Socio-cultural status of 'barracks women' in Nigeria, 1905-1985: A historical perspective

Justus Adim Nzemeka[1]

Department of History and International Studies
Anchor University Lagos, Nigeria
Jnzemeka@aul.edu.ng
ORCID. 0000-0002-8046-3448

Abstract

This article focuses on the socio-cultural status of barracks women in Nigeria. The study is important, contrary to the thinking that army wives have no history worth studying because of culture, environment, and sex stereotypes. The paper argues that since the incorporation of women into the barracks, their roles have been complementary in both empire-building and nation-building. Remarkably, their influence contributed to the construction of social relations and interdependence between the colonisers and the colonised. With the departure of European wives from the colony, indigenous officers' wives transformed their roles from the private to the public spheres to meet the challenges of nation-building and social change. In this piece, we draw on oral sources, military magazines and literature, qualitative data and Internet sources to highlight the socio-cultural status of women and their involvement in colonial and post-colonial societies. This paper reveals that rank is a factor in women's involvement in gender and service politics. It concludes that barracks women can improve their status in the social and economic spheres through government empowerment and social investment programmes. This study is limited to barracks women in Nigeria. It will help society to know that barracks women have a history worth studying.

Keywords: Barracks, barracks-women, Nigerian, socio-cultural, status.

Introduction:

Intellectual discourse on the status of barracks women since the colonial period has remained an unending dialogue. This is because of culture, gender inequality and biological determinism, but beyond this is the perception that over time women have been perceived as intruders and unwelcomed appendages in a male-dominated profession (Callaway 1987: 6). The year 1905 marked the starting point of our analysis because it was the year the Colonial Office mandated women to join their military husbands in British West Africa, while 1985, the terminal date, was significant in a dual capacity – it was the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) and also the year Maryam Babangida emerged as a crusader for 'women's empowerment' (Lufadeju 1987: 25; Iheanacho 2016: 134-146; Amadiume 2000: 99-103). Maryam Babangida was Nigeria's First Lady and wife of General Ibrahim Babangida who ruled the country between 1985 and 1993 (Babangida 1988; Olojede 2004: 119-121). The duration of the study was convenient because it provides considerable latitude to unravel and dissect some of the important and isolated issues hitherto overlooked in the analysis of barracks women in Nigeria.

The history of Nigeria is characterised by ethnic groups, languages and cultures, a combination of which contributed to the nation's diversity and strength. Nigeria has a population

1. Justus Adim Nzemeka PhD is a lecturer in the Department of History and International Studies, Anchor University, Lagos, Nigeria.

of over 200 million with a favourable climate that supports agriculture, mineral resources and mobility of labour. Its coastline also stretches from Badagry in the west to Calabar in the east and includes the Bights of Benin and Biafra. Its borders are contiguous with the Republic of Benin to the west, the Niger Republic to the north and Cameroon to the east (Crowder 1966: 23).

Before the British amalgamation of northern and southern Nigeria in 1914, the protection of the territory was entrusted to the constabularies, but due to its limitations, the force was later transferred to the West African Frontier Force (W.A.F.F). And by 1914, the Battalions had come under the Nigerian Regiment (Kirk-Greene 1964: 129-130). Since Nigeria's independence, its armed forces have not only defended the territorial boundaries of the country, but have participated in several peacekeeping operations (PKOs) in Africa, including that of Congo, Liberia, Sudan, Somalia and Chad, to mention but a few which added to her profile in the comity of nations (Defence Headquarters Publication 2010: 9-17; Akem 2008:10-14)

We must clarify some concepts used in this paper. For instance, the term 'status' means different things to different people. According to Ralph Linton, 'status' means the collection of rights and duties that attach to particular positions. This means that by this usage, 'status' which denotes a particular position itself, contrasts with 'role,' which refers to the behaviour appropriate to a given status (Linton 1936: 113-31; 627). Also, Jary and Jary explained that 'status' means any stable position within a social system associated with specific expectations, rights and duties. Status is equivalent to the role, although it is the latter term that has a wider currency (Jary and Jary 1991: 627). In the same vein, Sudarkasa explained that "the concept of the status of women is also used to refer to the placement of females relative to males in a dual-level hierarchy. In this sense, the term *status* connotes stratification and invites comparison with other systems of stratification (Sudarkasa 1993:150-158).

When we juxtaposed the argument of the scholars, we observed that there is a confluence of thoughts between Linton and Jary and Jary; in their views 'status' has to do with rights and expectations of individuals, as well as behaviours and expectations in a social system. On the other hand, Sudarkasa noted that status encompasses social and sexual stratification in society. It is noted in this study that 'status' is an achieved rank rather than an ascribed position. Therefore, the status of barracks women has been identified as their position and role in society. It is in this sense that we have interchangeably employed the concepts in this paper.

It should also be emphasised that the recruitment of indigenous Officers' Corps in Nigeria did not commence until 1948, and even when the British did, the commissioned officers remained bachelors until the late 1950s when a few got married, hence the dominance of European wives in empire-building due to the rank and position of their husbands (NAECS 1992: 100-101). Additionally, the term 'barracks women' as used in this paper refers to women married to officers and men of the force in both colonial and post-colonial periods.

The term became popular owing to the 'closed society' and restrictions of this social category from the larger society. In this regard, more fitting is Aderinto's concept of women 'subordinated by culture' (Aderinto 2001: 176-187) and Hillary Callan's conception of 'the muted group' (Callan 1975: 87-108; Nzemeka 2020: 143-157).

The Nigerian barracks can be described as a socially stratified community with rank and protocols. It is by nature distinguished clearly and exists very separately in society from the rest of the population, not least because of the wearing of uniforms and its location in barracks (Gutteridge1982:241-252). This arrangement contributed to the regimentation in the system among officers on the one hand and lower ranks on the other. More importantly, it is how women internalised the barracks culture and traditions without recourse to the background of civil life. A woman quickly learns her military life role and status, along with the military protocol and behaviour expected of her at social functions (Dobrofsky and Batterson 1977: 675).

This is expedient when we consider that an army wife is defined by her husband's rank, which implies that the rank of an officer is also the rank of his wife if not more (Babangida 1988:

15). Nevertheless, these privileges had their implications in the military: First, as an army wife, one must be careful when expressing an opinion because the outcome could be unfavourable to a military husband since one is no longer a civilian (Dobrofsky and Batterson 1977: 678). Second, an offence committed by a service wife would likely affect her husband's career, especially when it is against military traditions and ethics (Salisu 2019). Because of these, nothing is taken for granted whenever it relates to a military officer or his dependants. Consequently, it is argued in some quarters that the benefit of rank and privileges in the military force are often subsumed under risk and discipline.

In the same vein, the Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Code of Conduct emphasised among others that an officer's wife must maintain proper behaviour to reflect the high standards of the military profession and culture. It also underscored that an army wife must complement the high calling of her husband's office both at home and abroad as a Defence Attaché's wife (Babangida 1988: 73-74; Kinzer and Leach, 1996; Finlayson, 1976: 19-41). This explains the role and status of barracks women in the system and it is perhaps an enviable position that sets her apart from her civilian counterpart.

For many, the essential question is: how did literature portray European wives in the colony? According to Kipling "the *memsahibs* were self-centred and overbearing individuals" flitting from bridge parties to tennis parties "in the hills," while their husbands slaved away "in the plains" (Kipling 1986: 230-232; Chaudhuri 1988: 517-518). In discussing the maternal indiscretion of the *memsahibs* in British India, Sen argued, "At the core of *Plain Tales* lies the familiar trope of hill station flirtations and Anglo-Indian immorality with the stories effectively mythologising Simla and hill-station culture as the site of gaiety and frothy amusement (Sen 2000:16). In the same vein, Spear and Morris in their separate works blame white women in the colony for widening the gap between the rulers and the ruled, hence the palpable racial discrimination and social distance between the British and her subjects (Spear 1963:140; Morris 1998: 136).

Also, literature written by colonial officers portrayed white women in the colonies as sordid characters. One of the scholars observed that in men's memoirs of time in the colonies, European women appeared, if at all, as nameless figures in the background, while in widely read anti-colonial novels, such as those of E.M. Forster (1979), George Orwell (1967) and Joyce Cary (1939), women in the colonies were portrayed as shallow, self-centred and preoccupied with maintaining the hierarchy of their narrow social worlds (Callaway 1987: 3).

Arising from the above is the fact that there was a consensus on the negative perception of white women in the colonies, particularly in their social relations with the colonial subjects. However, this researcher did not rule out the challenges of women in the colonies, particularly in the area of liaison and sexual indiscretion of some British officers and the local women which brought about venereal diseases and the illegitimate children, as was the case in the Benue Plateau region of Nigeria (Naanen 1991: 57-79).

Aside from works of literature, popular lore also cast women in sordid competition over trivial signs of social status, including sociological studies which refer to white women as the cause of deteriorating race relations between the colonisers and the colonised (Callaway 1987:3).

Contesting the negative representation of women, Ghosh emphasises that the historical narrative of white women in the colony had been too narrow as white women played important roles in the construction of empire as missionaries, nurses, journalists, teachers, as well as wives and companions (Ghosh 2004: 737-753). Corroborating this view, Callaway stressed that the activities of European wives in the imperial culture of Nigeria were robust despite imperial challenges. The author noted that European wives were visible in supporting roles, and showed strong resources and initiatives in going beyond the boundaries of the colonial hierarchy (Callaway 1987: 28).

These works are useful to this study even though most of the scholars discussed events in colonial India. We underlined the sweeping generalisation of women's representation in the colonies because not all women were officers' wives and not all officers' wives were involved in partying as 'social butterflies'. But suffice it to state that women played complementary roles in social relations and the construction of empire. The gap in the works is that none of the authors discussed the status of women in Nigerian barracks.

In filling this gap, this study draws on primary and secondary material from a wide variety of sources including photographs and participant experience. The primary sources are mainly derived from structured interviews and oral data, government and official publications. As a participant-observer, this researcher had a robust stint in the Nigerian Army for over two decades, and also managed the documents of the Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association (NAOWA), Lagos Chapter. Secondary sources, on the other hand, include journals, books, Internet materials and published and unpublished dissertations. These materials were obtained from the Nigerian Army Libraries and Training Schools, Lagos, Kaduna, and Ibadan respectively. Others were sourced from the National Libraries, Lagos, Enugu, and Ibadan, as well as the Universities of Lagos, Ibadan, and Benin. These materials shed light on the subject and also clarify the grey areas.

The objective of this paper is to examine the status of women in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria, the intersection in the activities of European wives and their indigenous counterparts, as well as how the latter transformed their roles from the margin to the centre in the post-colonial period. To illuminate our understanding, we interrogate the following:

1. What was the status of women in traditional war camps in Nigeria? This will shed light on the role of women and whether these roles were static or dynamic in time and space.
2. What was the status of women in colonial barracks?
3. What was the nature of continuity and change after independence?

In my attempt to answer these questions, this paper is divided into four main sections. The first considers the role of women in pre-colonial war camps; this is to serve as a background to the main issue. The second examines the social origin of barracks women, while the third, discusses the status of army wives in colonial Nigeria and the fourth highlights the nature of change and transformation in post-colonial Nigeria. The conclusion of the paper brings together the various arguments, findings and recommendations.

Women's role in pre-colonial war camps

This section is important because it draws extensively on the idea of Stephen Ellis, who said that the writing of contemporary history sometimes requires going much further into the past than forty or fifty years ago (Ellis 2002:2). The essence of this is to unearth some of the neglected themes and isolated issues that helped reshape the past into the present. The history of women in warfare began in the distant past when they played a complementary role and also directed the affairs of female camp followers.

Two categories of women lived in pre-colonial camps; these were the warriors' wives and female camp followers, and each of these groups was involved in the socio-economic development of the camps. For example, in the household, women engage in domesticity and reproduction, preparation of food and medicines for the combatants. Others carry ammunitions; provide logistics and reconnaissance, while others sing praises of warriors to boost their morale. According to Biobaku, "in the war between the Egba and the Dahomean in 1851, the Egba owed their victory to the zeal of their women who attended to the wounded and kept the front-line supplied with food and water" (Biobaku1965: 44).

Most of the nineteenth-century wars also witnessed the use of metaphysical and supernatural approaches by women to support their warrior husbands. For instance, in *Oye* where one *Molebi,* nicknamed *ElegberunIbon* (the owner of 1, 000 guns) was reported to have

fought single-handedly against the Ibadan soldiers at night and rendered them vulnerable to Ekitiparapo attacks (Awe and Olutoye 1998: 120-130). Also observed were the exploits of a female deity known to have gone to war selling poisoned food to the Ibadan, and at strategic times conjure rain on them, while *Orisaleke*, wife of Ogedengbe, acted as Ogedengbe's mascot, with mystic powers to conjure the supernatural forces which aided her husband's victory in battles (Awe and Olutoye 1998: 126).

These illustrations point to the fact that women's roles in wars were remarkable; even though most of them did not participate in the actual war their presence provided support and confidence to the warriors. The role of women in wars helped erase the conception that wars were only fought by men, without women. Women also participated in the politics of the war camps. They were active in *Egba* politics as members of the *Ogboni* institution. "The *Ogboni* was made up of wealthy and influential men and a few old women known as the *Erelu* who could be relied upon to place duty before sentiment and maintain secrecy" (Biobaku 1965: 5-6).

The office of the *Iyalode* was also highly respected in Yoruba country; these women were distinguished and influential women who supported the activities of the male chiefs. Due to the network of female support that they wielded at the grassroots, these women were able to mobilise female opinion in support of their views, though the degree of their influence and power varied from place to place (Awe and Olutoye 1998: 122).

Women were visible in agriculture, trade and exchange. This is illustrated in a Nupe Camp visited by Hugh Clapperton: "Apart from the armed men and beating of drums, it seemed no different from any ordinary large village. Here are to be seen weavers, taylors (*sic*), women spinning cotton, others reeling off, some selling foo-foo and occassons, other crying (*sic*) yams and paste, little markets at every green tree" (Smith 1976: 136). This suggests that trade and markets in war camps were as lively as a community in peace with diverse activities and skills.

Apart from agriculture, the women of Abeokuta, Ijaiye and Egba also engaged in cloth production, weaving and spinning. The most celebrated of their production was the Abeokuta *Adire* which has survived into the modern period. In the nineteenth century Ibadan, trade and market flourished simultaneously as an economic vocation, and Iyalode Efusetan of Ibadan, a woman of influence kept a retinue of slaves who worked in her farms and also engaged for trade. Due to their productivity, Ibadan traders sent to Lagos foodstuffs, beans, yams, melons, yam flour and palm oil, due to their high demand in Europe, especially palm oil, for which Ibadan was not merely a producer but also a collecting house, because of its strategic location (Awe 1964: 221-230; Awe 2001: 71).

Also in the Sokoto Caliphate, Kriger explained that women were visible in textile production despite the purdah culture. They worked as dyers, spinners, and weavers, while others engaged in knitting, sewing and embroidery for export along the Bight of Benin (Kriger 1993: 361-401). The plantation economy of the Sokoto Caliphate equally witnessed the involvement of women slaves in the planting of sorghum, peppers, carrots, tomatoes and vegetables. Other crops were cotton, millet, grains, onions, wheat and shea butter, to mention but a few. Some of these crops were for home use while others served a commercial purpose to complement the efforts of men in the cash crop economy (Lovejoy 1978: 341-368)

Similarly, women demonstrated their skill in traditional medicines, psychiatry, obstetrics, orthopaedics and treating snake-bites. Through their efforts, pregnant women were delivered of their babies and wounded combatants cured. These activities proved that Africans had developed their form of medicine before the coming of Europeans and parts of these vocations had been sustained in modern times. The essence of these illustrations is to demonstrate that women were not passive agents as some European scholars have made us believe, but were change agents in their various communities.

The social origin of 'barracks women'

The history of barracks women and the challenges of gender and culture in the early years of the force have remained a neglected theme in academic discourse. Apart from the nursing sisters and missionaries, there were two categories of barracks women in colonial cantonments – indigenous soldiers' wives and European wives. In the beginning, women were excluded from the barracks on account of gender inequality and culture. Two ideological schools opposed women's inclusion in the British West African barracks of Gold Coast, Nigeria, Sierra-Leone and the Gambia.

The first was the military elite, popularly known as the 'hardened Old Coasters' and the second were the officials of the Colonial Office (Burns 1949:42). The military elite regarded women as intruders into what had been essentially a bachelor's paradise, where a man could dress as he pleased, drink as much as he liked, and be easy in his morals without causing scandals (Burns, 1949: 42). They also argued that women's illness often prevents the men from duty, thus creating regimental challenges for their colleagues and the force in general (Burns 1949: 43).

The second group were the officials of the Colonial Office, who contended that wives are often a nuisance in West Africa, and husbands were reluctant to take them travelling in bad weather and equally reluctant to leave them behind; therefore they travelled less than they should have (Burns 1949: 42). These interrelated arguments informed the decision of the Colonial Office that "the colony was no place for a white woman" (Callaway 1987, 18-19). In successive years, agitation for policy reversal became rife due to latent issues in the force which included poor quality food in the barracks, homesickness, frequent vacations of British officers to England, and a high rate of concubinage and liaison among British officers (Lugard 1922: 141; Crocker 1971: 62-63; Wilkinson Report 1905).

In an attempt to find a solution to the problem of desertion, a special commission was appointed by the Colonial Office in 1904. The Commission discovered that among the causes were changes in diet and the separation of soldiers from their families, and that desertion was most common among soldiers recruited outside the Gold Coast, of whom the Yoruba and the Mende were in the majority. Therefore, it was recommended in 1905 that women be allowed to join their husbands in British West African Cantonments (Wilkinson Report, 1905; Ukpabi, 1975: 101). This event marked the social origin of women in British West African barracks in 1905. But there was no immediate solution to that of European wives until 1920 when Col. Amery announced that it was the desire of the Secretary of State that married life should be the rule rather than the exception in the Crown colonies and Protectorates (Lugard 1922: 142).

The emergence of women in the barracks brought significant changes in the system: First, desertion was forestalled, second, liaison and concubinage which caused the production of half-caste children in the Benue-Plateau region of Nigeria was minimised. And third, women came with a new food culture as opposed to tinned or canned food offered to soldiers (Haywood and Clarke 1964: 38). Additionally, malnutrition caused by lack of vitamins and vegetables became a thing of the past. More important was the fact that the military barracks ceased to be a masculine world or bachelors' paradise as hitherto conceived.

Apart from the intention to create a masculine world, confidential correspondence between Lord Lugard and the Colonial Office in 1904 revealed that women's exclusion was critical in the colony and effective social relations (PRO/CO446/39 qtd. in Callaway 1987: 19). Nevertheless, women's exclusion demonstrates how a colonial policy in British West Africa worked against the colonisers and the colonised. The real issues behind women's exclusion in British West Africa have been traced to poor quality housing and the effect of tropical diseases.

This is corroborated by Burns, "Here the problem was the lack of houses, and if a junior officer brought his wife with him to the country he had to be given reasonable accommodation, which meant that a more senior officer had to be content with inferior quarters, for instance in the

"Chest of Drawers"(Burns 1949: 42). The frustration of Lord Lugard was equally explicit in the following lines:

> Much of this mortality and deficiency of staff might have been avoided by an Imperial loan charged against the revenues of the future if the nation had appreciated the value of the country as Mr Chamberlain did… If the British nation, I wrote in 1902, is not prepared to bear the cost of an enterprise that promises good returns, and already shows substantial progress, it was better that it had never undertaken it (Lugard 1922: 144).

A closer look at the factors that led to the exclusion of women in British West Africa suggests that the decision of the Colonial Office was informed by patriarchal ideology and gender inequality. It was also a factor of biological determinism and the Victorian gender ideology of separate spheres. It appeared that the experience of some of the military elite was derived from British India where they had ground-breaking service and the culture of the Cantonment Act, 1864 (Levine in Levine 1996: 585-612). To them, a woman was supposed to concentrate on housekeeping, reproduction and domesticity without crossing the boundaries of masculinity.

Comparatively, gender inequality was not peculiar to the British West African colonies because, in the U.S. Army some military officers rejected the inclusion of women on account of pregnancy since a female soldier must leave to give birth (Hammel and Taylor 1999: 76-84). A few argued that if women get recruited, "one might as well recruit people in wheel-chairs … While the majority threatened that if women come to West Point they will resign their commission" (Stiehm 1985: 377-392).

Arising from these are the factors of sex stereotypes and culture. To assume that "there is only one role for a woman: flat on her back having babies" is a wrong conception of our society (Hammel and Taylor 1999:84). Contemporary times have also shown that women can fly jet fighters and attack enemy locations without missing targets. They sometimes assist wounded men out of battle and still maintain their position in the front; therefore sex is not a factor.

The status of 'barracks women' in colonial Nigeria

The status of army wives in colonial barracks was that of a "dependant" because of institutional policy and the fact that women were incorporated based on marriage. Thus, women were expected to enjoy some privileges such as next-of-kin (NOK), membership of the Army Wives Association, and citizenship of the barracks. The citizenship of women in the barracks was derived from military terms and references. The concept of citizenship as used in this study refers to the status and membership of a person in a community.

The question is, what position(s) did military wives occupy in the barracks and how was their citizenship legitimised? According to Finlayson:

> For the officer's wife, it is a life of many roles. To the husband, she is a wife, to her children she is a mother, during separation she is both mother and father. To the army she is a dependant, and her privileges and responsibilities are pre-determined to a great extent by her husband's rank and assignment and to her civilian neighbours, she represents the military and when on foreign soil, she is a diplomat, a representative of her nation (Finlayson in McCubbin, Dahl and Hunter 1976:20).

Similarly, the literature on army dependants underscores that "the position of military wives was not only necessary, honourable and good but also the epitome of womanhood and always she complements the high calling of her husband" (McCubbin, Dahl and Hunter 1976: 20). Therefore, the notion that "a woman's place is in the home" as Finlayson reflected, is an outdated cliché (Finlayson 1976: 20). This is because most wives found satisfaction and fulfilment not only in their homes but also in the public space.

However, the status of a barrack woman could be terminated in two ways. First, on the dissolution of the marriage; that is, the marriage could suffer divorce not minding the number of children involved in the marriage. Second, the death of the military husband could terminate the woman's rights and privileges in the organisation; thereafter she would be known and addressed as an ex-soldier's wife or ex-officer's wife. The role of women in colonial barracks was wide-ranging and challenging.

According to Haywood and Clarke:

> All African troops, except recruits, had 'wives' in barracks who cook for their lords and kept the huts and lines clean. Each company had a head-woman, the magajia, who was responsible for the cleanliness of the lines as well as dress, deportment and general behaviour of the 'wives'. These head-women attended on company request day', usually a Thursday, which was a familiar institution to that which existed in the old Indian Army. One of their duties was to accompany any inspecting officer or other personages around their lines. They wore a sergeant's red sash and in the South wore a khaki drill jacket with sergeant's stripes as well. In the North they curtsied, Hausa fashion, in the South they saluted – and very well they did it (Haywood and Clarke 1964:316-317).

The above suggests that women combined housekeeping and socio-political roles in the barracks. The interesting aspect of women's organization was that the British understood that only women could manage the affairs of womenfolk, hence the creation of the office of woman leader known as the *magajia*. Also fundamental was the fact that women leaders were allowed to wear the military uniform with symbolic ranks, which implied a complete integration of this social group into the system.

In the domestic domain, women were advised to make the home conducive for their army husbands to retire after a hard day's work. They were also required to maintain proper conduct and relations with neighbours. The role of indigenous soldiers' wives was purely traditional; that is cooking, washing, reproduction, child-care and cleaning the environment. While at home, women also engaged as adjunct security officers and helped in the vigilance of the environs. European wives, on the other hand, played similar roles in domestic routines, though some of them hired local servants, cooks, and gardeners to manage their gardens and livestock (*Doki-boys*) (Larymore 1911: 252).

European wives also played remarkable roles in the household, sewing the family clothing, cutting costs of food and drink for entertainment, making efficient use of leftovers, and generally keeping watch on the household budget (Callaway 1987: 43-44). In the early years, European wives had no children in the colony because of official policy. Therefore, pregnant women had to depart well ahead of the delivery date to England to avoid embarrassment and maternal burden. But the period post-World War II presented a different picture for European families following the provisions of infrastructure and schools for European children in the colony.

At the social level, women related with their civilian neighbours in the outlying villages through religious activities, marriages, and military feasts such as West African Social Activity (WASA), Durbar, Coronation, and Empire Day. During religious celebrations such as Idel-Kabir and Eid al-Fitr *Sallah*, Easter and Christmas, women socialised with one another. They often shared food in the barracks and visited friends and families adorned in beautiful attire. Also, during the military feasts, women invited close relatives into the barracks to offer them first-hand knowledge of the environment and culture. This is noted in the private correspondence of Lady Lugard to Joseph Chamberlain:

> We were there for Coronation Day and I managed with the help of a little borrowed crockery from the Mess to give a dinner party of 20 people … We had the table patriotically decorated with roses (which alas came out of my band-boxes, as they do not grow here) and we drank the King's health with the band playing 'God save the king',

> and a black crowd of servants and others clustered around the open windows ejaculating 'Good King! Good King! (Lady Lugard, in Perham 1960: 80).

This showed that the military feast was an elaborate culture, involving military families and servants in the community. It also illustrates the vivacity of imperial culture and social interactions. European wives also participated in recreation and sporting activities, horse riding, reading and writing, which were uncommon among the indigenous soldiers' wives. Other recreational activities included shooting, hunting, and fishing. But indigenous soldiers' wives were not involved in the leisure and recreational activities because it was not a part of African culture; more important was the fact that women were burdened with domestic routines and economic production.

In the area of diplomacy and empire-building, some European wives interfaced between the Colonial Office and the colony. This is observed in the personal correspondence of Lady Lugard to Chamberlain in 1902, "The principal, perhaps, the only serious obstacle to the successful development of the country appears to me to be the effect of the climate upon Europeans …There can be no trustworthy continuity of administration until men can safely bring their wives and families to the country" (Lady Lugard, qtd, in Perham 1960: 83). This showed that Lady Lugard was a feminist and a crusader for empire. She also exploited the readership of the London *Times* to publicise colonial administration in British West Africa.

Constance Larymore, on the other hand, contributed to the social relations between the rulers and the ruled, particularly among the people of Katagum where she was told by the *Sariki* that she had been sent to them as a special mark of favour and was therefore bestowed the title *Uwamu,* meaning "our mother" (Larymore 1911: 85).

Also, Lady Bourdillon was reported to have danced with the Lagos Market Women (LMW) led by Madam Pelewura who ran the Lagos markets; such a store was placed upon her taste that new articles of clothing were named after her. Lady 'Bourdillon Lappa' was a particularly celebrated cloth in colonial Lagos (Pearce 1983: 273-274). As a woman of influence, Lady Bourdillon along with other European wives formed the Ladies Progressive Club (LPC) in the 1930s, and in post-World War II helped in the establishment of Corona Women's Society (CWS) which promoted charity and humanitarian activities in Nigeria (Callaway 1987, 218-219). The CWS later established the Corona Group of Schools in different parts of the country. These efforts were made possible because of the status of European wives and the position of their husbands in the colony.

The Second World War witnessed the enlistment of European wives into the force where they assisted their husbands in the office and language translations. According to Smith, "So she began to help me unofficially in the office in much the same way that other wives, in isolated stations, were soon to help their overburdened husbands throughout the war years" (Smith 1969, 125). Apart from confidential typing and occasional coding and decoding, other women engaged in the monthly checks on the accounts of the two native treasuries of the division, including maps and plans to prepare and statistics to compile (Smith 1969, 125).

The war efforts of the women contributed to their inclusion in Colonial Service since they demonstrated that empire-building was not only the work of men, but also that of women. Through this, women consolidated their spaces of authority, gender and power in the colony. But the case of indigenous soldiers' wives was not the same because they were socially excluded in colonial affairs due to race, language and the complexities of imperial culture. It was also observed that European wives shared the 'signifying system' of their home culture, social class and values. Contributing therefore to their success was the fact that they learned new social prescriptions and protocols which upheld the power relations of imperial culture and ethics (Callaway 1987: 10).

Women's role in the colonial economy contributed largely to the development of the barracks because of role differentiation. Since men were actively involved in military duties,

women engaged in one form of vocation or another to ward off idleness and perhaps contribute to food availability in society. Therefore, both indigenous soldiers' wives and their European counterparts were involved in food production and the food security of the barracks. To achieve their goals, military authorities allowed compound gardens at the back of living quarters and undeveloped plots at the fringes since the frequent cultivation of the land would scare off reptiles and vermin.

Therefore, the land was first cleared by women and sometimes by hired labour. Thereafter, they planted corn, leafy vegetables, peppers, tomatoes, melons, cassava, onions, flowers, and perennial fruit trees, among others. These arable crops served as 'convenient crops' because they were harvested for cooking, while the surplus was sold in the markets and the income derived was used for the purchase of essential items. Soldiers hardly participated in the cultivation of gardens because of military duties; they assisted during off-duty and harvest time but the income generated from the gardens remained with the women.

For instance, in 1902, Flora Lugard wrote to Joseph Chamberlain, "I have begun today to organise some little improvements in Government House garden, which is at present merely a cleared enclosure" (Lugard 1922:78-80). Also in Lokoja barracks, Constance Larymore explained, "I then and there took to heart the lesson which I have tried to practise ever since – the absolute duty of planting trees everywhere for the benefit of one's successors … We bought a couple of ponies, and I set to work to organize a stable" (Larymore 1911: 7). This showed that European wives were involved in compound gardens and animal husbandry, and this contributed to food availability and food security of the barracks.

European wives also planted flowers in their enclosures for the beautification of their environment. Some of the flowers included hibiscus, sunflowers, and zinnias. Others were marigolds, balsams and Eucharis lilies, to mention but a few (Larymore 1911: 237-238). A colonial officer's wife brought from Sierra-Leone to Bussa, northern Nigeria, twenty seeds of Clitoria, the beautiful sapphire blue pea, a tiny packet of *Ipomea quamoclit*, and a few seeds of brilliant scarlet miniature convolvulus and their descendants had spread to the outlying villages (Larymore 1911: 238-239).

These flowers served different purposes in the colony, apart from the aesthetic value they were used for the beautification of lawns, corridors and tables, and sometimes served as a symbol of love. European wives equally planted perennial fruit trees or orchards in their gardens, and these included, pea, guavas, oranges, mangoes, bananas, and paw-paws, to mention but a few. The fruit trees complemented arable crop production in the community and also provided the needed nutrients and vitamins that combat diseases.

Women also engaged in animal husbandry, for European wives kept ponies, donkeys, camels, and horses. They were used as beasts of burden and a means of transportation in northern Nigeria. They also managed other farm animals such as cattle, sheep, fowls, and goats. These animals were eaten on special occasions and cows were maintained for milk production and tilling the land. While European wives managed their animals in enclosures, indigenous soldiers' wives allowed their livestock and birds to roam about, only coming to roost in the evening. It was also because the maintenance of birds was not as labour-intensive as animal husbandry (Egwuatu 2019). Another factor that gave rise to this method was the availability of surplus arable land in colonial barracks and the fact that they did not practise mechanised agriculture, compared to the developments in post-colonial barracks. A colonial officer's wife stressed, "I started with a stock of five cows, each with a small calf, and in full milk: I then, with a lamentable want of foresight and proper humility, decided on and attempted to carry out all kinds of innovations and dairy principles, such as separating the calves from the cows" (Larymore 1911: 231).

Given the above, we can safely argue that women contributed immensely to the food production and food security of colonial Nigeria, contrary to the views that colonial rule

undermined women's role in agriculture. The colonial rule only focused on cash crop economy using the men as forced labour, while women remained subsistent in their economic livelihood. Available records indicate that the challenges of compound gardens were enormous. Some of these included the use of traditional implements, poor soil texture, locust invasion, and lack of fertilizers and loans. Farm animals were also affected by tsetse flies, fleas and ticks, mad-cow disease, and other tropical diseases. It is clear from our discussion that women were actively involved in the socio-economic and social relations of the colonial barracks in Nigeria, and these enhanced their status during the period.

Continuity and change in post-colonial Nigeria

The post-colonial developments in the Nigerian military brought a significant social change in the activities of barracks women. In the household, women continued with domesticity and reproduction, while others engaged housekeepers and maids to work in the home due to their involvement in the social activities of the barracks. The need for domestic servants was also motivated by the fact that a good number of army wives discovered that educational training would improve their status and capacity, contrary to their position in colonial barracks. Due to social change, barracks women became as important as their husbands because they helped their husbands to win the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). It should be recalled that in the war years, women provided victuals, humanitarian aid, prayers, and sex entertainment to their husbands, while a few participated in surveillance and reconnaissance. Since they assisted in keeping the peace and unity of the nation, some officers' wives participated in the military rule as 'first ladies because of their husbands' rank. In successive years, military authorities published that women were entitled to accompany their spouses on a foreign mission as wives of Defence Attachés, an opportunity that was not available in the Colonial Army.

Apart from assisting their spouses, a remarkable transformation in the status of senior officers' wives was the opportunity to create structures to advance the socialisation and capacity building of women. These structures included the Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association (NAOWA), the Nigerian Air Force Officers' Wives Association (NAFOWA), the Navy Officers' Wives Association (NOWA), and others. These associations later became outlets through which barracks women engaged in nation-building, socio-economic activities, and barracks development (Nzemeka 2015: 3-4).

Therefore, the associations became channels through which barracks women popularised their activities from the margin to the centre. Even when some of their husbands indulged in alcohol abuse, womanising, and pool-betting, the women stood by them as homemakers and supportive housewives because they had constructed spaces of authority and influence in the public space (Nzemeka 2015: 3-4). In post-Civil War Nigeria, women's involvement in military rule offered them the opportunity to create humanitarian programmes, the construction of NAOWA/ NAFOWA/ NOWA schools, donations to the physically challenged homes, the blind centres and leper colonies in the country.

In post-colonial Nigeria, the celebration of Empire Day, Coronation Day and other colonial feasts ceased in military barracks because they were stark reminders of colonial rule in the country. Rather, the Nigerian military embarked on the celebration of Army Day and Independence anniversary to mark the heroes past and the dogged fight for self-determination.

Similarly, the peacetime army gave women the opportunity to key into emerging social changes in military culture. One of these was the initiative of the Nigerian military authorities to allow women to accompany their husbands on a course lasting six months or more overseas, as well as foreign mission whenever an officer was appointed Defence Attaché. This allowed women to interact with other women around the world and also improve their status and educational background. As Babangida puts it, "There are many officers' wives who acquired

degrees and diplomas during such overseas sojourns … Some wives have even come back armed with degrees aptly called “Pushing Hubby Through” (P.H.T) (Babangida 1988: 26).

Babangida also stressed that these degrees were awarded to those who accompanied their spouses on courses to Fort Knox, Kentucky, and the USA (Babangida 1988: 26). Other women who had no acumen for academic work took to the study of home economics or learning a trade, such as hairdressing, event management, confectionery and handicraft. The benefit of these trades cannot be overemphasised. This is because they contributed to the development of skills, empowerment, culture and learning in Nigerian barracks. Some of the women also contributed to the development of gardening, poultry, fishery, and animal husbandry (Udegbe 1995: 69-84).

Through these activities, the status of army wives transformed into modern barracks in Nigeria. The contemporary times have equally witnessed women’s educational pursuits in law, economics, engineering, architecture and other fields of learning preparatory for opportunities in governance and business life; thus an officer’s wife said, “We are here to make a difference” (Akinsanmi 2013: 62).

Conclusion

In this study, we have attempted to consider the status of army wives in both colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. The paper highlights that army wives exploited the rank of their husbands in the social system because the rank of an officer is also the rank of his wife. Tracing the activities of women from the pre-colonial war camps, we observed that the activities of this group were not only significant but challenging. For example, in the household, women cared for their husbands and family, engaged in domesticity and reproduction. They were also visible in the social and economic activities of the war camps, including inter-group relations, festivals, and religious activities.

However, the colonial setting painted a slightly different picture due to role differentiation between men and women on the one hand and the European wives and their indigenous counterparts on the other. Thus, indigenous soldiers’ wives became socially excluded in empire-building and public affairs because of rank, race and culture. The Second World War witnessed the enlistment of women in the force where they assisted their husbands in varied capacities while the indigenous soldiers’ wives served as adjunct security watchers. Women’s war efforts contributed to their inclusion in empire-building and social relations. Their active involvement in the colony helped erase the notion that women were idle and a nuisance in British West Africa.

With the formation of the Progressive Women’s Club (PWC) and the Corona Women’s Society (CWS) in the 1930s and 1950s, European wives created spaces of authority and identity through which they carried out social and humanitarian programmes in colonial Nigeria. The challenges of rank and marginalisation of women by fellow women became a colonial legacy that continued in post-colonial barracks. It is noted that the post-colonial era widened the inequality between officers’ wives and non-commissioned officers’ wives due to the rank and status of their husbands.

On the economic front, European wives and their indigenous counterparts participated in crop production and animal husbandry to enhance food availability and food security in society. Immediately after Nigeria’s independence in 1960, Nigerian Army Officers’ Wives occupied the offices left by the European wives in colonial service. They formed associations that served as outlets for women’s empowerment and humanitarian activities similar to the PWC and CWS of the colonial period. In the Civil War years (1967-1970), these associations engaged in wide-ranging activities such as the provision of victuals to wounded soldiers and families, counselling and relief programmes similar to the activities of women in WW II.

Available records have shown that Barracks women participated in the peace-building effort of the country after the Nigerian Civil War, knowing that women and children were usually victims of wars. As part of our findings, this study has helped to invalidate the notion that army wives in

colonial Nigeria were idle and overbearing, 'flitting from bridge parties to tennis parties in the hills,' while their husbands slaved away 'in the plains'. Perhaps Joyce Cary and Rudyard Kipling's representation of the European women were only peculiar to British India, since it is established that in colonial Nigeria European wives were busy with the work of empire and social relations.

The paper also discovered that the status of army wives was transformed from the margin to the centre in post-colonial barracks due to the military policy that women could accompany their spouses on foreign missions whenever appointed as Defence Attaché or on a course abroad lasting between six and nine months. The essence of this policy was to enable the officer to concentrate on his assignment without the encumbrances of the home.

The article has demonstrated that the involvement of army wives in governance after the Nigerian Civil War also changed their status from the private to the public domain. Also during the period, they assisted their husbands as first ladies while others took to education to broaden their knowledge in governance, formal and informal sector economy.

This study is limited to the barracks women in Nigeria, their status and contributions to the society in the face the of peripheral environment, military tradition, and culture. Nevertheless, these challenges could be surmounted if more research efforts are focused on the study of the military environment, gender and power, economy and lifestyle. This study believes that barracks women can further improve their socio-economic status through the government's empowerment and social investment programme; this can make them self-reliant.

Acknowledgement
My profound gratitude goes to the Gender Studies Group, University of Lagos, where this paper received critical comments and suggestions.

References

Aderinto, A.A. 2001."Subordinated by Culture: Constraints of Women in a Rural Yoruba." *African History*, xix (3): 341-368.

Akem, P. 2008. Peace Support Operations and the Challenge of Complying with International Human Rights Instruments. *New Soja*, *A Magazine of the Nigerian Army*, 1st Quarter: 10-14.

Akinsanmi, F. J. 2013. "We Are Here to Make a Difference." *The Retiree Army Magazine*, vol.5, no.1, January-June: 62-66.

Amadiume, I. 2000. *Daughters of the Goddess, Daughters of Imperialism: African Women Struggle for Culture, Power and Democracy*. London: Zed Books Ltd.

Awe, B. 1964. "The End of an Experiment: The Collapse of the Ibadan Empire 1877-1893." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 111 (1): 221-230.

-------- 2001. Iyalode Efunsetan Aniwura (Owner of Gold). In: B. Awe (Ed.). *Nigerian Women, A Historical Perspective*. Ibadan: BookCraft and Sankore Publishers Ltd: 65-81.

Awe, B. and Olutoye, O. 1998. Women and Warfare in the 19th Century Yorubaland: An Introduction. In: A. Akinjogbin (Ed.).*War and Peace in Yorubaland 1793-1893*. Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) plc: 120-130.

Babangida, M. 1988. *The Home Front*, *Nigerian Army officers and Their Wives*. Ibadan: Books for Libraries Press.

Biobaku, S.O. 1965. *The Egba and their Neighbours 1842-1872*. London: Oxford University Press.

Burns, A. 1949. *Colonial Civil Servant*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

Callan, H. 1975. The Premiss of Dedication, Notes towards an Ethnography of Diplomats' Wives. In: S. Ardener (Ed.).*Perceiving Women*. London: Malaby Press: 87-104.

Callaway, H. 1987. *Gender, Culture and Empire, European Women in Colonial Nigeria*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.

Cary, J. 1939. *Mister Johnson*. London: Michael Joseph.

Chaudhuri, N. 1988. “Memsahibs and Motherhood in Nineteenth-Century Colonial India.” *Victorian Studies*, 1(4): 517-535.

Crocker, R.W. 1971. *Nigeria: A Critique of British Colonial Administration*, New York: Books for Libraries Press.

Crowder, M. 1966. *The Story of Nigeria*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd. Nigerian Defence Headquarters Publication, 2010. *Fifty Years of Nigeria’s Peacekeeping Experience*. Abuja: Defence Headquarters Press.

Dobrofsky, L. R. and Batterson, C. T. 1977. “The Military Wife and Feminism.” *Signs*, 2(3): 675-684.

Ellis S. 2002. “Writing Histories of Contemporary Africa.” *The Journal of African History*, 43(1): 1-26.

Egwuatu, Christopher. 2019. Personal interview on April 23, 2019. Lagos. Cassette recording in possession of the author

Finlayson, E. M. 1976. A Study of the Wife of the Army Officer: Her Academic and Career Preparations, Her Current Employment and Volunteer Services. In: H.I.McCubbin, H. I., Dahl, B.B., Hunter, E. J. (Ed.). *Families in the Military System*. London: Sage Publications Ltd: 19-41.

Forster, E.M. 1979. *A Passage to India*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Ghosh, G. 2004. “Gender and Colonialism: Expansion or Marginalization?” *The Historical Journal*, 47 (3): 737-755.

Gutteridge, W. 1982. “The Military in African Politics – Success or Failure?” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 1(2): 241-252.

Hammel, S. and Taylor, A. 1999. Why Would a Woman Want to Serve in the Military, Anyway? In: A. Bondoc and M. Daly (Ed.). *Letters of Intent, Women Cross the Generations to Talk about Family, Work, Sex, Love and the Future of Feminism*. New York: The Free Press: 76-84.

Haywood, A. and Clarke, F.A.S, 1964. *The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force*. Aldershot: Gale and Polden Ltd.

Iheanacho, N.N. 2016. “First Ladies in Nigeria: The Rise of Amazon Crusaders for Better Life of the Vulnerable.” *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 6:134-146.

Jary, D. and Jary, J. 1991. *Collins Dictionary of Sociology*, Harper Collins Publishers.

Kinzer B. and Leach, M. 1966. *What Every Army Wife Should Know*. Harrisburg: Pa: Stackpole Press.

Kipling, R. 1986. Nursery Rhymes for Little Anglo-Indians. In: A. Rutherford (Ed.). *Early Verse by Rudyard Kipling, 1879-1889*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 12-32.

Kirk-Greene, A.H.M. 1964. “A Preliminary Note on New Sources for Nigerian Military History.” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 111(1): 129-147.

Kriger, C. 1993. “Textile Production and Gender in the Sokoto Caliphate,” *The Journal of African History*, 34: 361-401.

Larymore, C. 1911, *A Resident’s Wife in Nigeria*, London: Routledge and Sons Ltd.

Levine, P. 1996. "Rereading the 1890s: Venereal Disease as “Constitutional Crisis.” *The Journal of Asian* Studies, 55: 585–612. *doi:10.2307/2646447*

------ -2003. *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire,* New York: Routledge.

Linton, R. 1936. *The Study of Man*, New York: Appleton-Century.

Lovejoy, E.P. 1978. “Plantations in the Economy of the Sokoto Caliphate.” *Journal of African History*, XIX (3): 341-368.

Lufadeju, S. 1987. “Rural Women on the Move, Abuja Workshop Calls for Better Life for Women.” *Newswatch Magazine*, September 28:25-26.

Lugard, F.D. 1922. *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons.

McCubbin, Dahl and Hunter (eds).1976. *Families in the Military System*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Morris, J. 1998. *Pax Britannica, The Climax of an Empire*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd.

Naanen, B. B. 1991. “Itinerant Gold Mines”: Prostitution in the Cross River Basin of Nigeria, 1930-1950. *The African Studies Review*, 34 (2): 57-79.

Nigerian Army Education Corps and School (NAECS) 1992. *History of the Nigerian Army 1863-1992.* Abuja: NAECS.

Niven, R. 1982. *Nigerian Kaleidoscope*. London: C. Hurst.

Nzemeka, J.A. 2015. “Wives of Military Personnel in Nigerian Barracks, 1905-1999: A Socio-economic History.” Published Ph.D. Thesis, Lagos: University of Lagos.

--------2020 “The End of an Experiment in British West Africa: A Case of Gender, Culture and Space in Nigerian Cantonments.” *Anchor University Journal of Humanities, Social and Management Sciences*, 1(1): 143-157.

Olojede, I. 2004. Public Policy and Gender Politics in Nigeria. In: S. Akinboye (Ed.). Paradox of Gender Equality in Nigerian Politics. Lagos: Concept Publications Ltd: 119-135.

Orwell, G. 1967. *Burmese Days*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Pearce, R.D. 1983. “Voilet Bourdillon: Colonial Governor’s Wife.” *African Affairs*, 82 (327): 267-277.

Perham, M. 1960. *LUGARD, The Years of Authority1898-1945*. London: Collins St. James’s Place.

Salisu, Mohammed, 2019. Personal interview on May 3, 2019. Lagos. Cassette recording in possession of the author.

Sen, I. 2000 “Gendering (Anglo) India: Rudyard Kipling and the Construction of Women.” *Social Scientist*, 28(9/10): 12-32.

Smith, R.S. 1976. *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-colonial West Africa*. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd.

Smith, B. S. 1969. *“But Always As Friends” Northern Nigeria and the Cameroons, 1921-1957*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

Spear, P. 1963. *The Nabobs*. London: Oxford University Press.

Stiehm, H. J. 1985. A Feminist in Military Academy Land; or, Men and Their Institutions as Curiosities. In: P. A. Treichler, Cheris Kramarae, and Beth Stafford (Ed.), *Theory and Practice in Feminist Scholarship* USA: University of Illinois Press: 377- 392.

Sudarkasa, N.1993. The Status of Women in Indigenous African Societies. In: Laurel Richardson and Verta Taylor. *Feminist Frontiers III*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc: 150-158.

Udegbe, I.B. 1995. “Better Life for Rural Women Programme: An Agenda for Positive Change?” *African Development*, 20(4):69-84. Retrieved January 22 2022, from *https://www.jstor.org/stable/43657992 pdf.*

Ukpabi S.C 1975. “Military Recruitment and Social Mobility in Nineteenth-Century British West Africa.” *Journal of African Studies*, 2(1): 87-107.

Wilkinson, P.S. 1905. Report on Desertion in the Gold Coast Regiment.