

Dichotomy and Difference: A Social History of Army Wives in Nigerian Cantonments, 1905-1985

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Abstract: This article examines the nature of the dichotomy and difference between officers' and non-commissioned officers' wives in Nigerian Cantonments. It identifies that the interactions between the two groups since the colonial period have long been overlooked in intellectual discourse and knowledge production due to culture and sex stereotypes. The paper argues that the relationship between officers and non-commissioned officers' wives in both colonial and post-colonial periods were marked by rank and social inequality. In this piece, we draw on primary and secondary sources of data, oral interviews, official documents, internet materials, and participant-observation to substantiate its claim, this paper reveals that the case of army officers' wives and non-commissioned officers' wives in Nigeria epitomizes the theory of social stratification in a male-dominated profession. Contrary to the opinion that it is only men that marginalise women, this paper demonstrates that women also marginalise fellow women on account of rank and social construct. It also affirms that colonial encounters reinvented inequality and dichotomy in gender relations and military life. The study concludes that rank is important but social inclusion will foster cooperation and collaboration in a plural society.

Keywords: army-wives, cantonments, colonial-period, dichotomy, Nigeria

Introduction

The interactions between the wives of Nigerian army officers and non-commissioned officers—also known as 'wives of other ranks' in the colonial and post-colonial periods—have not received adequate intellectual treatment in gender and women's history. This is partly due to perception, gender, and culture in a 'regimented' society. Since army wives 'live behind the walls' their actions and interactions with the larger society were not only restricted but closely controlled. Thus, a military wife must be most cautious in expressing an opinion since one is not an individual if married to military personnel but an extension of the husband.¹ As Janowitz puts it, "The military community is a relatively distinct social system that, prior to World War II, traditionally dictated its own patterns of behaviour....And as is true in other social systems, career military personnel and their families internalised the codes and values of this community, incorporating them as a way of life."²

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Military communities across time and space have been characterised by rank and bureaucracy which fostered regimental life, and since the environment was a 'closed' society, the people live a peripheral life. Thus, some African historians who have desired to work in this field have come across insurmountable difficulties placed in their path by ex-officers who were in a position to assist them in their research but rather chose to be obstructive, and therefore we are left with 'histories' written by some would-be historians more as apologia.³ This situation has left most military organisations under-researched on such wide-ranging topics such as Islam and women's seclusion in the cantonments, women and compound gardens in the barracks, and the effects of army mobility on women and the economy, to mention but a few. While it is true that the military community is an ordered system with command and control, the manner women internalise this culture has remained an unending dialogue.

The history of women in Nigerian cantonments during the colonial period is largely described as the history of European wives because of race and rank. In the same way, the history of army wives in post-colonial cantonments is dominated by the activities of Nigerian army officers' wives. The continuity in the social inequality between officers' wives and wives of lower ranks points to the colonial legacy of rank and inequality which began in the nineteenth century. This phenomenon was reinforced by the Victorian gender ideology of separate spheres which assigned women to the domestic sphere and men to the public sphere.⁴ In contrast, women in pre-colonial societies crossed the boundaries of masculinity to become "saviours of their societies," particularly in the time of wars.⁵ Notable examples were Queen Amina of Zaria, Princess Inkpi, and Princess Moremi, among others. Madam Tinubu of Egbaland and Iyalode Efunsetan of Ibadan also achieved power and influence in the economy and politics of nineteenth-century Yoruba society.⁶ Social inequality between men and women in the precolonial period was less conspicuous compared to the colonial years.⁷ Some African scholars, including both Amadiume and Oyewumi, have interrogated gender relations and inequality between men and women in African societies. Oyewumi cogently argues that the fundamental category "woman" – which is foundational in Western gender discourses – simply did not exist in Yorubaland prior to sustained contact with the West. There was no such pre-existing group characterised by shared interests, desires, or social position.⁸

Nevertheless, geography, environment, circumstances, and era influenced cultures and they impacted people in different ways. Studies have shown that as the nature of gender relations changed under colonial administration, the status of women was altered in politics and economy.⁹ Boserup's classic work summarised that "European settlers, colonial administrators and technical advisers are largely responsible for the deterioration in the status of women in the agricultural sectors of developing countries."¹⁰ The Colonial Office also declared in the early years that there was "no place for a white woman in the colony."¹¹

Several works exist on women and the Nigerian barracks but relatively little on the social relations, dichotomy, and difference between officers' and wives of other ranks. Generalised works include colonial literature and memoirs. For instance, Larymore's *A Resident's Wife in Nigeria* discusses among other things, her experiences in the economic and social life of Lokoja Cantonment, northern Nigeria.¹² The work also highlights her involvement in empire-building. But it overlooks the role of indigenous soldiers' wives in colonial cantonments. Flora Lugard's private correspondence to Joseph Chamberlain (then Colonial Secretary) underlines the

situation in colonial Nigeria and poor living conditions of colonial officers “huddled together in the smallest huts.”¹³ She stressed that there can be no trustworthy continuity of administration until men can safely bring their wives and families to the country.¹⁴ Perhaps not surprisingly, despite her position and influence in colonial administration Lady Lugard’s letters did not recall the contributions of indigenous soldiers’ wives to development of the cantonments.

Works written by colonial officers were also no exception in this regard as they did not see women as agents despite their involvement in the work of empire. For example, Burns’ *Colonial Civil Servant* highlights the author’s contributions in Nigeria, Bahamas, and Gold Coast.¹⁵ He also pointed out the challenges of colonial life and the effects of women’s exclusion in the early years of the colony. As a liberal colonial officer, Burns opined that “the officer who has his wife with him, unless she is entirely unsuitable as a wife lives a better and happier life, eats better food, than he can possibly do as a grass-widower. I attribute my own good health...to the fact that my wife was with me nearly every tour.”¹⁶ Crocker and Heussler’s separate works on the British Colonial Service examine the maladministration of the Colonial Office and the high-handedness of some senior officers of the force.¹⁷ Crocker was not favourably disposed to the exclusion of White women and children in the colony because of the effects on families.¹⁸ Yet, the role of indigenous soldiers’ wives in the cantonments did not feature in their works. Pearce’s “Violet Bourdillon: Colonial Governor’s Wife,” and Callaway’s *Gender, Culture and Empire, European Women in Colonial Nigeria* discuss wide-ranging issues on European wives and colonial service in Nigeria without any insights on indigenous soldiers’ wives.¹⁹ Apart from colonial literature, more recent works by Nigerian army officers’ wives also overlooked the activities of wives of lower ranks in their narratives, e.g., Maryam Babangida’s *The Home Front, Nigerian Army Officers and their Wives*, Oluremi Obasanjo’s *Bitter-Sweet, My Life with Obasanjo*, and Miriam Agisogu’s *The Toughest Job in the Military*.²⁰ Nevertheless, a few focused studies do exist.²¹

None of the above authors investigate the dichotomy and difference between officers’ wives and wives of other ranks in Nigerian cantonments which this article attempts to explore. The exclusion of indigenous soldiers’ wives in colonial literature was due to race, rank, and culture. European women in the colonial years did not readily espouse feminist aspirations or interests, particularly when it concerned their African counterparts.²² Thus, the relationship between the two groups was built on suspicion and division which hindered interdependence in the cantonments. Also, the post-colonial literature shows that Nigerian army officers’ wives were interested in the construction of rank, dichotomy, and difference to enable them to create spaces of authority and inclusion in military rule.

This article draws on primary and secondary material from a wide variety of sources, including participant experience. Primary sources are mainly derived from structured interviews and official and army publications. Secondary sources were sourced from the Nigerian Army Libraries and Training Schools, Lagos, Kaduna, and Ibadan respectively. Others were obtained from the NAOWA Secretariats, Universities, and National Libraries in Lagos, Enugu, and Ibadan. As a participant-observer, the author 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. The period of study begins in 1905 as the year

indigenous soldiers' wives could join their husbands in the British West African Cantonments (Nigeria, Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia) following the Wilkinson Commission Report on Desertion of troops.²³ 1985 saw Maryam Babangida, wife of General Ibrahim Babangida (President, 1985-1993) bring fame and glamour to the office of the first lady.²⁴

Since the military is defined by rank and protocols, this study utilizes the theory of social stratification to interrogate the following: How did the Colonial Office invent gender inequality in colonial service? To what extent did European wives construct gender and power in colonial cantonments? How did the Nigerian Army officers' wives create dichotomy and difference in their interactions with wives of other ranks in post-colonial cantonments? To answer these questions, the article is divided into three broad sections. Apart from definitions and perspectives, it discusses the colonial office and the invention of gender inequality in the early years. This is followed by European wives and the development of gender and power in colonial cantonments, then analysis of Nigerian army officers' wives and the creation of dichotomy in post-colonial cantonments.

Definitions and Perspectives

The term 'army wives' as used here refers to wives of both officers and non-commissioned officers in the cantonments. The latter were also known as 'wives of other ranks.' They are a non-arms bearing group and classified in military records as 'dependants' unlike female soldiers who trained to carry arms and could be mobilized at short notice. Officers' wives commanded power and influence compared to the non-commissioned officers' wives whose activities were directed and hardly consulted in the decision-making of the cantonments.

Similarly, 'cantonments' refers to a group of barracks in a particular place. They are special operation units from where troops are deployed for internal security operations (ISO) or peacekeeping missions. They are also arenas of training, leisure, and socialization. In Nigeria, army cantonments are located in Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu, Abuja, Lokoja, Kaduna, and Kano, to mention but a few. Sometimes, people interchangeably use the term cantonments for barracks but 'barracks' only denotes a group of buildings where soldiers (and sometimes their families) live.

In the early years, barracks were located at the outskirts of towns and villages and were made up of mud houses and bush huts because the construction of modern housing had not commenced until 1904. By contemporary times, most colonial barracks had been surrounded by a growing population and they are presently within city boundaries. Yet most of the activities at military sites remained hidden to their civilian neighbours. According to an informant, "we passed by the walls to the market but did not know what goes inside it."²⁵

Social stratification refers to "a systematic inequalities of wealth, power and prestige that result from a person's social rank."²⁶ Drawing on Haralambos et al.:

Social stratification is a particular form of social inequality. It refers to the presence of distinct social groups which are ranked one above the other in terms of factors such as prestige and wealth. Those who belong to a particular group or stratum will have some awareness of common interests and a common identity. They will share a similar lifestyle which, to some degree, will distinguish them from members of other social strata.²⁷

In the same vein, Sorokin noted that social stratification means the differentiation of a given population into hierarchical superposed classes.²⁸ It is a permanent characteristic of any organised social group and may be based on economic criteria, that is, when one focuses attention upon the differentials between the wealthy and the poor. It could also be politically stratified.²⁹ From the above, it is clear that the upper and the lower strata had different lifestyles that represented their status and ranks. Social structure has as its reward, prestige and power enjoyed by the elite to the exclusion of the lower strata.

In Nigeria, officers' wives in colonial and post-colonial periods enjoyed elite status compared to wives of lower ranks who were a subordinate class. Apart from stratification being a characteristic of the military, it is also an established social order designed to bring about discipline and regimentation. However, stratification also encourages divergence rather than convergence since officers' wives were a special group not because of skill or education but simply owing to the rank of their husbands. Therefore, the theory of 'functional importance' does not apply in all cases.

Ancillary to the above is Pareto's theory of elites which denotes "a class of the people who have the highest indices in their branch of activity."³⁰ Pareto divided the society into two classes: "a *governing elite*, and a non-governing elite. The former comprise individuals who directly or indirectly play some considerable part in government, and the latter comprised the rest."³¹ He added that the elite must have some degree of corporateness, group character, and exclusiveness, and must be aware of their pre-eminent position.

As applied to this study, the theories offer some distinguishing differences between wives of officers and non-commissioned officers in Nigerian cantonments. Officers' wives lived in better accommodation with their husbands and through their husbands' rank earned positions in the officers' wives association. Non-commissioned officers' wives had limited power and prestige so remained socially excluded in major projects affecting women in the organization.

The Colonial Office and Gender Inequality

A combination of factors favored the exclusion of women in British West African colonies. Following the establishment of the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) in 1897, a Colonial Office circular letter declared that the colony was "no place for a White woman."³² Senior officers of the force noted that there were inadequate infrastructure and housing to support family life in British West Africa. Burns pointed out that the older officials disliked the idea of wives coming to Nigeria because they interfered with their husbands' work, and prevented them from travelling on duty.³³ Thus, 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 scandal.³⁴ The official viewpoint explained that "wives are often a nuisance in West Africa. Husbands are reluctant to take them travelling in bad country or bad weather and equally reluctant to leave them behind; therefore they travel less than they should."³⁵ It was also said that "a wife's illness upsets the husband and puts him off his work, worst still is the fact that a wife sometimes quarrels with her husband's brother officers or their wives, and in a small community, where one meets socially in the evening the same people one works with during the day, this is disastrous."³⁶

Callaway points out that in male-authored memoirs of the colonial period, European women appear, if at all, as nameless figures in the background while in widely read anti-colonial novels they are portrayed as shallow, self-centred, and preoccupied with their narrow social worlds.³⁷ For instance, Joyce Cary in *Mister Johnson* depicts the lives of colonial officers' wives in Nigeria in a very unsympathetic manner. Corroborating this view, Kipling's plain tales accused colonial officers' wives of self-seeking and flitting from bridge parties to tennis parties "in the hills" while their husbands slaved away "in the plains."³⁸ Gartrell, however, contends that these images apply only to a few colonial wives, particularly those who were actively disliked within their circles. On the other hand, most wives might be better characterized as victims—oppressed by the stressful demands of military mobility and poor living conditions, to mention but a few.³⁹ Oake's *No Place for a White Woman* was written to expose gender inequality. The author visited her husband in the British Cameroons (then administered as an extension of Nigeria) where she found herself the only European woman in the camp.⁴⁰ According to her, "My host, one of the kindest I have ever known, confessed to me that he considered women out of place in West Africa."⁴¹

Based on the above, we can safely interrogate the position of the Colonial Office in two senses. First, patriarchal ideology and stereotypes informed its policy. Second, it was a factor of culture and gendered division of labour in a male-centered profession. Yet the main issue that led to women's exclusion in the colony was the lack of habitable housing and poor infrastructure development. Added to this were the effects of tropical climate and diseases which caused a high death rate among Europeans in the colony.⁴² As Burns summarized, "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'."⁴³ The frustration of Lugard on the infrastructure deficit was expressed in 1902 when he noted:

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...is not prepared to bear the cost of an enterprise which promises good returns, and already shows substantial progress, it were better that it had never undertaken it.⁴⁴

In 1901, the strength of WAFF in Nigeria was about seventy British officers, and 2,953 other ranks. By the second decade of the twentieth century many of them had been incapacitated by tropical diseases and the influenza pandemic (1918-1919).⁴⁵ Criticisms of Lugard during this period were because the solution he brought was too little, too late, and thus the discontent and near mutiny among troops in Zaria.⁴⁶

Agitation for policy change ensued due to poor quality food in the cantonments, homesickness, and desertion of soldiers.⁴⁷ Ancillary factors were the frequent vacation of British officers to England, and the high rate of concubinage and liaison among British officers.⁴⁸ By 1898 over 100 recruits deserted from units of the colonial forces quartered in Western Nigeria, and immediately after the Anglo-Asante War of 1900, desertion reached epidemic proportions in the Gold Coast Regiment, but little could be done to stop the problem.⁴⁹ To forestall this ugly trend, the Wilkinson Commission was established in 1904 to uncover the causes of desertion in

the WAFF. The Commission concluded that poor quality food and homesickness were the main factors.⁵⁰ Thus, it was recommended that women be allowed to join their military husbands in the British West African Cantonments.

This report marked the origins of women in the cantonments in 1905.⁵¹ The arrival of women in the cantonments brought remarkable changes in the system. Firstly, desertion was forestalled. Secondly, liaison and concubinage was lessened. Thirdly, women came with new food culture and crop production in the gardens to supplement tinned or canned food previously distributed to soldiers. With this development, malnutrition caused by lack of vitamins and vegetables became a thing of the past. More importantly, the military cantonments ceased to be a masculine world or bachelors' paradise as previously conceived by the Colonial Office. European wives would only join their spouses in 1920 following the announcement that married life should be the rule rather than the exception in the Crown Colonies and Protectorates.⁵²

European Wives and the Development of Gender and Power

European wives constructed gender and power in domestic affairs, social relations, and economic development of the cantonments. These activities were not only challenging but demanding because of role differentiation in the cantonments. While men engaged in military duties, European wives engaged in domestic routines, supervision of servants, and making the home conducive for their military husbands to retire after work. As Emily Bradley puts it, "Nothing is 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."⁵³ Most European wives also engaged in sewing family clothing, cutting costs of food and drink for entertainment, making efficient use of left-overs, and generally keeping watch on the household budget.⁵⁴ The domestic routine of European wives was closely tied to the requirements of the colony, and since their lives were trapped between two worlds, they embarked on gradual adaptation contrary to the colonially scripted images of Africa as "primitive," and "backward."⁵⁵

In European's quarters there were gardeners, locally adopted families, servants, stewards, and orderlies who worked for their colonial masters. Other neighbours included missionaries, traders, nursing sisters, and colonial civil servants.⁵⁶ European wives also employed the services of local servants in their daily purchases outside the home, and occasionally visited the markets to buy provisions and household items. Indigenous soldiers' wives also cooked and cared for their family; they equally visited local markets to buy essential goods. Women participated in cleaning of their compound and general sanitation of their environment. While indigenous soldiers' wives engaged in reproduction and child-rearing, European wives were denied reproduction because of colonial policy. A ban on reproduction was due to the lack of medical facilities and infrastructure in the colony, even women with children had to leave them behind in England in order to be incorporated into the colonial service.

Apart from domesticity, the construction of a social divide between European wives and their local counterparts affected cooperation and collaboration in the work of empire. Following a spike in malaria scourge in the cantonments, European fears that Africans were vectors of the deadly disease only reinforced the social divide. According to Ukpabi, in 1898 there were forty-

seven British officers and non-commissioned officers in the WAFF. More than half contracted malaria within a few weeks of their arrival in Nigeria and only about 60 percent of these men were able to complete a one-year tour. Eighteen percent died within a year and 22 percent were invalidated.⁵⁷ Consequently, European doctors advised British officers and their families not to sleep in proximity to locals.⁵⁸ Other factors that heightened residential segregation included complaints of noise and smoke.⁵⁹ To forestall this, new neighborhoods were divided into sectors along racial lines, separated by a quarter-mile wide non-residential buffer.⁶⁰ The creation of Government Reservation Areas (GRAs) furthered European wives' air of superiority as they lived apart from local soldiers and their families. This development reinforced race relations in the cantonments in particular, and in the colony in general. The policy also gave rise to bitter controversy and the allegation by both British Indians and Africans that it was merely a manifestation of racial arrogance and prejudice.⁶¹

To sustain the social inequality and bureaucracies between European wives and wives of local soldiers, the colonial administration strengthened the position of the head of indigenous wives (*magajia* in Hausa). The social and political life of wives of indigenous soldiers was in its formative years before the coming of European wives. By 1916, "All African troops, except recruits, had 'wives' in barracks who cooked for their lords and kept the huts and lines. Each company had a head-woman, the *magajia*, who was responsible for the cleanliness of the lines as well as the dress, deportment and general behaviour of the 'wives.'"⁶² *Magajia* served as a link to the Commanding Officers (COs) through the Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM). Consequently, communication between European wives and wives of other ranks was streamlined to pass through the *magajia* to the local women.

European wives created an identity in empire-building and had to learn the social scripts of colonial culture. They also shared the 'signifying system' of their home culture, social class, language, and values in the colony: "Thus 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, dinner, receptions and receiving lines, flag courtesies, and reviews."⁶³ European wives constructed spaces as they interfaced with their husbands in the work of empire. They also used their husbands' rank to create identity in the social relations with the local people bearing in mind that an army wife is defined exclusively to her husband and his rank.⁶⁴

For instance, Lady Lugard in her correspondences to Joseph Chamberlain highlighted the challenges of empire-building and life in the colony.⁶⁵ She also used her influence to campaign for the inclusion of European women in the early years of colonial service. Similarly, Lady Constance Larymore left remarkable achievements in Zungeru and Lokoja Cantonments. She was involved in the delimitation of the Northern Nigeria-Lagos boundary from Aide to Owo at a time the British colonial administration in Nigeria was short of manpower and resources.⁶⁶ As a Resident's wife, Constance Larymore promoted inter-group relations between Europeans and locals, particularly with 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."⁶⁷

Through their contributions, European wives achieved popularity and power in the colony. The inequality between European wives and their indigenous counterparts was

especially visible during the Second World War. The period witnessed the enlistment of European wives where they assisted their husbands in the office and also engaged in language translations. As Smith explained, “So she [my 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.”⁶⁸ Apart from confidential typing and occasional coding and decoding, other European wives participated in the monthly check on treasuries of the division, preparing plans, and compiling statistics.⁶⁹ European wives’ involvement in the war effort also contributed to their integration into the colonial service. In successive years this group consolidated their spaces of authority and influence by engaging in charity and humanitarian activities of the colony. For instance, Violet Bourdillon had already brought together European wives to form the Ladies Progressive Club (LPC) in the 1930s and post-World War II she helped lay the foundations of Corona Women’s Society (CWS) which promoted charity and humanitarian activities in Nigeria.⁷⁰ The CWS later established Corona Group of Schools across the country. European wives also exerted influence on social activities of the cantonments—using the privileges of their husbands’ rank—while wives of indigenous soldiers were excluded.

European wives and their indigenous counterparts were both involved in the cultivation of compound gardens. While European wives engaged in the planting of flowers and perennial fruit trees, indigenous wives cultivated arable crops. For instance, European wives in their enclosures planted a variety of flowers such as cypress vine, zinnias, balsams, marigolds, sunflowers, eucharis lilies, hibiscus flower, and corallita, among others.⁷¹ The fruit trees included citrus, guava, banana, oranges, and mangoes, to mention but a few. The orchards were not only a source of food but also provided shade to European quarters. Flora Lugard told Joseph Chamberlain, “I have begun today to organise some little improvements in Government House garden, which is at present merely a cleared enclosure.”⁷² Constance Larymore participated in compound gardening and animal husbandry to improve food production in the cantonment. She was reputed to have imported some flowers from Sierra Leone and Malta which were domesticated in Lokoja Cantonment.⁷³ Most European wives supervised animal husbandry. Cattle, donkeys, camels were maintained by hired servants. Horses and ponies required care from more specialized workers (*doki-boys*).

Officers’ Wives and the Creation of Dichotomy in Post-colonial Cantonments

In this section, we look at the continuity and consolidation of gender inequality between the Nigerian army officers’ wives and wives of lower ranks in post-colonial cantonments. We address the following questions: How did the Nigerian army officers’ wives construct inequality in their relationship with wives of other ranks? How was this phenomenon sustained over the years? To what extent did wives of other ranks respond to their marginal status?

Officer commissions in the Nigerian Regiment began in 1948 only after much agitation by the nationalists. The delay, according to the policy was caused by lack of training facilities and the indifference of the colonial authorities.⁷⁴ As informants noted, “the British were afraid to raise an officer corps so as not to create a systemic problem that would challenge colonial rule or fight for self-determination.”⁷⁵ By 1960, the Nigerian officer corps had increased due to a quota system and the constitutional provision of Federal Character. The Federal Character

policy in Nigeria was designed to reflect representations from the various constituent States and related communities making up the Federation.⁷⁶ As there were lopsided employments and recruitments into the army, the Federal Character Commission was established to promote equity.

The widespread departure of European wives upon Nigeria's independence gave rise to the formation of the Army Wives Association (AWA) in 1960. Nigerian army officers' wives realized that much more could be achieved collectively. On the one hand, this would prove that the marginalization of indigenous wives in colonial service was due to race, language, and culture. On the other, the AWA enabled them to continue with the work of charity and humanitarian activities of the cantonments. The AWA also mediated the peculiar social nature of military life which made it possible for women to be left on their own many times in a lifetime.⁷⁷ It provided a forum where army wives could achieve a sense of belonging or discuss the woman question similar to the Women's Corona Society.⁷⁸ It was not only to be a social organisation but also a philanthropic association with voluntary membership.⁷⁹ Its primary objectives, among others, were to promote the welfare of troops and families and to foster a bond of friendship, unity, and understanding among officers' wives.⁸⁰

The AWA also aimed at promoting and undertaking social welfare schemes such as sewing, cookery, and handicraft, and conducting health care classes for soldiers' wives. By 1963, the drive to restructure the association and introduce classes had gathered momentum because the AWA's impact was not felt in the larger society since their activities were confined to the barracks.⁸¹ Added to this was the fear that most officers would not allow their wives into the association if it was perceived as simply an outlet for gossip and other trivial pursuits.⁸² Officers' wives chose to exclude wives of lower ranks to address such concerns. Yet according to Maryam Babangida, "We got the name Army Wives' Association (AWA) changed to the current one Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association (NAOWA), because the previous name was simply bland and non-descript."⁸³ With the change and transformation from AWA to NAOWA, several adjustments occurred. These included the introduction of a new logo, identity cards for members, a secretariat office for operations, a code of conduct for members, a constitution, and a magazine to publicize activities, among others.

The importance attached to marriage by military authorities was immense. Marriage was associated with respect and responsibilities, and oftentimes, as a sign of maturity. A married soldier was often seen as a stable officer irrespective of rank and status. Over time, the Nigerian Army recognized the institution and sanctity of marriage and encouraged all NA personnel to uphold it. Accordingly, "An officer must introduce his fiancé to, and obtain the permission of his Commanding Officer (CO) before getting married."⁸⁴ Because of the importance of marriage in the system, when an officer and his wife walk into a gathering of officers, for instance in a mess hall, everyone was expected to rise as a mark of courtesy for the woman, the officer's rank notwithstanding.⁸⁵ The officers rising in salutation may in fact be quite senior to the officer accompanied by his wife. This courtesy was considered a mark of respect for the institution of marriage.⁸⁶ What accounts for the distinctive martial path of Nigeria's post-colonial army was its inability to innovate, instead choosing to continue with colonial culture and dependency.

Another factor that marginalized wives of other ranks was the political machinations of officers' wives. Officers' wives invented a military rank "a step ahead" of their husbands. The

“step ahead” of their husbands helped to check gender inequality between men and women in the cantonments and curtail the habit of officers intimidating women. These ranks were not imagined or merely symbolic ranks.⁸⁷ It is an open secret that most officers’ wives, more often than not, had the influence to recommend promotion or posting of subordinates to lucrative areas using their influence through NAOWA and their husbands. The policy of “a step ahead” in the words of an informant “made some senior officers’ wives influential to the extent that they often play an active role in service politics, juicy contracts, and appointments in the military.”⁸⁸ This practice enabled women to participate in important military ceremonies such as decoration of one’s spouse upon promotion (pipping) and the “pulling-out ceremony” — a tradition to mark the end of an active military career.

Military authorities continued to utilize the position of *magajia*, originally created in colonial cantonments as a link between indigenous soldiers’ wives and the European wives. This policy reinforced the palpable inequality between officers’ wives and wives of other ranks. Matters relating to wives of non-commissioned officers were first presented to the *magajia* for scrutiny, while difficult matters might be referred to the Regimental Sergeant Major and his second in command. Wives of other ranks responded to this phenomenon with indifference as it was part of Army culture. Yet in the Nigerian Air Force and Navy, wives of other ranks attempted to form associations, but this did not achieve wide support due to influence of the officers’ wives association. It appears many non-commissioned officers’ wives concluded that the military was a temporary station in life, hence their frequent indifference to women’s activities in the cantonments, even when such programs were designed for them. Therefore, rank and status became factors in the social exclusion of wives of other ranks as they were marginalized in planning and execution of women’s projects in the cantonments.

Conclusion

This article considered the nature of dichotomy and difference between the Nigerian army officers’ wives and wives of other ranks in the cantonments. In the early years of the force, women were excluded by the Colonial Office on account of gender and culture stereotypes until desertion became endemic in the force due to poor quality food and homesickness. Consequently, the Colonial Office mandated indigenous soldiers’ wives be able to join their husbands in the cantonments in 1905.

European wives were not allowed into the colony until 1920, although some had been admitted on personal recognition of their husbands. With the coming of European wives, the question of race, language, and rank came to the fore on account of the position of their husbands who constituted the military elite. Therefore, indigenous soldiers’ wives became marginalized. This development led to social distance and indifference in the system, even when European wives enlisted in the Second World War to help their husbands in the offices, wives of indigenous soldiers were at the periphery.

Following the formation of the Progressive Women’s Club and Corona Women’s Society, European wives constructed spaces of authority and identity through which they directed their social activities in colonial Nigeria. They did not incorporate indigenous soldiers’ wives in their activities across the cantonments on account of racial prejudice. While some hoped that the

marginalization of wives of other ranks would be addressed in the post-colonial period since it was a colonial construct, there was instead continuity in the culture of social exclusion.

The Army Wives Association (AWA) was formed to integrate officers' wives and wives of other ranks after Nigeria's independence and also serve as a forum for women's interaction in the community. The association later transformed from AWA to the Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association (NAOWA). To create identity and authority, officers' wives decided to exclude wives of other ranks in the association. The new association embarked on empowerment and humanitarian activities in the cantonments and wider society. In the planning and execution of such projects, wives of other ranks were excluded even when trained as lawyers, teachers, doctors, managers, and administrators. This aptly captures the stratification which does not promote cooperation and collaboration in the social system. Military authorities should overhaul the officers' wives associations in the Nigerian army, navy, and air force to accommodate wives of other ranks, particularly in the planning and execution of women's projects. This step would bring about increased social inclusion, cooperation, and collaboration in Nigerian cantonments.

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Notes

¹ Dobrofsky and Batterson 1977, p. 678.

² Janowitz, quoted from McNeil 1976, p. 254.

³ Ukpabi 1966, p. 486.

⁴ Gaitskell 1983, p. 242.

⁵ Awe 2001, pp. 10-11.

⁶ Awe 2001, p. 11.

⁷ Gordon 2001, pp. 271-73; see also Sudarkasa 1989, p. 152.

⁸ Oyewumi, 1997, p. ix.

⁹ Jeater 2006.

¹⁰ Boserup 1989, pp. 53-54.

¹¹ Colonial Office Gazette 1904, PRO/CO446/39; see also Callaway 1987, p. 4.

¹² Larymore 1911, p. 191.

¹³ Flora Lugard, quoted from Perham 1960, p. 82.

¹⁴ Flora Lugard, quoted from Perham 1960, p. 83.

¹⁵ Burns 1949.

¹⁶ Burns 1949, p. 42.

¹⁷ Crocker 1971; Heussler 1963.

¹⁸ Crocker 1971, p. 195.

¹⁹ Pearce, 1983; Callaway 1987.

²⁰ Babangida 1988; Obasanjo 2009; Agisogu 2009.

²¹ Nzemeka 2020; Nzemeka 2015; Nzemeka 2016/2017.

²² Ghosh 2004, p. 738.

²³ Wilkinson Report 1905.

²⁴ Lufadeju 1987. p. 25; see also Udegbe 1995. p. 74

²⁵ Interview with Rachael Okon, Lagos, 3 June 2020.

²⁶ Appelbaum and Chambliss 1995, p. 280.

²⁷ Haralambos et al. 2013, p. 19.

- ²⁸ Sorokin 1959, p. 4.
- ²⁹ Coser 1977, p. 473.
- ³⁰ Coser 1977, p. 397.
- ³¹ Coser 1977, p. 397.
- ³² Ukpabi 1966, p. 490; Colonial Office Gazette 1904. PRO/CO446/39; see also Callaway 1987, p. 19.
- ³³ Burns 1949, p. 41.
- ³⁴ Burns 1949, p. 42.
- ³⁵ Burns 1949, p. 42.
- ³⁶ Burns 1949, p. 42.
- ³⁷ Callaway 1987, p. 3.
- ³⁸ Kipling 1986, pp. 230-32.
- ³⁹ Gartrell 1984.
- ⁴⁰ Oake 1933.
- ⁴¹ Oake 1933, p. 11.
- ⁴² Ukpabi 1992.
- ⁴³ Burns 1949, p. 42.
- ⁴⁴ Lugard 1922, p. 44.
- ⁴⁵ Haywood and Clarke 1964, p. 37; Ohadike 1981; See also PRO/003445/47/13359 Lugard to Walter Long 1 Oct. 1918.
- ⁴⁶ Perham 1960, p. 551.
- ⁴⁷ Ukpabi 1975, p. 100.
- ⁴⁸ Lugard 1922, p. 141; Crocker 1971, p. 62.
- ⁴⁹ Ukpabi 1975, p. 100.
- ⁵⁰ Ukpabi 1975, p. 101.
- ⁵¹ Wilkinson, P.S. 1905; See also Ukpabi, 1975, p. 101.
- ⁵² Debate of 23rd August 1920. In the debate on the Colonial Office Vote, the spokesman of the Colonial Office (Colonel Amery) said 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; see Lugard 1922, p. 142.
- ⁵³ Bradley 1950, p. 85.
- ⁵⁴ Callaway 1987, p. 44.
- ⁵⁵ Martin 2012, p. 43.
- ⁵⁶ Larymore 1911, p. 8.
- ⁵⁷ Ukpabi 1992, p. 28.
- ⁵⁸ Njoh 2008, p. 589; See also Lugard 1922, p. 50.
- ⁵⁹ Lugard 1922, pp. 148-50.
- ⁶⁰ Lugard 1922, pp. 148.
- ⁶¹ Lugard 1922, p. 149.
- ⁶² Haywood and Clarke 1964, p. 316.
- ⁶³ Dobrofsky and Batterson 1977, p. 675.

- ⁶⁴ Dobrofsky and Batterson 1977, p. 675.
- ⁶⁵ Lugard 1922, pp. 82-84.
- ⁶⁶ Larymore 1911, p. 10.
- ⁶⁷ Larymore 1911, p. 85
- ⁶⁸ Smith 1969, p. 125.
- ⁶⁹ Smith 1969, p. 125.
- ⁷⁰ Callaway 1987, p. 218.
- ⁷¹ Larymore 1911, p. 240.
- ⁷² Lugard 1922, pp. 78-80.
- ⁷³ Larymore 1911, p. 238.
- ⁷⁴ Nigerian Army Education Corps and School 1992, p. 100.
- ⁷⁵ Interview with retired soldiers Samuel Erukhanuire, Joseph Anock, and Garuba Sadik, Ikeja Military Cantonment, Lagos, 5 May 2020. (transcripts in author's possession)
- ⁷⁶ Asiwaju 1997, p. 38.
- ⁷⁷ Babangida 1988, p. 63.
- ⁷⁸ Adams 2006, p. 11.
- ⁷⁹ Babangida 1988, p. 63.
- ⁸⁰ Babangida 1988, p. 63.
- ⁸¹ Babangida 1988, p. 64.
- ⁸² Babangida 1988, p. 65.
- ⁸³ Babangida 1988, p. 67.
- ⁸⁴ *Traditions, Customs and Ethics of the Nigerian Army, 2005.* p. 82.
- ⁸⁵ Babangida 1998, p. 15
- ⁸⁶ Babangida 1988, p. 15.
- ⁸⁷ Babangida 1988, p. 15.
- ⁸⁸ Interview with a retired army officer's wife. Ojo Military Cantonment, Lagos. 20 February 2020. (transcripts in author's possession).