

GENDER AND ECONOMIC AUTONOMY: REVISITING THE DOMESTIC ECONOMY OF THE MUSLIM ARMY WIVES IN LAGOS, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article examines the domestic economy of Muslim army wives in colonial and post-colonial Lagos. It is an important aspect of women's history that has not yet been dissected or documented in scholarly production. The oversight is due to military bureaucracy and restrictions, religion and sex stereotypes. This article argues that Muslim army wives have been active in the barracks economy and national development. They also played a significant role in the home and women-centred projects in the barracks. Unarguably, the manifesto of the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) and the Better Life for Rural Women (1987-1993) opened new opportunities for women's economic participation, self-reliance, and space. Consequently, Muslim army wives navigated the cultural norms, the trappings of religion, and domesticity for skill acquisition and small-scale industries in the barracks. They reconfigured their status from "dependants" to "interdependence." Using primary and secondary sources, oral sources, internet materials, government publications, military literature, and the theories of culture and gender roles to substantiate its claim, this article reveals that women can transform their status through government empowerment and loans, women-centred entrepreneurship, and a social investment programme. It concludes that religious and cultural barriers cannot impede women's economic development and self-reliance.

Keywords: Culture, Domestic Economy, Economic Autonomy, Muslim Army Wives, Lagos.

Introduction

This article examines the domestic economy of the Muslim army wives in Lagos barracks. It is an important aspect of women's history that has been overlooked in knowledge production due to sex stereotypes, religion, and the notion that Muslim army wives have no history in the barracks economy and national development. This paper argues that Muslim army wives were active in food production, tailoring services, trade and markets. They circumvented the trappings of culture, religion, and a closed community for skill acquisition and economic livelihoods. In the colonial state, Muslim army wives "live behind the walls" and were actively involved in domesticity and reproduction owing to the Islamic religion and seclusion. However, their experiences did not obscure their participation in the domestic economy, home management, and the barracks projects.¹

Figure I: A map showing the 16 Local Government Areas (LGAs) making up the Lagos Metropolitan Area



Source:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/1/1b/Map_of_the_Local_Government_Areas_of_Lagos.png/630px-Map_of_the_Local_Government_Areas_of_Lagos.png
(accessed 2 March 2025)

Apart from religion, two interlocking factors obscure the history of Muslim army wives in Lagos: First, the barracks are a “closed community” with protocols and restrictions. As Janowitz puts it:

“The military community is a relatively distinct social system that... traditionally dictated its 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

Therefore, it is noted that women’s activities were strictly guided because of a “regimental life.” The same could be said of their actions and interactions with the larger society.³ Against this backdrop, women shared the militarised life of their husbands in the barracks culture and service politics.

Second, there is a negative stereotype of women in general and Muslim army wives in particular. They were seen as unwelcome appendages in the military because the work

belonged to the men.⁴ This representation prolonged female recruitment into the Nigerian Army until the 1960s. Throughout the period, the senior military officers speculated that women would divulge official information to authorised persons, which would be inimical to the service.⁵ Also, from the official viewpoint, “pregnancy was a barrier to the effective performance of women in combat operations because childbearing affected manning and deployment.⁶ When one juxtaposes the above, one would discover that gender, culture, and sex (biological determinism) are the causes of inequality between men and women in society.

Study Area

Lagos is located on longitude 3^o 24'E and latitude 6^o 27'N.⁷ Before the sixteenth century, the Awori, of the Yoruba-speaking peoples, had dispersed from Isheri, a village twelve miles up the Ogun River in search of refuge from a conflict remembered as the “war of the world.”⁸ Since then, tradition has it that the Awori were the first to settle in Lagos because of their fishing activities in the lagoon. It was from this natural phenomenon that the city derived its name. “Lagos” in Portuguese means lagoon and was contracted from the word “Lago de Curamo”, meaning the eastern lagoon.⁹

The population of Lagos in 2023 was 15.9 million, but it is believed to be around 16 to 28 million. Lagos, consequently, developed into a garrison city to protect trade and commerce. It has over thirty military formations comprising the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The British annexation of Lagos in 1861 laid the foundations of a modern army and a capital city. They were saddled with the defence of Lagos, maritime trade, and the British interests. Lagos ceased to be the federal capital of Nigeria in 1991, following the transfer of the seat of government to Abuja.

A combination of geography, military establishments, and ports and harbours facilitated the industrial development of Lagos. And since the 1990s, Lagos has transformed into a megacity with an intermodal transport system that runs from the Island to the mainland. The preponderance of industries and markets made Lagos a destination for Nigerians and migrants from the West African sub-region.¹⁰

We must clarify some concepts used in this paper. For instance, the terms “Muslim army wives” and “Muslim wives” are used interchangeably in this paper to refer to Muslim women married to officers and junior officers in the Nigerian military. Muslim women comprised those of northern and southern Nigeria’s ethnic groups. The term is appropriate in our discussion, and the broader description of the barracks as a mini-Nigeria and a melting pot of cultures. The women were also known as “barracks women” because they lived in the barracks, and the term is popular because of the ‘closed community’ and the restrictions of this group from the larger society.¹¹ An understanding of the lived experiences of these women can best be borrowed from Aderinto’s “subordinated by culture,”¹² as opposed to Ardener’s “muted groups.”¹³ This is why some scholars claim that the “traditional military community moulded family life to the requirements of the profession.”¹⁴

Muslim women are known for the veil, and this depicts them as “women of the veil.” Seclusion is an Islamic practice commonly interpreted as a status symbol. It suggests that the man is wealthy enough to cater for his wife.¹⁵ It is also perceived in some quarters as an agency of women’s inactivity because of the dependence on her husband. On her part, Catherine VerEecke noted that seclusion is meant to keep Muslim women away from other men.¹⁶ Nevertheless, since the 1980s/90s, military culture and social change have transformed the rigid seclusion of the barracks women into partial seclusion because of the position of women in the military and their involvement in public engagements as first ladies and wives of military attachés.¹⁷ It is noted that seclusion is not a barrier to women’s economic development. This is because they manage the home during their husbands’ tour of duty, and participate in charity works and the barracks projects. Therefore, women are indispensable in the barracks culture because of their multiple roles.

This article explores the domestic economy of Muslim army wives in Lagos barracks. It is an important aspect of women’s history because the public is seemingly oblivious to the economic activities of the barracks women. It also contributes to the existing literature on women and the Nigerian economy. This study draws on the theory of culture to interrogate the following:

1. How did women emerge in Nigerian barracks?
2. To what extent did Muslim army wives contribute to the domestic economy of the colonial Lagos barracks?
3. What was the domestic economy of the Muslim army wives in post-colonial Lagos Barracks?
4. How did the Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW) stimulate women’s economic change between 1987 and 1993?

In my attempt to answer these questions, this paper is divided into four broad sections. Apart from the literature review and methodology, section one discusses the emergence of women in colonial barracks. Section two considers the domestic economy of Muslim army wives in colonial Lagos barracks. Section three examines the domestic economy of the Muslim army wives in post-colonial Lagos Barracks. Section four highlights the role of the BLRW as an agency of women’s development.

Literature Review and Perspectives

A vast literature exists on women and the Nigerian economy, but relatively little on the domestic economy of Muslim army wives in Nigeria. Generalised studies that discuss women and the Nigerian economy include Yusuff, who stated that colonialism disrupted the traditional system of production in indigenous Nigerian societies, reinforcing the existing systems of social inequality and introducing oppressive forms of social stratification throughout the state. Though women lost part of their former political authority, they still wielded influence in wholesale and long-distance trade.¹⁸ This corroborates Boserup's assertion that European settlers, colonial administrators and technical advisers were largely responsible for the deterioration in the status of women in the agricultural sectors of developing countries.¹⁹

Extending the idea, Bradshaw argued that cultural factors limit women's rights and engagement in the workplace. According to the author, religion still has a key role to play in determining gender norms in many cultures and fundamentalist views across the spectrum of religions deny women's rights, including rights related to sex, mobility, and employment. She noted that political culture and women's sensitisation are necessary ingredients to give women a voice at the local and national levels and to participate in formal systems of power.²⁰

McIntosh traced the lives of Yoruba women in southwestern Nigeria between 1820 and 1960. The author argued that women were active in the home, gardening, and the market economy because most husbands could not cater for their families and extended relations. Also, women wanted to have resources for maintenance and further production. The work concludes that the Yoruba women accepted change and continuity between 1820 and 1960.²¹ In the same vein, Sudarkasa claimed that Yoruba women were visible in the marketplace and the home. She underscored that every woman, whatever her trade, was expected to keep a few chickens and a goat or two from which she derived a small income for housekeeping.²²

Olawoyin stated that patriarchy gives a general impression of men's rule over women and of male domination over females in society. The author affirms that this social arrangement limits women's participation in significant aspects of development and obscures their contributions to society. The author revealed that African women had some autonomy despite men's domination.²³ Agomo underlined that in African countries, women have a long history of participation in productive work, such as crafts making, cloth dyeing and weaving, subsistence farming, trading and food processing. The author emphasised that traditional African societies encouraged women to develop self-reliance through these endeavours in addition to full-time housework and childbearing.²⁴ Similarly, Oluwasola opined that women have been involved in various agricultural activities, especially food processing and marketing. Despite their contributions to economic and social change, they continued to be marginalised. The author concluded that women's empowerment through loans and government incentives would improve their conditions.²⁵

Focused studies include Nzemeka, Falola, Zakaria, Kriger, and Schildkrout. These works provide perspectives on the economic activities of Muslim women in Nigeria. For instance, Nzemeka revealed that army wives are not only visible in the Nigerian economy but also involved in food production and food security. He suggested that the government should pay attention to the economic activities of barracks women and offer them the necessary support for greater participation in economic development. Other authors highlight that, in Muslim communities in Zaria, Kano, and Sokoto, respectively, considerable production and trade took place in the compounds by women kept in seclusion. Essential services were also provided by women specialists and professionals across various fields. The authors conclude that Muslim women were neither oppressed, subjugated, nor marginalised as sometimes speculated. None of the authors discuss the domestic economy of Muslim army wives in Nigerian barracks, despite their significant contributions to food production, trade, and markets.

To fill this gap, this study draws on an interdisciplinary approach, qualitative data, primary and secondary sources, and participant observation. The primary sources were from several months of ethnographic fieldwork in major barracks in Lagos. Structured interviews, military literature, and government and official publications were also used. The names of the interviewees are pseudonymous because they requested to be anonymous to safeguard their privacy. Secondary sources, on the other hand, include journal articles, books, internet materials, and published and unpublished dissertations.

These materials were obtained from the Nigerian Army Libraries and Training Schools in Lagos and Ibadan. Others were sourced from the National Library, Lagos, the Universities of Lagos and Ibadan. As a participant-observer, the present researcher had a robust stint in the Nigerian military for over two decades, where he collected some of the materials. These sources, as well as participant experience, shed light on the subject and the grey area.

This article also utilised Sherry Ortner's theory of culture and the devaluation of women to substantiate the claim that the domestic economy of secluded wives was stimulated by the Islamic religion and military culture. According to Ortner:

“Women are universally oppressed and devalued. However...it is not biology as such that ascribes women to their status in society, but the way in which every culture defines and evaluates female biology. Ortner argues that in every society, a higher value is placed on culture than on nature. Culture is the means by which humanity controls and regulates nature”.²⁶

However, some scholars have criticised Ortner because she failed to show conclusively that every society's culture is valued more highly than nature. For instance, Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson opposed Ortner's view because, among the Sherbo of West Africa, children were seen as close to nature, while adults of both sexes were seen as close to culture.²⁷ Despite the criticisms, the theory of culture is germane to this study because it is Islamic culture that brought women's seclusion. Military culture also made women “army dependents.” These interconnected factors contributed to gender gaps, inequality, and marginalisation between men and women. Gender roles are the product of the interactions between individuals and their environments.²⁸

Ann Oakley's study suggests that gender roles are culturally rather than biologically determined. This is because comparisons between different cultures have shown that the behaviour and roles of men and women are highly variable.²⁹ This suggests that it is culture and not sex or biological characteristics that determine gender roles. Oakley persuasively opposed Murdock's biological determinants of gender roles. She concluded that, apart from childbearing, there were no tasks performed exclusively by females; therefore, biological characteristics do not prevent women from particular occupations, for the mother role is a cultural construction.³⁰

When one juxtaposes the above, one would discover that gender roles in the military assign separate spheres to men and women. It was modernity and social change that transformed the rigid seclusion to partial seclusion. Hence, Muslim women played a remarkable role in the economy, and community development as first ladies. It is noted that gender is a social construct, while sex denotes the biological differences between men and women.

The Emergence of Women in Nigerian Barracks

At the beginning of the colonial state, women were excluded from the Colonial Service due to gender inequality and the masculine culture of the empire. The confidential correspondence between Lugard and the Colonial Office in 1904 supported the exclusion of women on several grounds. First, most officers were required to travel extensively. Second, the cost of suitable accommodation and social infrastructure was demanding, and third was the unsatisfactory health conditions, coupled with the prevalence of tropical diseases and malaria.³¹ As Burns cogently noted,

“From the official point of view, wives are often a nuisance in West Africa because 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”.³²

Apart from the decision of the Colonial Office, there was an overwhelming dislike of the presence of women, especially European wives, in colonial Nigeria. The arguments revolved around gender, sex, and sex stereotypes as opposed to tropical diseases and malaria made popular in European literature. These interlocking factors led to the colonial policy of “No place for a white woman”³³

We can safely argue that gender inequality gained currency during British colonial rule, and since then, women have remained at the margins of the public sphere, politics and the economy. What the senior colonial officers could not divulge to the British civil society was that they were fighting colonial wars, and women could be victims of attacks. This also hampered the establishment of permanent military accommodation rather than bush and mud huts. This is corroborated by Haywood and Clarke, “They generally lived in tents or bush huts. Fresh food was mostly not available, so diet had to be supplemented by tinned provisions, usually packed in chop-boxes.”³⁴

As Pritchard recalled:

“I arrived in Nigeria in February 1927 and was to enjoy the happiest time of my life there until I returned to my British Regiment. I found I had been posted to the 4th Battalion of the Nigerian Regiment stationed at Ibadan. . . . At Ibadan, we lived in “bush houses“, that is, houses built of mud, with grass roofs and matting doors and windows coverings”.³⁵

It is noted that there was a housing deficit and a general lack of infrastructure for the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) until 1904 when the colonial authorities began the construction of the first modern barracks in Zaria, Nigeria.³⁶

In the intervening years between 1897 and 1904, women's exclusion in the CS triggered interconnected challenges. First was the poor variety of food in the WAFF. Second was malnutrition and desertion of soldiers of the WAFF.³⁷ Third was the homesickness of indigenous soldiers and the frequent vacation of British officers and men to England. It was on this far-reaching problem that Burns said: "During my first period of service in Nigeria, from 1912 to 1923, I went on leave to England six times. In over forty years of colonial service, I have made twenty-five sea voyages to and from West Africa."³⁸

This consequently affected manning and deployment. It also affected the recruitment of indigenous soldiers into the force. To solve the problem of desertion of soldiers, the Colonial Office established the Wilkinson Commission in 1904 to unravel the immediate and remote causes of desertion in the WAFF. This is aptly illustrated by one of the scholars:

"The Commission was mandated to unravel the cause(s) of desertion and proffer a solution. However, it found that among the causes were changes in diet and the separation of soldiers from their families....As a remedy, the committee recommended that every effort be made to encourage the wives to join their husbands".³⁹

The report of the Commission brought a policy reversal in British West Africa in 1905 and the incorporation of Indigenous soldiers' wives into the cantonments.⁴⁰ The policy reversal was necessary because of the colony. It was also a relief to the Colonial Office because the policy affected the colonisers and the colonised on many fronts. However, the European wives were not allowed in the colony until 1920, when "the spokesman of the Colonial Office, L.S Amery, 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"⁴¹

It should be recalled that in the Colonial Service, "Officers were discouraged from marrying while young, the colonial officer – like the army – was apt to consider that an officer married was an officer marred."⁴² To reinforce the argument, the Colonial Office declared: "Lieutenants can't marry," said an army adage. Captains may marry, Majors should marry, Colonel must marry," for a colonel's lady was a social asset but a lieutenant's wife was a financial encumbrance, as well as an occasional embarrassment.⁴³ Given the above, the announcement of L.S. Amery marked a turning point in the lives of European wives and their husbands in colonial Nigeria. It also increased the number of European wives in the colonial service.

It should be emphasized that some European wives were already in the colony on the personal recognition of their spouses but the policy reversal increased the number of European wives in colonial Nigeria. These include Flora Lugard, Constance Larymore, Sylvia Leith-

Ross, and Olive MacLeod, to mention but a few. These women drew their social identity and status from their husbands' work and rank.⁴⁴ The emergence of women in the cantonments brought tremendous changes in the military. In the first place, it erased the original conception of the institution as a masculine world. In the second place, the social and economic interactions between army wives and their civilian neighbours contributed to a robust barracks culture. Third, women's involvement in agriculture and trade improved the food content and nutrition of the community compared to the early years, when fresh food was mostly not available in the cantonments. It should be clear from our discussion that the position of women in the home and society cannot be overlooked because of their multiple roles.

The Domestic Economy of Muslim Army Wives in Colonial Lagos Barracks

Since army wives "lived behind the walls," not much of their activities were known to the general public, especially in the colonial state. Hence, they were seen as intruders in a male-dominated profession.⁴⁵ The economic activities of Muslim army wives revolved around agriculture, compound trade, and exchange. Agriculture, the mainstay of the barracks economy, centred on compound gardens and animal husbandry. "Compound gardens", as the name implies, were carried out by the Muslim women behind the living quarters and undeveloped plots. It varied from about two to four hectares, depending on the size of the household, especially the number of wives it harboured. Unlike a European garden, it is not full of flowers but of diverse food crops and perennial trees of economic, medicinal and nutritional value.⁴⁶

In the barracks, military authorities approved the clearing of fallow lands to prevent mosquitoes, reptiles and dangerous animals. The clearing of shrubs and felling of trees were done by military husbands and sometimes hired labour. Corroborating the view Appah and Adeniyi summarize:

"As is the case with most barracks, farming activities are allowed but restricted to the undeveloped outskirts of the Cantonment. A few animals are raised; these include livestock, poultry, and pigs. The all-year-round crops grown along the small streams include sugar cane, banana, onions, tomatoes, cabbage and rice".⁴⁷

Also, Ishaku Mallo noted that cultivation cuts across slopes ranging from 0° to 15°. Areas used for agriculture are flat, gentle or moderate. Agricultural land use cuts across all types of slopes, provided the land was not built up.⁴⁸ The above suggests that farming and animal husbandry were simultaneously practised in the barracks, and women were the major farmers because the men were engaged in military duties. This aptly explains the theory of culture and gender roles in the barracks.

Other farm contents included cereals, corn, okro, pepper, spinach, yams, leafy vegetables, cowpeas, beans, potatoes, watermelon, and cassava. Women also planted perennial fruit trees, such as mangoes, guava, peas, pawpaw, cashews, oranges, soursops, and medicinal plants (*Effirin*, *Uziza*, bitter leaf, waterleaf, and pumpkin leaves). These crops improved the food qualities of military families, while women sold the surplus harvests to the

mammy markets to earn income. Often, the earnings from sales complemented the maintenance allowance of the home. However, the cultivation of compound gardens and perennial fruit trees is fraught with challenges. The fruit trees were often cleared away by the military authorities due to infrastructure development, construction of housing, and road networks. Sometimes, the trees were invaded by locusts, termites, and ants. The damage affected productivity and disrupted women's economic growth and development.

Apart from crop production, some Muslim wives also played a remarkable role in animal husbandry. They kept some animals in pens and enclosures for commercial purposes, similar to the role of women in pre-colonial camps.^{49 50} The domestic animals include: goats, sheep, rams, cattle, turkeys, pigeons, ducks, and chickens. Domestic animals were a veritable source of food and proteins for families, and when sold in the markets, women earned income for the household. It should be emphasized here that some European wives imported birds into the colonial cantonments to boost food production and food security. The birds included Plymouth Rock cock, Buff Orpington cocks and Houdan hen.⁵¹ The freighting of birds into the colony was because "African birds were skinny, their bone tough, and the eggs no larger than bantams."⁵²

The importation of birds into colonial barracks was a matter of choice and not of demand by the public. The European wives wanted a variety of meat and proteins. For them, European birds were a home-grown choice. They also contributed to livestock production - cattle, horses, camels, sheep, and donkeys. Some animals were used as beasts of burden, travelling long distances, while horses were used for recreational activities. The cattle were used for tilling and dairy production. The challenges of animal husbandry were enormous. For instance, the birds often die of bird flu or avian influenza, colds, floods, and reptile attacks. Sometimes, the animals suffer from mad cow disease, trypanosomiasis, and snake bites. These often hinder women's productive capacity and economic development.

A combination of factors led women into the barracks economy. First, it was to overcome loneliness and the solitary condition of the environment since the men were engaged in military duties.⁵³ Second was the quest for food availability and food security in the home. Third was "finance," the drive to engage in food production for the markets and earn income for the family. As Sudarkasa noted, "Women worked outside the home to meet the responsibilities placed upon them as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, members of guilds, chiefs, or citizens."⁵⁴ Elizabeth Finlayson also indicated that "finance was the major reason junior officers' wives worked. Inadequate salaries, frequent moves, need to purchase items such as furniture contributed to the need for additional income."⁵⁵ Therefore, the point is that women worked to overcome loneliness and engage in food production to complement their husbands' income.

Muslim women were also involved in production, and arts and crafts. They played an active role in the local cloth industry, weaving, knitting, embroidery, and dyeing. Some engaged in plaiting hair, food processing, fruit drinks production (*kunu, zobbo, fura nunu*), and medicinal herbs. The cloth industry among the women was more lucrative than plaiting

hair. It has its advantages over imported cloth, and its value was obvious in the social, religious, and ceremonial events.

Women also derived income by embroidering men's caps which gave them a higher status.⁵⁶ In Nigerian barracks, the *Igbira*, Anam, Ubulu-uku, *Idoma*, and *Ijebu* women dominated the cloth industry. They also maintain apprentices for sewing, weaving, and knitting. Others took measurements and packaging of finished materials. Most purchases were made by the female apprentices and their madams' adult children. They also sold finished materials. According to one of the Muslim army wives, "My adult children were supportive; they carried my wares to the market for sale while I engaged in further production at home."⁵⁷ Another respondent remarked, "I could not have done much without my children. They helped in the market, distribution of goods to customers, and purchase of accessories."⁵⁸ As Barkow summarized:

"A girl's main job is to help with household tasks and to hawk the craft products of the married women of her compound. Since they are secluded, married women must rely on unmarried girls for outside tasks – fetching water and washing clothes ...making purchases at the market and, above all, hawking"⁵⁹

It should be clear that women's seclusion is not a barrier to economic production and development but an agency. It connects women, artisans and apprentices and stimulates further production and engagements. Records have shown that despite the income earned from women's production and sales, they use the money without recourse to the men because it is a complementary resource that does not give them status and power in the public arena.⁶⁰

The reason why most Muslim women use their income without recourse to the men are twofold: First, they believe that the essence of seclusion in the Muslim world view is to restrict women to the domestic domain without economic livelihoods and social interactions with the public. Therefore, a man should provide the needs of his wife and children. Second, most women sourced their capital through personal savings, family, friends, and loans, thus, the idea to surrender their earnings would make them vulnerable because it is a complementary resource.

The plaiting of hair was common among Muslim women in the barracks, due to the variety of styles and convenience. Some plait for pleasure while others plait to earn income. According to one of our respondents, "Plaiting hair was less arduous and requires a little capital outlay and space to commence. Besides, the beauty of plaiting hair lies in the fact that women combined domestic routine and petty trade."⁶¹ Some professional hairstylists enjoyed long queues of customers, especially during the weekends and festive periods. They also engaged female apprentices who specialized in different hairdos. This group assisted in a variety of linkages and publicity. Through this avenue, most women expanded their economic activities.

Another economic production of the Muslim women in the barracks was compound trade or the home trade. The nature of housing in Nigerian barracks created opportunities for economic activities in the deep recesses of the home. In the early years of the barracks, Muslim women were relatively absent in the *mammy market* activities except the compound trade. This is because of the Islamic culture of seclusion and dependence. The *mammy market(s)* was a designated commercial centre in the barracks for military families, civilian traders, and buyers.

Compound trade was the cornerstone of women's economic livelihoods in the barracks. As petty traders, they sold assorted provisions, detergents, pomade, millet, soya beans, barley, beans, rice, oil, beans, and essential commodities. However, their capital base was often sourced from personal resources, family support, and loans from local thrift and cooperative societies. Women purchased most of their goods from neighbouring markets and towns for resale in the barracks. They also bought farm produce from the female farmers in the barracks which they sold to the buyers. The women spread their wares in the corridors and windows, and sometimes inside the kiosks and open cages in front of their quarters. In the evenings, they packed the goods inside the containers and boxes to prevent water, rodents, and pilferage. Because the sales were executed at home, we described the trade as "compound trade," while Polly Hill categorized it as the "Hidden trade."⁶²

The challenges of compound trade cannot be overlooked. First, most women suffer from a lack of capital and collateral for loans. This is why the banks and financial institutions discriminate against women. Consequently, their economic expansion and financial support for the home were affected. Second, the use of traditional storage facilities, such as cages, kiosks, and containers, to prevent rodents and pilferage was also a factor. This is because the containers (metal or plastic) contaminate the goods due to heat and the fact that they were crammed into a small space. Thus, rodents burrowed deep into the cages and containers, damaging the goods, and causing losses. Third, utilizing the living quarters for trading and production hindered women's economic development. This is similar to the predicaments of women in textile production in the Sokoto Caliphate.⁶³ So long as the production sites of Muslim women remained in the deep recesses of private apartments, production would thrive on a subsistence level. Hence, the relative invisibility of Muslim army wives in the government empowerment programmes and debates on Nigerian women.

Another factor often overlooked in the economic and human capital development of Muslim army wives was the frequent posting of military men. The movement and social mobility disrupted women's economic expansion. As "trailing spouses," army wives were bound to accompany their husbands to locations of primary assignments. Therefore, they lose their customers, friends, and suppliers. In the new environment, they must adjust before any economic activities commence. Sometimes, during adjustment, their capital became liquidated or diverted to other home expenses or health matters.

It is clear from our discussion that Muslim women's economic production was hidden because of Islamic practices and military culture. Also, Muslim women's productive capacities remained subsistence and rudimentary because of socio-cultural and structural

factors such as gender inequality, sex stereotypes (biological characteristics or determinism), and the lack of access capital, land, and education. More importantly is the “exploitation of ‘culture’ and religion to propagate the ‘natural’ states of women as wives and mothers, perpetuating a patriarchal view of women’s status.”⁶⁴ Furthermore, Muslim women dread the idea of business expansion because of military postings.

The Domestic Economy of the Muslim Army Wives in Post-Colonial Lagos Barracks

The post-independence period brought change and continuity in production, distribution, and exchange. This was caused by the forces and factors of decolonization, nation-building and social change. The Muslim women continued the Islamic culture of seclusion but still engaged in the cultivation of compound gardens, animal husbandry, trade, and ancillary services until the 1970s/ 80s when the United Nations Decade for Women and the BLRW under the auspices of the Nigerian Army Wives Association (NAOWA) raised women’s consciousness of economic participation, political inclusion, employment opportunities, and gender equality, to mention but a few. They continued the cultivation of maize, potatoes, onions, watermelon, tomatoes, pepper, spinach, leafy vegetables, and perennial fruit trees, as was the case in colonial period. Nigeria’s independence brought with it rising inflation and political chaos. Consequently, more women took to production, manufacturing, trade and compound gardens. The involvement of Muslim women in income-generating activities was triggered by the interlocking factors of low wages of military men and the quest for autonomy. As Kirk-Greene plausibly argued, ‘In January 1899, troops’ pay was: 1/- per diem for privates, 1/1d for L/Cpls, 1/3d for Cpls. and 1/- for Sgts. Of the month’s pay of 28/-, a private was paid in two instalments, of 7/6d and 11/-, while 9/6d went to deferred pay.’⁶⁵

As Miners put it:

“Army pay was not very attractive in 1956. When fully trained, a recruit received 2s.6d. a day, rising to 3s.9d. At this time unskilled daily-paid government labourers were paid 4s.8d. a day in Lagos, 3s.6d. a day elsewhere in Southern Nigeria and it was only in the remotest parts of the North that the lowest government rate dropped to 2s.4d. a day.....A police recruit received 5s. a day, rising to 9s. a day as a first-class constable; a police lance-corporal received 10s.4d. a day – more than an army RSM”.⁶⁶

When we juxtapose the above, it is clear that military pay in the Colonial Service was relatively low compared to the salaries of the Nigerian Police in the 1950s. In the words of an army wife, “Most soldiers began to help their wives in the gardens, felling trees, burning shrubs, tilling the ground, weeding, and making ridges.”⁶⁷

Occasionally, women hired labour when their military husbands were on a tour of duty or when the burden of farm work was stressful. This supports the claim that “Africa is the region of female farming per excellence, where men fell the trees but to women fall all the subsequent operations.”⁶⁸ “The synergy between soldiers and their wives led to the cultivation of root crops and cereals, such as yams, cocoyam, cassava, sugarcane, wheat, barley, and rice, hitherto neglected by women because of the intensive labour.”⁶⁹ Since soldiers discovered

that women earned substantial income from crop production, trade, and markets, cases of wife battering and divorce were reduced in the barracks. Therefore, women began to recover their space and identity in the private and public spheres.

Muslim women continued with animal production, as was the case in colonial barracks. The animals were kept for commercial purposes and as a source of meat for the family. During the religious feasts and naming ceremonies, some animals were sold or given to friends and families. However, animal production is fraught with challenges, such as the attacks of snakes, cats, and carnivorous animals. The birds also suffer from avian flu, cold, and dysentery, to mention but a few.

Another industry that survived into the post-colonial period was the traditional cloth production. The women improved their techniques in embroidery, knitting, and sewing. This was possible through modern electric sewing machines and zigzag technology. Tailoring services were convenient because women could combine domestic routines, child care, and compound trade. It was also profitable because of the employment of female apprentices who engaged in most errands and deliveries.

Fish processing also continued after independence because of its lucrateness. The women used the services of their children in the purchase and sale of fresh and dried fish. While the main labour was done in the backyard, the sales were done by adult children. The major buyers were soldiers' wives and civilian neighbours. Fish processing has its challenges. The use of firewood and the attendant effect of deforestation, harmful carbon dioxide emissions, and environmental pollution. Given the above, military authorities banned fish processing in the barracks in the 1980s. Yet, some women continued to engage in the industry because of the lucrative nature and nutrients.

Nigeria's economy suffered a reversal in the global market in the 1970s. The recession was caused by the Nigerian Civil War which engulfed a considerable amount of money, men and material. Two events followed in quick succession. First was the food shortage in the country. Second was the rapid infrastructure and housing developments in the barracks which affected women's economic activities and land use. Consequently, the food crisis became worrisome leading to striking headlines from the media. For instance, *The Daily Times* dated February 24, 1971, writes, "Nigeria Will Face Food Shortage If..." Reporting on the same matter, *The Editor, Sunday Times*, June 4, 1971, opined, "The Nation Faces the Threat of Famine", and *The Daily Express News*, July 4, 1971, reads, "Save Nigeria from Famine."

Similarly, journal articles did not ignore the danger of food insecurity in the country. For instance, Wayne Nafziger's "The Economic Impact of the Nigerian Civil War"; J. Oguntoyinbo and Paul Richards' "Drought and the Nigerian Farmer"; and Tina Wallace's "The Challenge of Food: Nigeria's Approach to Agriculture 1975-80", to mention but a few.⁷⁰ These scholars treated the food question in Nigeria with utmost concern. The essential question is, how did the military government respond to these reports?

By 1973, the Federal Military Government had launched the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), aimed at ameliorating the food crisis in the country. It was an initiative to assist farmers in the production of food but this effort did not yield the desired results. The Second National Development Plan (1970-74) had also commenced with little achievements, despite the promises made by the government. For instance, most farms and plantations abandoned during the civil war in the East-Central and South-Eastern States had been revived and brought back into production.⁷¹ The military junta had also increased the supply of fertilizers to farmers and extension agents. Yet, food production increased in arithmetical proportion, while the nation's population increased in geometrical progression. Arising from the above, food shortages persisted in the country.

By 1975, General Muritala Mohammed administration had opened the Nigerian borders for the importation of goods and liberalized export commodities and trade. This was perhaps due to the inadequacies of the Yakubu Gowon Udoji Salary Award of 1973, aimed at alleviating the rising costs of living and the plight of the Nigerian Civil Servants.⁷² The emergence of General Olusegun Obasanjo as Head of State in 1976 led to the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) Scheme on May 21, 1976, in Dodan Barracks, Lagos.⁷³ Obasanjo explained that the programme was designed to make Nigeria self-sufficient in food production, and thus urged institutions, colleges, universities and the armed forces to grow their food.⁷⁴ He equally advised traditional authorities, community leaders, and individuals who had fallow land to release them temporarily to institutions and organizations to grow food crops. Obasanjo encouraged individuals to start farming even in their little backyard plots, grow vegetables or keep poultry.⁷⁵

It is noted from the above that Obasanjo's plea for food production and food security was a reflection of the poor state of the nation's economy. However, his efforts did not yield immediate turn-around to the nation's economy but rather stimulated army wives and some civilian counterparts into compound gardens. It also brought the realization that women could engage in farming. However, this scheme was neither improved by successive administrations nor sustained by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture.

A critical challenge in the economic development of the Muslim women during the period was land use. It was caused by infrastructure and housing developments in the cantonments immediately after the civil war. The population of the Nigerian army in 1967 before the outbreak of the civil war was about 10, 000 and by the end of hostilities in 1970, the population was around 250,000 men.⁷⁶ This therefore called for additional housing and infrastructure to accommodate soldiers and their families. Consequently, women's productive activities in compound gardens and compound trade dwindled. The land shortages consequently brought specialization among the women. Some concentrated on food processing, tailoring services, and compound trade, while others settled for gardening, and arts and crafts.

Between 1979 and 1983, Muslim women exploited the open spaces, backyards, and undeveloped plots of land for crop production, animal husbandry, and small-scale or backyard industries in line with Obasanjo's directives. According to a respondent, "We were impressed

by the participation of our wives in crop production, food processing, plaiting of hair, and cloth production because it lessened the expenses in the home.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the Muhammadu Buhari regime (1984-1985), which inherited the Green Revolution Programme of President Shehu Shagari (1979-1984), did not encourage women's economic development because of ideology; rather he placed a ban on export trade and also closed the Nigerian borders. The policy was criticized on many fronts because it did not help the infant industries to grow or the general public to be economically self-reliant. Thus, the closure of Nigerian borders became one of the first policies revoked by the Ibrahim Babangida regime (1986-1993).

Better Life for Rural Women: A Catalyst of Transformation

Following the ouster of the Buhari regime, the Babangida administration introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 to shore up the Naira and exchange rates. The hardship posed by the SAP led to the introduction of the BLRW by Maryam Babangida, Nigeria's First Lady. It was launched on 14-15 September 1987, at the Abuja Workshop, titled "Rural Women on the Move."⁷⁸ She assured the participants that the workshop was the "Beginning of a movement which strives to ensure a better life for the rural woman through the elimination of hunger, poverty and disease."⁷⁹ The BLRW was accepted by the Nigerian women because it shared similarities with the agenda of the United Nations Decade for Women. The commonality centred on women's economic participation, political inclusion, and gender equality, to mention but a few.

The question therefore is, how did the BLRW incorporate women, especially Muslim women into economic production, cooperative society, and exhibitions and trade fairs? The BLRW arrangement was divided into three main phases. First was the social and literacy programme. Second was the acquisition of relevant skills, and third was the economic and financial empowerment. The phase one of the programme dwells on the acquisition of basic learning skills in Mathematics, General Studies, and English. The adult literacy programme was the bedrock for capacity building and skill acquisition. To achieve this, the BLRW utilised many schools in the barracks for adult classes, conducted between 4.00 pm – 6.00 pm Monday to Friday. The timing was convenient because the students have closed from school and the women attended to them and their food before the Adult classes.

On Saturdays, the classes commenced at 9.00 am to 2.00 pm. The time offered women quality time because the children were at home and most military husbands were off-duty.⁸⁰ The instructions taught in the schools were critical to women's development because it is related to their day-to-day transactions. More importantly, it offered army wives the opportunity to fulfil their dreams, especially Muslim women who were unable to complete their primary and secondary schools before marriage. The phase two of the program focused on training and acquisition of relevant skills, in waste-to-wealth, tailoring services, weaving, hat production, soap making, pomade, and disinfectants.⁸¹ Others trained in pottery, leather works, local cloth production (*Adire*, *Akwa-ocha* and *Batiks*), agriculture, fish farming, photography, hairdressing, interior decoration, catering and hospitality business, and arts and

crafts. The important aspect of the programmes was that trainees were encouraged to use local raw materials available in their localities.

Phase three of the BLRW programme was the last stage. With the successful acquisition of literacy and skill acquisitions, certificates were issued to the trainees. This qualified the women for membership of the NAOWA Cooperative Society and financial empowerment of the Peoples' Bank Plc.⁸² The cooperative societies were zoned, and barracks women were encouraged to register in their zones for effective monitoring. This exercise was managed by accredited agencies, organized private sectors, financial institutions, women's cooperative societies, and community associations.⁸³ These were the nearest grassroots through which army wives were identified and issued cooperative cards. This is because the BLRW under the auspices of NAOWA was women-centred scheme that operates via cooperative societies.

During the period, the BLRW launched 7, 635 cooperatives, 997 cottage industries, 1751 new farms and gardens, 487 new shops and markets, 419 women's centres, and 163 social welfare programmes. Through these programmes, Muslim women transformed their status, and circumvented the veil, domesticity, and culture, for economic inclusion. The women applied the knowledge acquired from the BLRW Conferences, Seminars, and workshops. An important development of the period was that Muslim women challenged the concept of social exclusion, seclusion, and dependents. This brought interconnected changes because women abandoned the traditional system of rearing birds and livestock production for modern poultry and animal husbandry at the backyards. Birds were kept in poultry cages for commercial purposes and the scientific production method led to the use of scientific officers and veterinary doctors who cared for the birds every week, there were additional labour that managed the birds for a fee and this brought improved production of chickens and eggs, shops for the storage of eggs. The interactions between Muslim women, buyers, and feed sellers brought new ideas and friendships.

Livestock farming centred on the production of goats and sheep. The animals were kept in the pens or enclosures where women cared for them and provided their feeds unlike the colonial years when the animals wandered about. These animals were often sold in the markets or to officers celebrating promotions, naming ceremonies, and marriage celebrations. Apart from animal husbandry, women also engaged in the manufacturing and production of soap, pomade, candles, and disinfectants. They constructed makeshift workshops in the backyards; hence we called it the backyard economy. The production process was much easier for women because of the training, handbook and précis handed to them during the BLRW workshops and trainings.

Others engaged in fish production using plastic tanks and dug-out wells at the backyards. Here, they bred assorted fish and received their buyers in the farms located at the back of their homes. Women derived income from fishing with which they support the home and their welfare. The same could be said of Muslim women in bread production and confectionaries. The women used electric ovens for production and hired buses, tricycles, for distribution. The advantages of electric ovens are immense because there were no carbon emission, air pollution, or heat compared to the traditional mud ovens of firewood or coals. It

also offered Muslim wives privacy since the finished products were sent to the shops, schools and other retail outlets. Apart from generating income, bread also serve as food for the families. The involvement of the Muslim women in economic livelihoods contributed to the barracks economy and the economic history of women in Nigeria. It helped women create spaces of inclusion from the private domain to the public domain, which partly supports Barkow's claim that "Women have changed from farmers to craftsmen, and young girls have changed from farmers to vendors of the products of their elders."⁸⁴ It should be clear from our analysis that Muslim women in Nigerian barracks were not subordinated by culture; neither did they remain at the margins of development because they circumvented the trappings of culture, religion and sex stereotypes for economic self-reliance.

Conclusion

This article considered the domestic economy of Muslim women in Nigerian barracks. One of the core observations of this paper is that scholarly treatment of the economy of Muslim army wives in Nigeria has been overlooked in knowledge production due to a closed community, restrictions, and culture. Therefore, this paper is a contribution to the existing literature on Nigerian women and the economy. The study answered an important question. Contrary to the thinking that Muslim women were invisible in the Nigerian economy, this paper demonstrated that they played an active role in agriculture, trade and markets. The subsistence economy of Muslim women was stable, despite the cash crop economy of the colonial state.

The post-independence economy also showed continuity and change. Following the impact of the United Nations Decade for Women and the BLRW, women's participation in politics and economy, Muslim women in Nigerian barracks transformed their status from the private sphere to the public sphere, to participate in the literacy program, skill acquisition, and cooperative societies of the BLRW. This led to the "backyard industries," agriculture, and compound trade. The challenges of women's economic livelihoods include the postings of military husbands, lack of loans and the use of simple equipment for production and manufacturing.

This article established that the government should recognise women as change agents instead of victims. Also, feminists should focus on the theories of economic participation, rather than the theories of gender inequality. The status of Muslim women can be improved through government empowerment and women-centred social investment programmes. This paper concluded that seclusion is not a barrier to women's economic development and self-reliance.

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Biodata

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