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## REVISITING THE PAST: A HISTORY OF EUROPEAN WIVES IN COLONIAL NIGERIA, 1920-1960

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**ABSTRACT**

*This article reconsiders the history of European wives in colonial Nigeria. It is an aspect of women's studies that has elicited scholarly interest in the past three decades or so because of the peculiarities of the subject, gender and colonialism. The paper argues that the poor representations of this group in most colonial literature and male-authored memoirs were not an accurate reflection of colonial Nigeria. European women bypassed the hierarchies of Colonial Service and the trappings of imperial culture in Nigeria to create social inclusion and space. They also introduced British culture, diplomacy, cooperation and collaboration between the colonisers and the colonised. Using primary and secondary sources of data, official documents, journal articles, and internet materials to substantiate its claim, this paper reveals that European women's history in colonial Nigeria was robust. It establishes that the policy change on White women's exclusion in British West Africa was inevitable and existential because of interdependence, the challenges of malnutrition, and the desertion of soldiers. The paper concludes that the position of women cannot be overlooked in history, colonial society and culture.*

**Keywords:** *British West Africa, Colonial Service, European wives, gender roles, Nigeria, women's history*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This article examines the history of European wives in colonial Nigeria. It examines two interrelated factors. In the first instance, it aims to demonstrate that European wives in colonial Nigeria were regarded as “partners for progress”

contrary to the notion that the colony was “no place for a White woman”.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, it aims to invalidate Rudyard Kipling’s assumption that European wives in the colonies were confined to their narrow social worlds, flitting from bridge parties to tennis parties in the hills while their husbands slaved away in the plains.<sup>2</sup> These representations were common narratives in most colonial literature and male-authored memoirs,<sup>3</sup> but scholarly inquiries have proved otherwise in recent times.<sup>4</sup> European wives in Nigeria, otherwise known as “colonial wives”, played a supporting role to their husbands and the work of the empire and were informally called the “crusaders for empire”.<sup>5</sup> In memoirs of colonial wives and the writings of liberal colonial servicemen, it was stated that women acted as change agents in most British empires and colonies not

- 1 C Jeffries, *Partners for progress: The men and women of the colonial service* (London: Harrap and Co. Ltd, 1949), pp.155-156. “She [Lady Flora Lugard] was deeply interested in the affairs of West Africa, anxious to learn from him [Lugard] all she could [...] with her strong faith in Britain’s imperial mission”. See, M Perham, *Lugard: The years of adventure 1858-1898* (London: Collins St James’s Place, 1960), p. 646; As Perham has written, “But Mary Kingsley, who had the courage to be just to all parties, was also the champion of the unchartered traders on the west coast and as, like Flora Shaw, she was a peacemaker”. See, Perham, *Lugard: The years of adventure*, p. 648; H Callaway, *Gender, culture and empire: European women in colonial Nigeria* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1987), p. 4; ME Oake, *No place for a white woman* (London: Lovat Dickson, 1933). The contributions of the following colonial wives opposed the negative stereotypes. For instance, in Nigeria, Flora’s death was aptly regarded as an event in the history of the empire. According to LS Amery, the Colonial Secretary, “Lady Lugard had already played a notable part in awakening the consciousness of this country to the opportunities and responsibilities of our imperial heritage”. See, Perham, *Lugard: The years of authority 1898-1945*, p. 671; Writing on Lady Violet Bourdillon, the editor of *Daily Service* summarised, “No wife of any Governor before had made Government House more democratic and popular than Lady Bourdillon”, “Editorial, Violet Bourdillon”, *Daily Service*, 17 May 1943; Nnamdi Azikiwe, a Nigerian nationalist, also wrote, “She stands unique”, *West African Pilot*, 15 May 1943.
- 2 R Kipling, “Nursery rhymes for little Anglo-Indians”. In: A Rutherford (ed.), *Early verse by Rudyard Kipling, 1879-1889* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 230-232.
- 3 Female authored memoirs and literature that oppose male narratives include C Larymore, *A resident’s wife in Nigeria* (London: Routledge and Sons Ltd, 1908), p. xiii; Oake, *No place for a white woman*; S Constantine, “Woman’s work in the service of empire: Lady Margaret Field (1905-94) from schoolteacher to governor’s wife”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46 (3), 2018, p.1.
- 4 M Densmore, “Power and gender: British women’s role in 19<sup>th</sup> century imperial India”, *Undergraduate Library Research Award*. 2 <<http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ulra/awards/2016/2/>>, accessed 26 March 2024, pp.1-2; JJ Van-Helten and K Williams, “The crying need of South Africa: The emigration of single British women to the Transvaal, 1901-1910”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 10 (1), 1983, pp. 17-18; N Chaudhuri, “Memsahibs and motherhood in nineteenth-century colonial India”, *Victorian Studies* 31 (4), 1988, pp. 519-520; R Johnson, *British imperialism, histories, and controversies* (London: Springer, 2003), pp.122-131.
- 5 H Callaway and DO Helly, “Crusader for empire: Flora Shaw/ Lady Lugard”. In: N Chaudhuri and M Strobel (eds.), *Western women and imperialism: Complicity and resistance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 79-97.

only because of their Victorian culture and social life but also because of their gender and power.<sup>6</sup>

Hence, Bernard Bourdillon stressed, “THE GOOD AND, alas, the harm that can be done by the wives of men working in the colonies is too little realised”.<sup>7</sup> This remark subsequently became a pointer that European wives were not fairly treated in literature and Colonial Service (henceforth CS) since they shared in their “husbands’ exile”, tropical diseases, and the work of the empire.<sup>8</sup> The role of British women travellers was also a topical issue because of their dedication to the British Empire.<sup>9</sup> It was speculated that most of them were “married to the empire” since they dedicated their service to the British Empire and colonial adventures.<sup>10</sup> Despite the lives and duties of these women, most gender narratives still portray the role of women in society as secondary, subordinate and marginalised.<sup>11</sup>

Nigeria's chequered history began with the British colonisation in the nineteenth century. The appointment of Joseph Chamberlain as Colonial Secretary stimulated the British Government to pursue a vigorous colonial policy.<sup>12</sup> This led to the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates into a single unified nation called “Nigeria”, a vast area of land sprawling from the desert to the sea with diverse ethnic groups, cultures, religions, and languages.<sup>13</sup>

The year 1920 marked the starting point of our analysis because it was the year the spokesman of the Colonial Office, Col. Amery, announced that, “It was the desire of the Secretary of State that married life should be the

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6 LR Dobrofsky and CT Batterson, “The military wife and feminism”, *Signs* 2 (3), 1977, p. 675; Larymore, *A resident's wife in Nigeria*, p. 224.

7 B Bourdillon, *The future of the colonial empire* (London: SCM Press, 1945), p. 77; Also see, RD Pearce, “Violet Bourdillon: colonial governor's wife”, *African Affairs* 82 (327), 1983, p. 267.

8 Larymore, *A resident's wife in Nigeria*, p. xiii. Also see, BS Smith, *But always as friends: Northern Nigeria and the Cameroons, 1921-1957* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1969), pp. 124-125.

9 S Ulmer, “British women travellers: challenging and reinforcing Victorian notions of race and gender”, *Historical Perspectives: Santa Clara University Undergraduate Journal of History, Series II* 20 (7), 2015, p. 1.

10 MA Procida, *Married to the empire: Gender, politics, and imperialism in India, 1883-1947* (London: Manchester University Press, 2017).

11 S Beauvoir, *The second sex: The classical manifesto of the liberated woman* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. vii-viii.

12 JC Anene, “The protectorate government of southern Nigeria and the Aros, 1900-1902”, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 1, 1956, p. 20.

13 DO Ajayi, “British colonial policies and the challenge of national unity in Nigeria, 1914-2014”, *Southern Journal of Contemporary History* 47 (1), 2022, pp. 27-28.

rule rather than the exception in the Crown colonies and Protectorates”.<sup>14</sup> This encouraged greater immigration of white women into the colony and the CS in Nigeria. The year 1960, the terminal date, was significant in two senses: firstly, it was the year Nigeria obtained her independence from Britain.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, the year marked the end of European wives’ activities in the public space in colonial Nigeria. The scope of the study was convenient because it gives us the latitude to dissect isolated issues hitherto overlooked in the analysis of white women in Nigeria.

The objective of this study is to recapture the history of European wives in colonial Nigeria and to show that they were partners for progress, contrary to the thinking that the colony was no place for a white woman. It is also a contribution to the existing literature on gender and colonialism. This paper is structured as follows. Apart from definitions and literature review, section one discusses the Colonial Service and women’s exclusion. Section two underlines the policy change, while section three examines the role of European women in the private sphere. Section four explores the role of European women in the public sphere, while section five highlights the contributions of European women to social and humanitarian activities. Additionally, the paper traces the role of European wives in the economic sphere.

## 2. DEFINITIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

We must clarify some concepts used in this paper. For instance, “European wives” refers to women who accompanied their husbands to the colonies to provide support and care. The term is appropriate in the context of our discussion and the broader picture of white women’s role in colonial Nigeria. In colonial literature, they were known as “colonial wives” because most of them were married in the colonies and even stayed after the death of their husbands. For instance, Sylvia Leith-Ross lost her husband through blackwater fever and later returned to colonial Nigeria for charity work and scholarly research.<sup>16</sup>

The “Colonial Service” refers to the British imperial administration of African states. In British West Africa, the CS was uppermost to the Colonial Office not only because it was the instrument of administration but also as a military machine to protect the British interests against the incursion of the French and the Germans. As Robert Heussler puts it, “It normally suggests

14 FD Lugard, *The dual mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: William Blackwood and Sons Ltd, 1922), p. 142.

15 M Meredith, *The state of Africa: A history of a continent since independence* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2017), p. 77.

16 Callaway, *Gender, culture and empire*, p. 167.

administration in tropical Africa more than in any other part of the world. The West African colonies took the lion's share of CS recruits, East Africa being second and Central Africa a poor third".<sup>17</sup>

The European community in colonial Nigeria comprised government officials, railway staff, missionaries, miners, merchants, and the West African Frontier Force (henceforth, WAFF) together with their wives.<sup>18</sup> They lived in a closed community and Government Reservation Areas (GRAs) in Lagos, Zungeru, Kaduna, Lokoja, Port-Harcourt, and Enugu where they domesticated Victorian culture and social life. Between 1922 and 1943, about 83 women were recruited for educational posts, 72 for medical posts, eight for miscellaneous posts, and 2 189 as nursing sisters.<sup>19</sup> As one of the colonial officers noted,

From 1942 to 1952, a total of 2 512 women had been appointed to the C.S. (2 185 from 1945). As before, most were nurses, 1 603, followed by 717 appointed to education posts, and the remainder, 192, were doctors, administrative assistants and unspecified others [...]. From 1942 to 1952 amounted to 10 945, and total strength had reached around 18 000 by 1954. By 1960, Her Majesty's Colonial and Overseas Service (HMCOS offices numbered 20 500.<sup>20</sup>

This shows that European women were visible in colonial Nigeria and empire-building as partners for progress.<sup>21</sup>

Gender roles refer to the duties of men and women in society. "Roles may be specific or diffuse, ascribed or achieved".<sup>22</sup> In some societies, roles were based on sex and biology, that is, hormonal differences and biological configuration (*biogenetic* and *biocultural*) between males and females. According to Niara Sudarkasa, "role" refers to the behaviour appropriate to a given status.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it is noted in some scholarly literature that gender roles contributed extensively to social stratification and division in society, particularly between men and women.<sup>24</sup>

17 R Heussler, *Yesterday's rulers: The making of the British colonial service* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 3.

18 Smith, "But always as friends", p.128.

19 Jeffries, *Partners for progress*, p. 152.

20 A Kirk-Greene, *On crown service: a history of HM colonial and overseas civil services, 1837-1997* (London: Tauris, 1999), pp. 49-53, 74.

21 Jeffries, *Partners for progress*, pp.155-156.

22 D Jary and J Jary, *Collins dictionary of sociology* (London: Harpers publishers, 1991), p. 538.

23 N Sudarkasa, "The status of women" in *Indigenous African Societies*. In: L Richardson and V Taylor, *Feminist frontiers II: Rethinking sex, gender, and society* (New York: Random House Inc, 1989), pp. 152-158, specifically, p. 152.

24 GA Makama, "Patriarchy and gender inequality in Nigeria: The way forward", *European Scientific Journal* 9 (17), 2013, pp. 120-121; NA Wole-Abu, "Nigerian women, memories of the past and visions of the future through the communication narratives of the media", *Global*

Several works exist on women and empire, but relatively little on the history of gender and colonialism in Nigeria. Generalised literature that depicts European wives in sordid characters includes Alan Burns, Rudyard Kipling, and Jan Morris, to mention but a few. For instance, Burns stresses that many of the senior officials disliked the idea of wives coming to British West Africa (Sierra Leone, Nigeria, the Gambia, and Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) because of interference, culture, and sex.<sup>25</sup> The author also states that European women were regarded as intruders into what had been essentially a bachelor's paradise.<sup>26</sup> Writing in the same vein, Kipling argues that colonial wives were, "self-centred, overbearing individuals, flitting from the bridge parties to tennis parties 'in the hills' while their husbands slaved away in the plains".<sup>27</sup> Morris stresses that Englishwomen wove a white web around their menfolk, often stirring conflict between rulers and the ruled.<sup>28</sup>

Opposing the negative representation of white women in the colonies, Nupur Chaudhuri discusses the experiences of confinement, delivery, and infant care of the "memsahibs" British housewives in India. The author argues that historians of colonial India have paid little attention to the inner dynamics of the memsahibs' private sphere in the colonial environment.<sup>29</sup> Durba Ghosh also underlines that the historical narrative of colonial wives had been too narrow despite their roles in the construction of the empire as travellers, missionaries, nurses, and housewives.<sup>30</sup>

Corroborating the view, Mary Densmore notes that historians studied men as the sole power players of imperialism, often ignoring or downplaying women's roles, both as complicit or resistant imperialists. The author concludes that British women played an active role in imperialism, displaying their resilience and agency, contrary to the negative stereotypes and harmful generalisations or mistruths.<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, Ushehwedu Kufakurinani and Pius Nyambara explore the impact of the Second World War (WWII) and women's contributions to Southern Rhodesia. The authors reveal that the war

*Media Journal* 16 (31), 2018, pp. 1-2; KT Hansen, "Introduction: Domesticity in Africa". In: KT Hansen (ed.), *African encounters with domesticity* (USA: Rutgers University Press, 1992), pp. 1-33, specifically, pp. 5-6; J Huber, "A theory of gender stratification". In: L Richardson and VA Taylor, *Feminist frontiers II* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989), pp. 112-113.

25 A Burns, *Colonial civil servant* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1949), p. 41.

26 Burns, *Colonial civil servant*, pp. 41-42.

27 Kipling, "Nursery rhymes for little Anglo-Indians", pp. 230-232.

28 J Morris, *Pax britannica: The climax of an empire* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1998), p. 136.

29 Chaudhuri, "Memsahibs and motherhood", p. 517.

30 D Ghosh, "Gender and colonialism: Expansion or marginalization?" *The Historical Journal* 47 (3), 2004, p. 737.

31 Densmore, "Power and gender", p. 1.

reconfigured women's domesticity because of their increased participation outside the home. Kufakurinani and Nyambara establish that the shift bred several conflicts and tensions as the state attempted to maximise women's labour power to either replace men or embrace the new opportunities created by the war.<sup>32</sup> Although the above works do not directly address colonial Nigeria, they provide insights into gender and colonialism.

Focused studies included those of Stephen Constantine, who discusses the contributions of Lady Margaret Field in colonial Nigeria. Lady Field changed her role from a schoolteacher to a Governor's wife, which endeared her to the colonial service officers.<sup>33</sup> Constance Larymore outlines her role in colonial Nigeria, particularly her involvement in boundary delineation, social and humanitarian activities, and gardening.<sup>34</sup> These roles were almost similar to those of Diana Mary Mitchell in Rhodesia. As Kate Law argues, "Before entering formal party politics, she ran what she called a 'Backyard School' for African children who otherwise would have had no access to education".<sup>35</sup> The contributions of Mitchell suggest that women could overcome marginalisation, the trappings of culture, and race.

Similarly, Robert D Pearce explores the qualities of Violet Bourdillon as a colonial Governor's wife in Nigeria. The author defined her role in the social relations between the colonisers and the colonised, particularly among the Lagos Market Women (LMW) led by Madam Pelewura. Also significant was her role in the WWII where she mobilised European women in charity and humanitarian activities.<sup>36</sup>

Helen Callaway discussed the role of European women in colonial Nigeria. The author notes that European wives played a complementary role to their husbands and the work of the empire. However, Callaway was non-committal on the question of whether, "the colony was for a white woman or not".<sup>37</sup> None of the above authors addressed the two questions that provoked this study.

32 U Kufakurinani and P Nyambara, "Reconfiguring domesticity?: White women and the Second World War in Southern Rhodesia", *Historia* 60 (2), 2015, p. 132.

33 Constantine, "Woman's work in the service of empire, p. 1.

34 Larymore, *A resident's wife in Nigeria*.

35 K Law, "Liberal women in Rhodesia: A report on the Mitchell Papers, University of Cape Town", *History in Africa* 37, 2010, p. 390.

36 Pearce, "Violet Bourdillon", pp. 273-274.

37 In her book, Callaway wrote, "This study, then, begins with the ethnography of European women within the imperial culture of Nigeria and goes on to examine why the negative images of colonial women have persisted for so long". See, Callaway, *Gender, culture and empire*, p. 29.

To fill this gap, this study draws on primary and secondary materials from a wide variety of sources, including participant observation. Primary sources are obtained from oral data and government and official publications. Secondary sources were derived from military literature, academic books, journal articles, internet materials, published dissertations, and memoirs. The study also profited from the author's personal experience in the Nigerian military for over two decades, where he accessed some of the colonial documents that helped clarify grey areas.

This paper also draws on Vilfredo Pareto's theory of the elite. According to him, "The elite are a class of people who have the highest indices in their branch of activity".<sup>38</sup> He divided society into two classes, *a governing elite*, and *a non-governing elite*.<sup>39</sup> The former comprises individuals who directly play some considerable part in government, and the latter comprises the rest. Pareto noted that the elite must have some degree of corporateness, group character, and exclusiveness, and must be aware of their pre-eminent position. Writing in the same vein, Abner Cohen noted that,

An elite is a collective of persons who occupy commanding positions in some important sphere of social life, and who share a variety of interests arising from similarities of training, experience, public duties, and way of life. To promote these interests, they seek to cooperate and coordinate their actions using a corporate organisation. Some of these interests can be articulated in a formal association, as in the medical profession. But there are functions and interests, both universalistic and particularistic, that the elite cannot organize formally.<sup>40</sup>

It is clear from the views of Pareto and Cohen that a major change in society occurs when one elite replaces another (i.e., circulation of elites). And since a greater proportion of the population is manipulated and controlled by the elite (a few), they develop an internal mechanism to consolidate their powers against the majority. European wives constituted the women's elite in colonial Nigeria and were visible in the work of the empire, they succeeded because of their social cohesion and organisation. Because of this, senior officers and their wives were in charge as governors, district officers, and residents.

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38 V Pareto's theory cited in LA Coser, *Masters of sociological thought, ideas in historical and social context*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc. 1977), p. 397.

39 Coser, "Masters of sociological thought", p. 397.

40 A Cohen, "Preface", *The politics of elite culture: Explorations in the dramaturgy of power in a modern African society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. xvi.



### 3. COLONIAL SERVICE AND WOMEN'S EXCLUSION

In British West Africa, European women were excluded in the early beginnings. This is because the CS was a male-dominated profession, especially its masculine ideology, military organisation, rituals of power and hierarchy, as well as inequality between the sexes.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, women were seen as appendages in the colony since the work belonged to their husbands. Hence, the colony became a place, "where a man could dress as he pleased, drink as much as he liked, and be easy in his morals without causing scandal".<sup>42</sup> As one of the colonial officers summarised, "Women interfered in their husbands' work and prevented them from travelling on duty".<sup>43</sup>

From the official viewpoint, "wives were often a nuisance in West Africa and husbands are reluctant to take them travelling in the bad country or bad weather and equally reluctant to leave them behind; therefore, they travelled less than they should".<sup>44</sup> These appear to be the issues surrounding women's exclusion in British West Africa.

Contrary to the above, three interconnected factors were plausible explanations for the exclusion of White women in British West Africa: firstly, there were colonial wars, and the programme of pacification of the local people had not commenced. Therefore, women had to be excluded to avoid attacks.<sup>45</sup> Secondly, the senior officers of the CS believed that European women would drive a wedge between rulers and the ruled, as was the case in British India.<sup>46</sup> Thirdly, and most importantly, was the general lack of infrastructure in the colony.

As Frederick Lugard puts it, "Poor food and bad housing add to the effect of a trying climate, especially in West Africa, and necessitate frequent leave, with a consequential increase of staff to maintain the actual minimum duty".<sup>47</sup> He also added, "I think that the appalling death rate in those early years in West Africa was due not so much to the climate as to the absence of the necessary housing, & C".<sup>48</sup> These were the views of the father of colonial Nigeria and the driver of the "forward policy".

41 Callaway, *Gender, culture and empire*, pp. 5-6.

42 Burns, *Colonial civil servant*, pp. 41-42.

43 Burns, *Colonial civil servant*, pp. 41-42.

44 Burns, *Colonial civil servant*, p. 42.

45 We did not like the soldiers: they were our people and had conquered us for strangers and had defeated our people on the plain just before us. This feeling was very common all over the North. For details see, Sir Ahmadu Bello, *My life* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 23.

46 Morris, *Pax britannica*, p. 136.

47 Lugard, *The dual mandate*, p. 141.

48 Lugard, *The dual mandate*, p.143.

Apart from poor housing in the early years of British West African Cantonments caused by colonial wars and frequent change of locations, there was also the problem of food for European officers and men due to limited options and differences in food culture. According to A Haywood and FAS Clarke, "Fresh food was mostly not available during the period; hence diet had to be supplemented with tinned provisions, usually packed in chop-boxes".<sup>49</sup> The reliance on tinned food was probably to avoid the poisoning of soldiers through local supplies but this worked against the CS as most tinned foods lacked vitamins and vegetables.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, there was an outbreak of malnutrition in the WAFF. This development triggered further challenges in the CS, such as the desertion of local soldiers, the frequent vacation of British officers to England, and the problem of manning and deployment of troops.<sup>51</sup>

To curb the challenges of homesickness and the absence of women and children in the colony, the Colonial Office restricted recruitments to bachelors and single men but this policy suffered a setback because of systemic problems. It is, therefore, noted that colonial wars and poor accommodation for military personnel in the cantonments were largely responsible for women's exclusion in British West Africa. Thus, the Colonial Office declared that there was, "No place for a white woman" in the colony.<sup>52</sup> This implies that different factors led to white women's exclusion in colonial Africa.

Despite these restrictions from the policy level to the environment, some women trailed their husbands to colonial Nigeria to offer wifely support and comfort. Among these was Larymore who came in 1902, Lady Lugard in 1902, Sylvia Leith-Ross in 1907, and Olive MacLeod in 1910.<sup>53</sup> Women's exclusion, consequently brought agitation in England as it was argued that the Colonial Office had no right to separate families because of imperial adventure. After many campaigns, the policy on women's exclusion in Nigeria and the entire British West Africa was repealed.

49 A Haywood and FAS Clarke, *The history of the royal West African frontier force* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden Ltd, 1964), p. 38.

50 Smith, "*But always as friends*", p. 146.

51 SC Ukpabi, "Military recruitment and social mobility in nineteenth-century British West Africa", *Journal of African Studies* 2 (1), 1975, pp. 100-101.

52 Callaway, *Gender, culture and empire*, p.19. Also see, D Jeater, "No place for a woman: Gwelo town, southern Rhodesia, 1894-1920", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26 (1), 2000, p. 29; It is safe to argue that British colonial systems were constructed in a specific gendered hierarchy and ideology and this can be seen even as far down south as Rhodesia, see, Kufakurinani and Nyambara, "Reconfiguring domesticity?", p.133. The British colonial office did not encourage the presents of wives. "Confidential correspondence between Lugard and the Colonial Office in 1904 shows its objections on several grounds: the fact that most officers were required to travel extensively, the cost of building suitable accommodations and the unsatisfactory health conditions (PRO/CO446/39).

53 Larymore, *Gender, culture and empire*, p. 166.

#### 4. POLICY CHANGE

A turning point came in 1905 when the Wilkinson Commission was set up to unravel the cause(s) of desertion in the WAFF. The Commission subsequently discovered that rotten grains and yams were included in soldiers' diets, and this brought malnutrition, homesickness, and desertion. Therefore, it was recommended that women should be allowed to join their husbands in the colony to forestall further desertion and fulfil domestic roles and colonial housekeeping.<sup>54</sup> This tells us that women's roles were subordinated by culture and colonial encounters. It is noted that the constriction of women's roles in the colonies not only disempowered them but also limited their social space. Therefore, indigenous soldiers' wives were incorporated into the CS in 1905. Since then, their husbands had a robust life without venereal diseases.<sup>55</sup> Although venereal diseases were serious health challenges in most British colonies and dependencies, Nigeria's case was different compared to British India and other colonies, where the Cantonment Acts were enacted to police venereal diseases.<sup>56</sup>

Following an aggressive campaign denouncing women's exclusion in England, in 1920, Col. Amery, the spokesman of the Colonial Office, announced, "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".<sup>57</sup> This marked the end of white women's exclusion in British West Africa and the beginning of a robust barracks culture and inter-group relations with the wider society. From the foregoing, the exclusion of women in British West Africa shows a fundamental mistake in the doctrines of the CS. It also illustrates how a colonial policy inadvertently worked against the colonisers and the colonised. Thus, the emergence of women in colonial Nigeria inaugurated a new era in the CS and the British "forward policy".

54 "The National Archives of the UK (TNA), Colonial Office (CO) 445/19, PS Wilkinson, Report on desertion in the Gold Coast regiment, 1905".

55 Ukpabi, "Military recruitment and social mobility", pp. 100-101.

56 P Levine, "Venereal disease, prostitution, and the politics of empire: the case of British India", *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4 (4), 1994, p. 579; See also, P Levine, *Prostitution, race and politics: Policing venereal disease in the British empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003); R Hyam, "Concubinage and the colonial service: The Crewe circular (1909)", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 14 (3), 1986, p. 170.

57 See Debate on the Colonial Office Vote dated, 23 August 1920, Quoted in Lugard, *The dual mandate*, p. 142; Ukpabi, "Military recruitment", p. 101; See also J Bush, "The right sort of woman": female emigrants and emigration to the British Empire, 1890-1910", *Women's History Review* 3 (3), 1994, pp. 385-409.

## 5. EUROPEAN WOMEN IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE

In the formative years, European wives and their indigenous counterparts were restricted to the home as homemakers (dependants) due to interrelated factors and forces. First, there was the fear of dangerous animals, roaring lions and wandering leopards.<sup>58</sup> Second, were the vagaries of weather, climate and tropical diseases, and third, were the wars of conquests and the hatred of the conquered people. Writing in 1914, Laura Boyle noted,

The majority of men out here [...] don't believe in women coming out to the coast [...] they don't want them; they'd only get ill and be a nuisance. Even if they do come out as I have [...] they are politely received but always with the sort of suppressed view. Poor beggar, it's a pity she is here, but, come on, let's be kind to her. In the coastal towns [...] it is different, for they can be packed off home easily [...] but even then, they are not so far wanted.<sup>59</sup>

Rex Niven's experience was also unique. He brought his wife to Nigeria in 1925, and the Resident Officer in Lokoja welcomed her with the statement, "Mrs Niven, this is no place for a white woman".<sup>60</sup> In 1928, Mary Elisabeth Oake travelled with her husband to the British Cameroons, found herself the only European woman in the station, and was told that, "women were out of place in West Africa".<sup>61</sup> These encounters informed the title of her memoir, *No Place for a White Woman*.

From a broad perspective, the military profession requires that women be confined to the home as homemakers, engage in childcare, dressmaking, home budgeting, housekeeping and sex entertainment with their husbands.<sup>62</sup> But the determination of most European wives to "civilise Africa" transformed their roles from the private to the public spheres. As Elizabeth Finlayson stated,

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 predetermined to a

58 Smith, *But always as friends*, p. 124.

59 "The diary of Laura Boyle", Quoted in LH Gann and P Duignan, *Rulers of British Africa, 1870-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), pp. 242; 246-247.

60 R Niven, *Nigerian kaleidoscope* (London: C. Hurst, 1982), p. 62.

61 Oake, *No place for a white woman*, p. 11.

62 J Robins, "Colonial cuisine: Food in British Nigeria, 1900-1914", *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies* 10 (6), 2010, pp. 461-463; See also, Law, "Liberal women in Rhodesia", p. 391.

great extent by her husband's rank and assignment. To her civilian neighbours, she represents the military and when on foreign soil, she is a diplomat, a representative of her nation.<sup>63</sup>

In the colony, a wife's primary duty was to make the home conducive for her military husband to retire after a hard day's work. It was also necessary that, "a woman quickly learns her military wife role and status, along with the military protocol and behaviour expected of her at social functions - coffees, brunches, teas, formal and official luncheons, dinners, receptions and receiving lines, flag courtesies, and reviews".<sup>64</sup>

Because of the challenges of colonial life, Emily Bradley, a colonial wife who accompanied her husband to Central Africa in 1926, wrote, "In the colony, your husband is the master, the work is his life. You are going to a Man's world in which you will be very much the lesser half of this imperial 'partnership' [...] you are your husband's silent partner".<sup>65</sup> In the area of housekeeping, Emily G. Bradley added,

There was a need for setting up a household, touring with your husband, dressmaking without tears, managing servants, and developing a flourishing garden [...] there is nothing so cruelly disheartening to a man when he is prepared to enjoy his life and his work in what is still largely a man's country [than] a miserable wife. It spoils everything for him, his home, his leisure and inevitably, his work.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, in the colony, women sewed their children's nappies and coats, most of the coats were made from the ones that had gone out of fashion or abandoned.<sup>67</sup> Thus, all the administrative wives became very domesticated throughout the period.<sup>68</sup> Domestic servants were also hired by European wives, while domestic aides were assigned to senior colonial officers. These include stewards, batmen, and gardeners. According to Larymore,

63 E Finlayson, "A study of the army officer: Her academic and career preparations, Her current employment and volunteer services". In: HI McCubbin (eds.), *Families in the military system* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1976), pp. 19-20.

64 Dobrofsky and Batterson, "The military wife and feminism", p. 675.

65 E Bradley, *Dearest Priscilla, letters to the wife of a colonial civil servant* (London: Max Parish, 1950), p. 116.

66 Bradley, *Dearest Priscilla*, p. 85.

67 Cecillie Swaisland, quoted in Callaway, *Gender, culture and empire*, p. 196

68 Swaisland, quoted in Callaway, *Gender, culture and empire*, p. 196.

The staff consists of a cook, with an attendant satellite, called a 'cook's mate', a steward or 'boy', with, usually, in a married household at least, an under-steward, or perhaps a couple of small boys to assist generally in the housework and table service. There may be an orderly attached, but his duties consist rather of the airing of clothes and boxes, cleaning of guns and boots, and carrying of letters, etc.<sup>69</sup>

Larymore further stated,

The head steward must be carefully chosen, and is worth training, for in his hands lies the greater part of your daily comfort, and to his shortcomings can be traced most of the irritability which is recognised as a natural weakness of the dweller in West Africa.<sup>70</sup>

It was the overbearing attitude of some European wives toward African cooks and stewards that contributed to their poor representations in colonial literature and men-authored memoirs. Similarly, European wives forbade their husbands from having African ladies as domestic aides for fear of liaison and concubinage. Colonial officers who attempted this social contact were punished by the CS.

## 6. EUROPEAN WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

On the political and administrative front, the life and times of some European wives were remarkable in colonial Nigeria. The unmarried women travellers and married wives of senior colonial officers had their roles in the colony. For instance, before the marriage of Flora Lugard in 1906, she used *The Times* to publicise colonial rule in West Africa to the ordinary British. It is argued that, "Shaw had a public and political identity, through her journalism career, and was in direct contact with people in colonial administration before she wrote a book inspired by her time in Nigeria".<sup>71</sup>

An interesting part of her imperial politics was how she bypassed the separate spheres by creating spaces of social inclusion for European women. Her friendship with Joseph Chamberlain, the then Secretary of State for the colony, was rewarding, particularly in the handling of imperial administration and policy issues. According to Margery Perham,

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69 Larymore, *A resident's wife in Nigeria*, p. 204.

70 Larymore, *A resident's wife in Nigeria*, p. 212.

71 Ulmer, "British women travellers", p. 32.

Flora did not hesitate to write, and write at immense length, to Mr Chamberlain both as Flora Shaw to her old friend and as Lady Lugard to the Colonial Secretary. She was confident she could use her position in her husband's service, a claim that even Lugard cannot at first have found altogether easy to accept. Therefore, in the autumn of 1902, she sent Chamberlain a letter that was almost a dispatch with its full account of the work that had been achieved in Northern Nigeria. She did not scruple to impress upon the man of power how greatly this work was handicapped by lack of means and, knowing just what his political difficulties were, she gave him the arguments which might help him to extract funds from a grudging House of Commons.<sup>72</sup>

In another correspondence to Chamberlain in 1902, Lady Lugard wrote,

The officers of the force were living huddled together in the smallest huts which could protect them from the weather. British administration in the interior provinces did not exist. Now if you could see it you would, I am sure, be keenly interested, for it owes its creation to your initiative.<sup>73</sup>

The above clearly defined Lady Lugard as a "crusader for empire" and a prized example of the colony. Her remarks to Joseph Chamberlain were probably appropriate in the context of the times because he was one of the architects of the WAFF established in 1897 to protect British interests and also halt the incursions of the French and the Germans.<sup>74</sup> Viewed from another context, we can argue that Lady Lugard's response is appropriate because of the spirit of colonialism and its rigid structure which restrained Lugard from exposing the challenges of the empire.

Relating to the above, Lassie Fitz-Henry underlined, "The first sight of our house reduced me to secret tears, as I could not believe that was where we were to live. It appeared to be a shed not even worthy of a cow".<sup>75</sup> It is safe to argue that housing was one of the challenges of the colonial state. Thus, we should be quick to applaud the resilience of these women who shared in their husbands' predicaments in the colony.

Before the policy reversal on women's exclusion in the colony, Lady Lugard had opposed the policy. This is observed in one of her remarks,

72 Perham, *Lugard: The years of authority*, p. 81.

73 Lady Lugard quoted in Perham, *Lugard: The years of authority*, p. 82.

74 SC Ukpabi, "The origins of the West African frontier force", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 111 (3), 1966, p. 500.

75 L Fitz-Henry, *African dust* (London: Macmillan Ltd, 1959), p. 14.

We were counting how many people we ought to ask if we gave a big inaugural dinner and we found that there are over 30 civil and military officers of sorts [...]. Everyone now is asking me about bringing their wives out and there is a general set towards civilisation.<sup>76</sup>

The agitation of the colonial servicemen was probably based on the fact that Lady Lugard had connections to speak to power, despite her confirmation that there can be no trustworthy continuity of administration until men can safely bring their wives and families to the country.<sup>77</sup>

Lady Lugard's interference in the politics of the empire was a pointer that she was an insider in colonial affairs. Her influence on imperial and administrative policies came to the fore when she was asked to write the 1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entries on the "British Empire", "Nigeria", "Cecil Rhodes" and several other topics. Her work, *A Tropical Dependency* (1905) has also become a reference treatise for researchers of Africa.

Mary Kingsley was also a famous traveller and writer who combined intellectual gifts, physical courage, and political initiative.<sup>78</sup> She was an ardent supporter of colonial rule and, at the same time, a defender of indigenous people. As a colonial crusader, she was reputed to have opposed Lord Lugard on the liquor traffic and aspects of the colonial agenda.<sup>79</sup> Her travels throughout West Africa helped shape European perceptions of both African cultures and British colonialism in Africa. "She was proud of Britain as an imperial power and included herself not only among traders but also among old-fashioned imperialists"<sup>80</sup>

Another woman of substance in colonial Nigeria was Violet Bourdillon. It was said of her that,

On tour in Niger Province in January 1939, when the Governor was running a high temperature and had to retire to bed, it was Lady Bourdillon who filled in as understudy and carried out the tour of inspection, meeting the Emir of Kontagora, visiting the women's quarters, talking in Arabic with the Alkali.<sup>81</sup>

It should be noted from our discussion that European women contributed to imperial politics and administration in Nigeria.

76 Perham, *Lugard: The years of authority*, p. 79.

77 Perham, *Lugard: The years of authority*, p. 83.

78 Perham, *Lugard: The years of adventure*, p. 648.

79 F Lugard, "The liquor traffic in Africa," *The nineteenth century* XI. November 1897; quoted in Perham, *Lugard: The years of authority*, p. 559.

80 M Kingsley, *West African studies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1901), p. 418.

81 Pearce, "Violet Bourdillon", p. 270.



Their supporting roles were equally visible in diplomacy. For instance, during the WW II, Lady Bourdillon requested Charles de Gaulle two things he wanted most in the world and the answer was instantaneous, "To see France victorious and to die on that day of victory".<sup>82</sup> This shows the loyalty of a man to his country and a woman's interest in international politics. Little wonder, "he [Bernard Bourdillon] was to pay tribute to his wife's human sympathy and quite exceptional lack of all sense of class or colour", adding that her attitude had influenced his policy towards a whole range of problems".<sup>83</sup>

Similarly, the experiences of Muriel Rosin in the politics of Southern Rhodesia in the years 1946 to 1958 were inspiring. According to her, "My husband, then a busy young doctor building his practice, always encouraged me to find outside interests [...] and I think such interests are terribly important for a wife that they make for a stimulating companionship – so long as they don't interfere with the running of a woman's home or with looking after her children".<sup>84</sup>

Muriel Rosin, no doubt, had an understanding husband just like Diana Mary Mitchell who noted, "My husband was the breadwinner so I could afford to be this so-called 'liberal' because of my standard of living".<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, some men would feel threatened by the influence and power of their wives in the public domain and their determination to shatter the glass ceiling. The colonial experiences of these women suggest that women were actively involved in empire-building and politics, contrary to the thinking that the colony was no place for a white woman.

Closely related to the above, were the contributions of Maryam Babangida, wife of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, Nigeria's first lady (1985-1993). "Mrs. Babangida was so influential with her husband that she practically operated the leverage of power behind the scenes".<sup>86</sup> "With her Better Life for Rural Women Programme (BLRW), she influenced the creation of the Ministry of Women Affairs, the Directorate of Employment, Peoples' Bank plc, and the creation of Delta State with the capital in her hometown, Asaba".<sup>87</sup> It is safe to argue that most men and women succeeded because of the close connection between them and their spouses.

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82 Pearce, "Violet Bourdillon", p. 272.

83 Pearce, "Violet Bourdillon", p. 271.

84 Muriel Rosin Papers, Newspaper Cuttings, Rhodesia Herald, (cutting not dated) as quoted in U Kufakurinani and E Musiwa, "The unsung heroine: Muriel Ena Rosin's political experiences in Rhodesia, 1945-1980", *Heritage of Zimbabwe* 30, 2012, p. 37.

85 Law, "Liberal women in Rhodesia", p. 390.

86 "When first ladies take the centre stage of governance", *Daily Sun*, 16 December 2009.

87 "When first ladies take the centre stage of governance", *Daily Sun*, 16 December 2009.

## 7. EUROPEAN WOMEN IN SOCIAL AND HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES

The role of European women in social and humanitarian activities cannot be overlooked. In colonial Nigeria, most of them abandoned racial prejudice in their social interactions with the local people. For instance, Larymore, a Resident's wife, exploited her husband's rank in the CS by offering her services in boundary demarcation. As she has written, "Exactly a month after our arrival, we set forth on our first tour in the 'bush.' The object of our journey was the delimitation of the Northern Nigeria-Lagos boundary, from Aiede to Owo, and at the former place we were to meet the Lagos Travelling Commissioner".<sup>88</sup>

The involvement of Larymore in boundary delineation demonstrates that there was a manpower shortage in colonial Nigeria. It was also a pointer to the indispensability of professional European women in supporting roles. Apart from boundary demarcation, Larymore also played an active role in the social relations between the colonisers and the colonised. This is observed in her social visit to the Sariki of Katagum,

The Sariki explained to me that, as I had evidently been 'sent' to them as a special mark of favour, it was quite necessary for them to know my name; - What should they call me? 'A man's name,' I remarked [...]. After cogitating in whispers, the old man said, smiling, that they would in future know me as Uwamu (Our Mother), and so I received my 'country' name, one that has stuck with me ever since.<sup>89</sup>

The involvement of European women in colonial Nigeria shows their indispensability in the colonial administration. It is also a pointer that empire-building was not a male preserve.

On the other hand, Lady Lugard was the first to sketch the contributions so far made in imperial administration in Nigeria, particularly in humanitarian activities, the spread of peace and justice, as well as the reduction in slavery and the slave trade.<sup>90</sup> Her remarks were a bit convincing, "We have abolished slavery, and, as a consequence, it has been assumed that the labour which once supplied the great industries of the world has ceased to have any value".<sup>91</sup> There is no gain in saying the fact that the Europeans who introduced the trans-Atlantic slave trade were also the people who abolished it.

88 Larymore, *A resident's wife in Nigeria*, p. 10.

89 Larymore, *A resident's wife in Nigeria*, pp. 85-86.

90 Perham, *Lugard: The years of authority*, p. 82.

91 F Shaw, *A tropical dependency: An outline of the ancient history of Western Sudan* (London: James Nisbet, 1905), p. 39.

Lady Lugard's social life was robust, she organised charity and relief programmes for refugees of the First World War from Belgium and other countries.<sup>92</sup> This was the first attempt by a colonial first lady to display the act of diplomacy and politics of good neighbourliness. Violet Bourdillon partly replicated this feat during WWII when she hosted refugees and bereaved women in the colony.

Similarly, wives of different official ranks had the same duties at different levels and on a different scale similar to that of their husbands in different capacities.<sup>93</sup> The District Officer's wife had her roles in the district similar to that of the Resident's wife in the province, thus the supporting role of colonial wives appears to be a prime example of the person-defining power of organisations flowing across the conjugal link.<sup>94</sup>

In 1936, Betty Moresby-White in Lagos noted, "And I found if you went to dinner at Government House you sat very strictly in seniority, and you had to be very careful who you walked out behind, or in front of, as you left the dining room, all that sort of thing. Very difficult it was".<sup>95</sup> This explains the nature of social conventions and protocols among European wives in colonial Nigeria. A tradition that has been sustained by the Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association (NAOWA) in contemporary times.

By 1945, white women had created identity and influence in colonial Nigeria. They were visible in intergroup relations, charity, and humanitarian activities, which helped alleviate the sufferings of WWII. The manpower shortages in the CS and the need to provide support to their husbands contributed to the enlistment of this group in WWII. As Bryan Sharwood Smith underlined,

So she [his wife] 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. Apart from confidential typing and occasional coding and decoding, there was the monthly check on the accounts of the two native treasuries of the division. There were also maps and plans to prepare and statistics to compile, all of which experience was to prove a great value to her, sooner than we thought.<sup>96</sup>

92 J Seiz, "British women on the British Empire". In: K Madden and RW Dimand (eds.), *Routledge handbook of the history of women's economic thought* (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp.50-70.

93 Callaway, *Gender, culture and empire*, p. 79.

94 See, Callaway, *Gender, culture and empire*, p. 79.

95 B Moresby-White, Quoted in Callaway, *Gender, culture and empire*, p. 78.

96 Smith, "But always as friends", p. 125.

The war also saw Lady Bourdillon extending her hospitality to the indigenous people and foreigners. For instance, "When a ship was sunk outside Lagos harbour, several of the crew being killed, she [Lady Bourdillon] invited all the survivors to dinner: they were served, in two sittings, thick soup and steak and kidney pie".<sup>97</sup> According to Pearce,

She arranged that every new British officer arriving in Nigeria should have a meal at Government House, and stay the night if he wanted to, before proceeding to his station. She tempered the elaborate formality of official protocol and, during the Second World War when a host of visitors, officials, and dignitaries became stranded in Lagos, was soon running what she described to her husband as "the best hotel in Africa".<sup>98</sup>

The war efforts of the European women reflected their devotion to their husbands and the colony. Writing on Southern Rhodesia, Kufakurinani and Nyambara argue that the involvement of Western women in the WWII did not mean a deviation from the dominant domestic ideology, but rather a reconfiguration of this ideology because women's contributions were channelled towards domestic-oriented and related occupations. This explains the challenges of the WWII and how women's roles were temporarily reconfigured in the war years.<sup>99</sup>

To advance the social relations between the colonisers and the colonised, Lady Bourdillon believed that not much would be achieved in the colony until the Lagos Market Women's Association (LMWA), a pressure group and grassroots association were integrated: As Pearce puts it,

Violet Bourdillon was particularly concerned in Nigeria to establish close relations with local women. She soon became popular with the formidable array of women, led by Madam Pelewura, who ran the Lagos markets, and 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.<sup>100</sup>

This implied that Lady Bourdillon was accepted by the LMWA as a grassroots woman, without prejudice. She also organised garden parties and tea parties for all and sundry. In December 1940, it was the turn of the nurses, men, and women, but all black, from the local hospital, and about 30 turned up for tea, followed by a game of musical chairs and, finally, ice-cream sodas.<sup>101</sup>

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97 Pearce, "Violet Bourdillon", p. 271

98 Pearce, "Violet Bourdillon", p. 271.

99 Kufakurinani and Nyambara, "Reconfiguring domesticity?" pp.132; 159.

100 Pearce, "Violet Bourdillon", pp. 273-274.

101 Pearce, "Violet Bourdillon", p. 273

Immediately after WWII, European women began to utilise their social organisations, such as the Ladies Progressive Club (LPC) and the Corona Women's Society (CWS), as an outlet for empowerment programmes and the provision of schools. Sylvia Leith-Ross became the first Lady Superintendent of Education to live among the Igbo and later worked as an intelligence officer in Lagos during WW2.<sup>102</sup> Before the War, she had made a remarkable impact on the colonial educational system and was thus invited by the Director of Education, Selwyn Grier, to join the Department.

Her coming on board helped the Lagos Women's Organisation (LWO) actualise their bid for a Girl's Secondary School along the lines of King's College for Boys, established in 1909. Queen's College Lagos was thereafter established in 1927 with Lady Faith Wordsworth as the principal.<sup>103</sup> Also, during the period, Diana Bridges, like the majority of European women, worked in the Lagos Censor's Office and equally assisted her husband, who was Acting Commissioner of the Colony during the Great War. Her job, among others, was the issuing of permits for the salt ration to the market women, a situation caused by the rising cost of living, scarcity of salt, and essential commodities.<sup>104</sup>

The LPC and the CWS became an assembly of European women and Lagos women socialites. They promoted social relations and engaged in fundraising for the War Relief Fund and the education of children in Lagos. With the eventual return of peace after WWII, the CWS established the Corona Schools for learning and scholarship. It later became a melting pot of cultures for children of various countries resident in Nigeria. It should be clear from our discussion that European women contributed immensely to the social and humanitarian activities of colonial Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that Jefferies praised the achievements of wives of colonial servicemen, not only in providing, "wifely support for their husbands but also voluntarily as in effect unpaid social workers".<sup>105</sup>

On the social relations between European wives and their indigenous counterparts, it was noted that dichotomy and difference exist due to racial divide, culture, and language. Therefore, European women assumed the role of superior queens (elite) and indigenous wives the lesser queens (order takers). Additionally, indigenous soldiers' wives were excluded in the CWS except the Lagos women socialites trained in Europe.

102 S Leith-Ross, quoted in Callaway, *Gender, culture and empire*, p. 167.

103 Callaway, *Gender, culture and empire*, p. 112; also see, JA Nzemeka, "Gender and empire: A study of army wives in the socio-economic development of Lagos, 1905-1960", *Ife: Journal of the Institute of Cultural Studies (IJCS)* 14, 2021, p. 164.

104 Nzemeka, "Gender and empire", p. 161.

105 Jeffries, *Partners for progress*, pp.155-6.

## 8. EUROPEAN WIVES IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE

Apart from private and public life, European women were also visible in food production and food security of the colony. They cultivated compound gardens to overcome loneliness and as a pastime activity. The compound gardens and enclosures gradually became sites for crop production and animal husbandry. It was from here that European families contributed to food security through meat and egg production, which helped reduce malnutrition caused by tinned food and the lack of vitamins. In the gardens, women planted flowers, perennial fruit trees, grains, and leafy vegetables. In one of the correspondences of Lady Lugard, she noted,

I have begun today to organise some little improvement in the Government House Garden, which is at present merely a cleared enclosure. The black labourers are absurd, just like a crowd of children, but I think I can get on with them and both in the house and garden they seem to be working quite willingly.<sup>106</sup>

Some of the flowers in the gardens included sunflowers, marigolds, petunias, eucharis lilies and convolvulus. The majority of them were imported from Europe, Sierra Leone, and Malta. Larymore also recalled,

I brought from Sierra Leone, 20 seeds of *Clitoria*, the beautiful sapphire blue pea, a tiny packet of *Ipomea quamoclit*, and a few seeds of a brilliant scarlet miniature convolvulus. Their descendants are now spread all over the country, so much so that they have often been mentioned to me as growing wild.<sup>107</sup>

The utility of flowers cannot be over-emphasised, most European families used them as a symbol of love and beautification of tables and homes. It was alleged that Violet Bourdillon maintained a tradition of sending flowers to patients in Lagos hospitals, a practice continued by the family gardener Mr. Tokunbo Ajai even after the Bourdillons had departed Nigeria.<sup>108</sup> Apart from flowers, European wives also planted fruit trees such as guava, pawpaw, oranges, apples, avocado peas, cashews, bananas, mangoes, pineapples, breadfruits, and lemons. Due to the use of these fruits, a colonial officer once advised,

106 Lady Lugard, quoted in Perham, *Lugard: The years of authority*, pp. 77-78

107 Larymore, *A resident's wife in Nigeria*, pp. 238-239.

108 Pearce, "Violet Bourdillon", p. 276.

I consider that the government should provide the necessary funds to make a garden for each official bungalow, should set out the necessary hedges and plant fruit trees, and it would then be reasonable to ask each occupier to maintain the garden.<sup>109</sup>

Most of the fruit trees were domesticated in Lokoja, Zungeru, Lagos, Bussa, and Kaduna cantonments, as well as the colonial Government Reservation Areas (GRA). The challenges of gardening included the use of simple implements, weather and climate, reptiles, and rodents.

Apart from compound gardens, European wives also engaged in animal husbandry. Most of them imported English fowl from Europe because of the nature of African birds. As Larymore puts it,

The keeping of poultry is certain to become, in the near future, a feature of every English household in Nigeria. However, the class of fowl bred in the country in [*sic*] such a wretched one, the birds are small, skinny, and tasteless, and the eggs no larger than bantams', that the importation of good breeds is a very real necessity.<sup>110</sup>

Therefore, some European wives brought a fresh consignment of fowl into the country for meat and eggs. Some of the birds included - Buff Orpington cock, the black Minorca hen, the Houdan hen, the Plymouth Rock cock, and others.<sup>111</sup> This suggests that European wives contributed to the colonial state's food production and food security.

Women also brought pets as companions in the colony, these include dogs and cats. Most of them were domesticated, while others were given to friends and neighbours. They also kept cows, donkeys, camels, and horses. Cows were maintained in the pens for dairy production, meat, and tilling of the ground for cultivation, while donkeys, camels, and horses were used for transportation, sports, and recreational activities. Animal husbandry was also fraught with challenges, particularly, the prevalence of tsetse flies, reptiles and snakes, floods and tropical climate.

109 Burns, *Colonial civil servant*, p. 102.

110 Larymore, *A resident's wife in Nigeria*, pp. 223.

111 Larymore, *A resident's wife in Nigeria*, pp. 223-224.

## 9. CONCLUSION

This paper considered the history of European women in colonial Nigeria. It answered an important question. Contrary to the negative representations of European wives in male-authored works and colonial literature, the case of European women in colonial Nigeria was different. One of the core observations of this paper, even though, it is a contribution to the existing literature, is that European wives in colonial Nigeria offered wifely support to their husbands, and contributed largely to the work of empire, charity, and humanitarian activities. They were also visible in gardening and food production, which contributed to the food security of the colony.

During WW 2, most of these women enlisted into the force to support the war effort and their husbands in the offices as language translators, accounts and administrative officers. Their activities were also conspicuous in the Censors Board, where salt and other essential commodities were distributed as palliatives to the Lagos women.

With the return of peace in post-WWII, white women in colonial Nigeria became actively involved in social and humanitarian activities, expanding the gendered space. They promoted education for the girl-child and subsequently established the Corona Schools and Queens College, Lagos. This study established that the theory of elite is germane in the social inclusion of European wives in the colonial state since they were in the shadows of their husbands' ranks, influencing some of the policies.

The paper revealed that European wives were "partners for progress" and this corroborates the views of Larymore that tropical Africa is for the civilised nation that can take its women along with it. This study concluded that the position of women cannot be overlooked in history, society, and culture because of their multiple roles.