet and Maxwell, 186, 187
- T**
 Teriba, O., 189
 Tiffany, Sharon W., 192
 Trevelyan, G. M., 189
 Tribalism, 149
- U**
 UAC, 20, 23
 Uduh, E. A., 3, 165
 Ugbut, M. O., 42
 Ukpabio, Rev. Essien, 6
 Ukpang, 57, 62
 Ukpang, Dr. S. M. O., 59
 United Free Church, 7
 United Schools, 149
 Universal Adult Suffrage, 35, 157,
 158
 University of Nigeria, 113
 Uturu, 69
 Uyangba, Okpa Usung. (Town), 1
 Uzuigwe, Ayam, 41
 Waddell, Hope Musterton, 5, 6
 Training Institute, 7, 10, 166
 Wazobia, 119
 Welfare for workers, 89, 90, 91
 West African Pilot, 36, 172, 173,
 175, 196, 197, 199
 Westminster model, 108
 Willink's Commission, 151
 WIN (Women in Nigeria), 84, 105,
 130, 132, 136, 159
 Winsor Clinic (Margaret husband's
 clinic), 15
 Winsor Domestic Science, 98, 100,
 101, 158
 Winsor Sewing Institute (Margaret's),
 64
 Women's Emancipation, 127
 Afrigbo, 139
 Ajayi, 139
 Dangogo, 131
 linear view or negative, 128, 130,
 132,
 marxists, 130, 135
 political bureau, 133, 134
 pragmatic or three dimensional
 view, 137, 138, 139
 positive or two dimensional

view, 135

Sule Bello, 137, see also WIN, 132

Y

Young, EKP, 25, 42

Z

Zerman, Z.A.B., 198

Zurchur, A. J., 198

Ac
Rec

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