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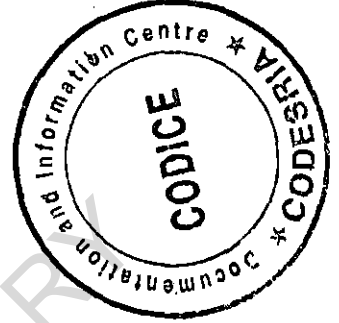
**White Women and Domesticity in Colonial
Zimbabwe : c. 1890 to 1980**

**June
2015**

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**White Women and Domesticity in Colonial Zimbabwe, c.1890 to
1980**



Ushehwedu Kufakurinani

**A Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in the subject of Economic History in the
University of Zimbabwe**

Supervisors: Pius S. Nyambara and Teresa Barnes

June 2015

Abstract

The study analyses white women's experiences in colonial Zimbabwe in relation to domesticity. As in most new colonial territories, one of the mandates of the coloniser was to domesticate 'the wild' (that is the indigenous populations and their environment) and make the conquered areas ideal for settlement and exploitation. The civilising mission was central to the project of domesticating the empire. The domestication of empire, however, was more complex and went beyond the mere extension of western civilisation and the taming of the physical environment. It also manifested itself in gender relations within the British Empire and derived its major characteristics from Victorian culture. In the context of gender analysis, domesticity defines women's proper place as the home and has a potential to restrict women's options. The study demonstrates that in reality, domesticity was more complex and went beyond the relegation of white women to the home or so-called private sphere. The domestic ideology, like elsewhere, took different forms within Rhodesian society and these shaped white women's experiences in very complex ways. White women also appropriated, challenged and deployed this ideology as well as engineered its reformulation over time. There was a continuous dialogue between ideology and white women's experiences. On the whole, the study inserts white women in the colonial narrative and demonstrates that there is an incomplete story on colonialism when these women are absent in this narrative. White women clearly had a huge influence on the social, economic and political development of the colonial societies and yet there has been little rigorous academic effort to appreciate their experience, roles and status particularly in colonial Zimbabwe. This thesis uses largely empirical evidence drawn from a multiplicity of primary and secondary sources such as extensive interviews, internet sources, archival records and published works on Southern Rhodesia and other parts of the British Empire.

Dedication

To my family – Sheron my wife, children (Grace and Daniel), siblings (Mashia and Gratitude), in-laws and parents

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Acknowledgments

The writing of this work has been made possible by a number of contributions from several people. Four of these were probably cornerstones in shaping the writing of this piece, playing the role of supervisors in one way or the other. The first person is P. Nyambara one of my supervisors. I am so grateful for his meticulous reading of my chapters and his patience with my errors. His swift responses to my drafts always challenged me to be even more productive. Secondly, I am also grateful to Terri Barnes as co-supervisor to my work. From the onset, her accepting to take me in as her supervisee humbled me, given her very tight schedule. She also assisted me with relevant reading and research material.

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List of Abbreviations

- BSACo – British South African Company
- CSWA - Civil Service Women's Association
- FAWC – Federation of African Women's Clubs
- FWIR – Federation of Women's Institutes of Rhodesia
- FWISR – Federation of Women's Institutes in Southern Rhodesia
- IFUW – International Federation of University Women
- ISP – Irene Staunton Papers
- MRP – Muriel Rosin Papers
- NAZ – National Archives of Zimbabwe
- NCWSR - National Council of Women of Southern Rhodesia
- NFBPWR (B&PW) – National Federation of Business and Professional Women of Rhodesia
- NHR – National Housewives Register
- NUF – National Unifying Force
- PSA - Public Service Association
- RAUW – Rhodesia Association of University Women of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (later Association of University Women)
- RHL – Rhodes House Library
- RWL – Rhodesian Women's league
- SOSBW – Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women
- WI(s) – Women's Institute(s) (short for FWISR)
- WNSL - Women's National Service League
- WVS - Women's Voluntary Services of Central Africa
- ZAPU – Zimbabwe African People's Union

Map of Rhodesia¹



¹ D. Caute, *Under the Skin. The Death of White Rhodesia* (London, 1983)

INTRODUCTION

This study analyses white women's experiences in Southern Rhodesia¹ in relation to domesticity from the 1890s to 1980. When the Pioneer Column² came to occupy what is now Zimbabwe in 1890, much of the territory was considered by the coloniser to be virgin and untamed.³ As in most new colonial territories, one of the mandates of the coloniser was to domesticate 'the wild' (that is the indigenous populations and their environment) and make the conquered areas ideal for settlement and exploitation.⁴ The civilising mission was central to the project of domesticating the empire. In her foreword, written in 2002, to an unpublished autobiographic manuscript on an early Rhodesian family, Edone Ann Logan, for example, expressed pride in the "fore fathers and mothers" who played part "in the civilising and development of the untamed land to which they came."⁵ The domestication of empire, however, was more complex and went beyond the mere extension of western civilisation and the taming of the physical environment. As I demonstrate in this thesis, it also manifested itself in gender relations within the British Empire and derived its major characteristics from Victorian culture.

¹ The country had four names throughout the period under investigation namely Southern Rhodesia (1890 – 1965), Rhodesia 1965 – 1978), Rhodesia-Zimbabwe (1978-1980) and finally Zimbabwe (since 1980). The first two names are used interchangeably in this thesis.

² The pioneer column was a group of paramilitary volunteers recruited by Cecil John Rhodes, one of the key individuals behind the occupation of Southern Rhodesia. Each of these volunteers was promised 15 gold claims and 3000 acres of land for participating in the conquest of Mashonaland.

³ For an interesting discussion on sexual and gendered images of empire see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁴ McClintock also makes an interesting analysis of European colonial conquests as domesticating projects. See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.

⁵ Sheila Hornby, "The Yesterdays" (unpublished manuscript). This manuscript is not numbered. I am grateful to Edone Logan for a copy of this interesting story of the Days family. This family was made up of five sisters and a brother. They came to Southern Rhodesia in 1914 and the manuscript gives detailed stories of their everyday experiences.

Within gender relations in the empire, domestication manifested itself as the domestic ideology also known as domesticity and sometimes referred to as the cult of domesticity.⁶

Noting the significance of the Victorian culture, particularly the domestic ideology in shaping British colonial societies, Anne McClintock writes:

The cult of domesticity... became central to imperial identity, contradictory and conflictual as that was, and an intricate dialectic emerged. Imperialism suffused the Victorian cult of domesticity and the historic separation of the private and the public, which took shape around colonialism and the idea of race. At the same time, colonialism took shape around the Victorian invention and the idea of home.⁷

Thus for McClintock, this cult of domesticity was “an indispensable element both of the industrial market and the imperial enterprise”⁸ and adds that “... gender dynamics were from the outset, fundamental to the securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise.”⁹ This study grapples with these claims by McClintock, demonstrating the extent Victorian domesticity was reproduced in the Southern Rhodesian context, the nature of its impact and the responses of men and women to the ideology. By and large, this ideology was always contested, negotiated and sometimes expediently reformulated. This confirms John and Jean Comaroff’s observation that the making of colonialism is “in serious part a product of struggles amongst dominant ideologies and their perpetrators.”¹⁰ In Southern Rhodesia and the empire at large, domesticity was one such dominant ideology neatly woven with the ‘civilising’ mission.¹¹ In the words of Margaret Strobel, “the tasks of homemaker and mother

⁶ These terms are used interchangeably in this thesis.

⁷ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 36.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 5.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 7.

¹⁰ John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, “Images of Empire, Contests of Conscience: Models of Colonial Domination in South Africa”, in F. Cooper and A. L. Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire and Colonial Cultures in Bourgeois World* (California: University of California Press, 1997), p. 192

¹¹ A number of works have been written that examine and critique the concept of imperialism as a civilising mission in the British Empire. Some of these works include Terence Ranger, “The Invention of Traditions in Colonial Africa”, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1991); Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of*

had even greater implications for preserving 'civilisation' when carried out in the outposts of the empire."¹²

This study attempts to address a number of issues. It helps to explain the workings of domesticity and, to some extent refine some of our understandings of the ideology. Throughout this thesis it is emphasised that the domestic ideology was a significant shaper of the experiences of white women within and beyond the so called private spheres. These experiences were also important in shaping the colonial terrain. The study thus challenges both colonial and nationalist historiographies which tend to exclude the analysis of settler women and their contributions to colonial society. It also adds to the growing volume of research which aims to mainstream settler women's history. Even when other histories such as those of African women or those that engaged with the gender aspects of colonialism began to take shape in the mid-1990s, white women were absent or made brief appearances in Zimbabwean historiography.¹³ This is probably because, white women were part of the privileged classes and, therefore, were seen as willing accomplices in the oppression of the African population. By analysing the colonial experiences of white women, the study also contributes to discourses on white femininity and by extension the construction of whiteness particularly in colonial societies.¹⁴ In this way, this study adds another dimension to Zimbabwe's historiography.

Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian England (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹² Margret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 1.

¹³ Some of the works that have been written on African women in colonial Zimbabwe include Elizabeth Schmidt, *Peasants, Traders, and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1992); Diana Jeater, *Marriage, Pervasion, and Power: The Construction of Moral Discourse in Southern Rhodesia 1894-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and Teresa Barnes, *"We Women Worked so Hard": Gender, Urbanization, and Social Reproduction in Colonial Harare, Zimbabwe, 1930-56* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999).

¹⁴ I make detailed examination of these aspects later in this introductory chapter.

As will be shown below, many scholars on women/gender/feminist studies have engaged with the concept of domesticity. Given the extent of debates on domesticity, one could easily see it as an exhausted concept. However, the empirical evidence provided in this study demonstrates that the subject of women's domesticity remains complex and can be appreciated better through continued case by case analysis which helps challenge universal theorisation of the workings of the domestic ideology. Karen T. Hansen sees domesticity as something that alters "in the face of a combination of processes involving shifting metropolitan discourses on empire, on-going changes within the colonies, and tensions inherent in their very enterprises."¹⁵ It is this 'altering' that makes it necessary to avoid universal conclusions on the workings of ideology. Continuous investigation of different case examples helps to unpack some of the intricacies of domesticity and understand the contexts within which this ideology functions. In brief, the 'why' and 'how' of the forms that domesticity can take over time and space can be addressed more accurately from a case study as opposed to universal theorisation of this ideology.

The use of domesticity in this thesis as a lens to understanding the experiences of white women in Southern Rhodesia is one effort towards the continuous investigation of the workings of the domestic ideology within societies. As noted, domesticity was certainly an important force in shaping the gender terrain within settler societies particularly in relation to white women's roles and status. In her South African study, Helen Dampier makes an observation, applicable to most settler societies that, "Settler women embraced their civilizing/domesticating role. Sometimes this took the form of direct domestic education, as in the training of servants, sometimes women merely provided a model of domesticity, from

¹⁵ Karen T. Hansen, "Introduction: Domesticity in Africa", in Karen T. Hansen (ed.), *African Encounters with Domesticity* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), p. 8

which it was hoped that Africans would learn.”¹⁶ P. Levine notes that part of white women’s domestic function in the colonies involved duplicating western life, “the growth in the number of women living in the colonies was accompanied by a sense of domestication – bringing ‘home’ to the empire in quite literal ways.”¹⁷ Apart from understanding the colonial terrain, the thesis also makes appreciate, to a certain extent, the nature of British colonialism.

Domesticity interacted with other forces such as race and class, in shaping the experiences of white women. As McClintock postulates, social categories do not exist in privileged isolation as the existence of each category is in social relation to other categories.¹⁸ Jane Haggis is also sceptical about focusing on gender (in this case domesticity) at the exclusion of race or class, noting that this “does little to capture the relations between women across the colonial divide”.¹⁹ The thesis also acknowledges this interplay of race, class and gender in shaping white women’s experiences.

Interestingly, societies continue to debate domesticity for women (what has been termed the ‘New Domesticity’).²⁰ More recently the debates have been taking place on social networks, various internet blogs and platforms and this confirms the continued topical nature of this issue.²¹ Thus although the subject of domesticity received wide debate among scholars as early as the 1970s, the last word is far from being said. Some old arguments about women and motherhood are also resurfacing. Writing in 2005, Hilde Heynen noted that “reality...

¹⁶ Helen Dampier, “Settler Women’s Experiences of Fear, Illness, and Isolation, with Particular Reference to the Eastern Cape Frontier, 1820 – 1890” (MA Diss., Rhodes University, 2000), p. 53.

¹⁷ Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Diseases in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 233.

¹⁸ Dampier, “Settler Women’s Experiences”, p. 9.

¹⁹ Jane Haggis, “White Women and Colonialism: Towards a Non-Recuperative History”, in Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (eds), *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 164.

²⁰ A recent work that tries to grapple with women’s domesticity is Emily Matchar, *Homeward Bound: Why Women Are Embracing the New Domesticity* (Simon & Schuster, 2013).

²¹ See, for example, newdomesticity.com/ accessed 25 Nov 2013 and http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-11-25/opinions/35282982_1_jam-new-domesticity-domestic-work, accessed 25 November 2013 (Appendix A).

shows the continuing strength and influence of the ideology of domesticity.”²² This reality however, is, in Heynen’s words, “nowadays tacit rather than explicit.”²³ It is important to indicate from the outset that while domesticity was a strong ideology shaping white women’s experiences in Southern Rhodesia, there was a continuous dialogue between white women and this ideology in which the former also helped shape the latter by negotiating and contesting its ‘rough’ edges.

Southern Rhodesia as a destination for white women

Southern Rhodesia was established as a settler colony like French Algeria and British Kenya. For this and other reasons, the migration of white women to Southern Rhodesia and their domestic roles as mothers of the imperial race, among other things, was greatly valued.²⁴ The early colonial environment was generally not considered ideal for white women and children, given the shortage of what were considered basic necessities and the prevalence of disease. Thus in the first two years of colonisation, white women were barred from the colony. The result was that the sex ratio in the colonies was acutely in favour of men, at least before the Second World War.²⁵ In Britain, there too existed limited employment opportunities for women and sex imbalances in favour of women largely as a result of large scale migration of men to the colonies.²⁶ As a result of the latter, there were “surplus” women of marriageable age in the metropole.

²² Hilde Heynen, “Modernity and Domesticity: Tensions and Contradictions” [*colloquium 2005 colloque 2005*] *Sophia*, p. 111.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ For an assessment of white women’s immigration in the British Empire see Julia Bush, “‘The Right Sort of Woman’: Female Emigrants and Emigration to the British Empire, 1890 – 1910”, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1994). In non-settler colonies such as Nigeria, the settlement of white women was actually discouraged at least up to the Second World War. See Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire*.

²⁵ John Pape notes that it was not until 1921 that white women population reached 40 per cent of the settler population. See Pape, “Black and White”, p. 715. See also A. S. Mlambo, *White Immigration into Rhodesia: From Occupation to Federation*. (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 2000).

²⁶ Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire*, p. 25.

Metropolitan and colonial governments and various organisations such as the Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women (SOSBW) went on an aggressive campaign to help increase the presence of white women in the colonies. This included sponsored passages, advertising and putting in place logistical measures to facilitate smooth migration to the colonies. In 1937, the SOSBW claimed that it had been responsible for the immigration into Southern Rhodesia of some 2, 223 women and children since 1901 and noted that this figure indicated “the remarkable value of the society.”²⁷ Aside from being wives to the Rhodesian men, white women were also needed to fill a growing demand for white female labour in the traditional feminine sectors such as teaching, nursing and clerical administrative work. The emigration promoters in Britain were particular about the type of woman to be sent to the colonies arguing that, “the emigration of the wrong sort of woman served only to impede the proper domestication of the empire.”²⁸

Apart from the incentives and assistance provided by the state and non-state institutions, personal reasons also drove white women to Southern Rhodesia; these ranged from joining family, seeking employment, adventure, marriage or migrating at a young age with parents. As Vron Ware indicates, “While there was always the prospect of danger and risks in travelling around the world ... it was invariably measured against the likelihood of poverty and unemployment at home.”²⁹ Many women also left for the colonies to escape the limitations imposed by domesticity in the industrialised nations and they perceived the

²⁷ NAZ, GEN-P/SOC, Report of the Rhodesia Committee of the Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women, 1935-1937 p. 11. For more details on the works of this society also see G. F. Plant, *SOSBW: A Survey of Voluntary Effort in Women's Empire Migration* (London, 1950).

²⁸ Lisa Chilton, “A New Class of Women for the Colonies”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* Vol. 31, No. 2 (2003), p. 40.

²⁹ Ware, “Beyond the Pale”, p. 127.

colonies to be relatively liberal and less stringent about women's roles and status in society.³⁰ Sara Mills confirms this observation indicating that, "In many accounts of women travelling and in autobiographical and fictional accounts, British women stress the freedom which they found within the colonial context, which seemed free of some of the constraints of British society."³¹ Chilton notes that British women in the colonies had the freedom to be "unconventional (within strict parameters), unbound by archaic social environments and the dictates of respectable society."³² These perceived liberties were used to attract more women to the colonies. Chaudhuri, however, cautions us from over-emphasising the potentially liberating effect that the colonies had upon white women noting that, "in reality women often merely exchanged the restrictions of Victorian society for those of the colonial world."³³

Once in the colonies such as Southern Rhodesia, these women constituted different groups and classes partly shaped by a range of backgrounds, including Jewish, Greek, British, French, Australian and Afrikaans. Thus, they were not homogeneous and their experiences differed from class to class and from region to region in the colonies. For Irene Staunton, "All the two words 'white women' can signify are gender and skin colour but, as anywhere else in the world, women differed significantly from each other in terms of education, class, origin and family, marriage and personality."³⁴ While this was true it must be acknowledged that in the colonies, race tended to be a powerful force around which white communities converged and was used to justify 'othering' everyone outside the dominant race. In colonies such as Southern Rhodesia, the differences in class, education, origin and family were often

³⁰ Personal Interview with Anna Brazier, Harare, 15 August 2011. Anna goes on to make a comparison of the lifestyles in Europe and Southern Rhodesia and notes that for instance, women in Southern Rhodesia had the drudgeries of housework lightened by domestic servants and as such had relative freedom of movement while in Europe it was very expensive to have domestic servants.

³¹ Sara Mills, "Gender and Colonial Space", in Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*, p. 697. See also Sara Mills, *Gender and Colonial Space* (Manchester University Press, 2005).

³² Chilton, "A New Class of Women for the Colonies", p. 50.

³³ Nupur Chaudhuri, "Memsahibs and Motherhood in Nineteenth-Century Colonial India", *Victorian Studies* Vol. 31, No. 4 (1998), p. 519.

³⁴ Autobiographical note by Irene Staunton sent by email as attachment <weaver@mango.zw> (4 April 2012).

overlooked by commonality in race and “a common commitment to material self-improvement and a pleasant lifestyle”.³⁵ As more and more women flocked into the colonies from their diverse backgrounds, they became an important force in shaping and influencing ideological, social, economic and even political trends. In Southern Rhodesia, the bulk of the white community was of British stock and, therefore, influenced largely by British culture.

The following sections explore in detail the domestic ideology and deal with three aspects. First, I discuss the working definitions and parameters of the application of the concept of domesticity in this thesis. Second, I demonstrate the origins of the domestic ideology and, finally, discuss the scholarly debates surrounding this ideology. The empirical evidence which demonstrates the nature and extent of impact of the domestic ideology in the Southern Rhodesian context will be the subject of discussion in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Writing gender and empire: An overview

The perception of white women as beneficiaries and accomplices in the colonial order partly explains their exclusion in many scholarly works on the colonial period. Published works on white women’s colonial experiences in Africa have thus been a recent development in the study of gender and empire (sometimes called gender and colonialism or gender and imperialism).³⁶ This subject can also be taken as a category of what has been called imperial studies but the difference is that the former makes a deliberate effort to re-insert the experiences of women in relations to the menfolk within the empire. Philippa Levine describes the subject of gender and empire as not only involving re-populating the colonial

³⁵ Peter Godwin and Ian Hancock, *'Rhodesians Never Die'. The Impact of War and Political Change on White Rhodesia c1970-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 50.

³⁶ For a critical review essay on works on gender and empire see Formes, B. Malia. “Beyond Complicity Versus Resistance: Recent Work on Gender and European Imperialism”, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1995), pp. 629-641.

stage “with a more diverse cast of historical protagonists”, but also an exploration of “social processes and power using sexual differences as a key but by no means unique analytic.”³⁷ The initial works on gender and empire, however, sought to re-inscribe white women in the writing of colonial history by giving them visibility in imperial studies and thus simply replacing male with female protagonists. Haggis is, however, critical of such writings arguing that, “Presenting voices of white women in a singular authenticity reduces the historical narrative to series of parallel tracks essentially unrelated to each other.”³⁸

Scholars such as C. Oliver were pioneers in the study of white women in the colonies (particularly outside India) and her study discussed their historical experiences as explorers, missionaries, and adventurers.³⁹ Another pioneering work is one edited by S. Ardener and H. Callan.⁴⁰ Ardener and Callan’s book explores the experiences of white women, particularly the wives of the colonialists. They argue that these women were incorporated, meaning that their roles and status were derived from the status of their husbands.⁴¹ This analysis is persuasive but must not be universalised. As Karen Hansen notes, the notion of incorporation helps to highlight the centrality of gender in colonial projects.⁴² The notion, however, universalises the experiences of wives in a colonial setting and it suggests a lack of independent action or functioning among white women who were wives, and also assumes that these wives were passive recipients of incorporation. Evidence in this thesis demonstrates some degree of independence and flexibility of colonial wives in their roles in

³⁷ Philippa Levine, “Introduction: Why Gender and Empire?”, in Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 1.

³⁸ Haggis, “White Women and Colonialism”, p. 164. Also see Haggis, “Gendering Colonialism or Colonising gender? Recent Women’s Studies Approaches to White Women and the History of British Colonialism”, *Women’s Studies International Forum* Vol. 12 (1990), pp. 105-112.

³⁹ C. Oliver, *Western Women in Colonial Africa* (London, Greenwood Press, 1982).

⁴⁰ Sheila Ardener and Helen Callan (eds), *The Incorporated Wife* (London: Croom Helm, 1984).

⁴¹ *Ibid.* pp. 1-2.

⁴² Karen Hansen, “White Women in Changing World; Employment Voluntary Work, and Sex in Post-World War II Northern Rhodesia”, in Nupur Chaudhuri and M. Strobel (eds), *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1992), p. 250.

society. Although the dominant ideology would demand incorporation for married white women, many wives took up independent employment, embarked on volunteer work and some even became politically involved and, therefore, defied being incorporated to a certain degree.

Another ground-breaking study on gender and empire is one by H. Callaway, an anthropologist, on white women in colonial Nigeria.⁴³ Callaway makes intensive use of interviews and her work demonstrates how men always had decision making status in Nigeria's colonial society. Looking at white women in the professions and colonial administration as well as the colonial state's attitudes and policies towards these women, Callaway demonstrates how patriarchy and gender stereotypes defined the experiences and positions of European women in Nigeria. Similarly, K. Hansen's work on white women in post-World War II Northern Rhodesia examines the historical experiences of these women in wage employment, volunteer work and their domestication in the 'private' sphere.⁴⁴ While these works must be commended for challenging the androcentric nature of imperial histories, they had their own limitations as will be shown.

Most early works on white women in the colonies were caught up in binaries. White women were presented as either colluding with or resisting imperialism;⁴⁵ as either victims of patriarchy or villains actively involved in the oppression of indigenous populations or as continuously tied to the private as opposed to the public domain. Scholars like Kate Law,

⁴³ Helen Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire. European Women in Colonial Nigeria* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1987).

⁴⁴ Hansen, "White Women in a Changing World".

⁴⁵ Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*. Also see a review essay by Malia B. Formes, "Beyond Complicity Versus Resistance: Recent Work on Gender and European Imperialism", *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1995).

Malia Formes, Angela Woollacott and Anne McClintock⁴⁶ have begun to challenge the binaries that seek to explain the experiences of white women in the colonies. For McClintock, these binaries “run the risk of simply inverting the dominant notions of power.”⁴⁷ She posits that race, gender and class were not distinct categories and examines how these interconnected in shaping the experiences of women in both the metropole and the colonies. McClintock demonstrates how the British Empire was domesticated and throws examples from different parts of the Empire which help draw a pattern of the dominant ideologies. Her work signifies an attempt to move away from binaries that may simplify complex experiences of men and women in the British Empire. Regarding victim versus villain binary, A. M. Fetcher contends that white women’s involvement in the colonies was far more complex and contradictory beyond these binaries.⁴⁸

There has also been a growing number of edited works exploring various aspects of gender and empire, a few of which will be made reference to. The 1984 pioneering work of Sheila Ardener and Helen Callan has already been noted. Another pioneering piece is one from Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel published in 1992 that portrayed white women in the colonies as either extending colonialism or sabotaging the empire.⁴⁹ Such bifurcation of white women’s experiences has also been criticised for oversimplifying their otherwise complex experiences.⁵⁰ In their 1997 edited collection, Frédérick Cooper and Ann Stoler note that colonial society was neither homogeneous nor without conflicts. Colonial society was

⁴⁶ Kate Law, “Writing White Women”: Whiteness, Gender, Politics and Power in Rhodesia, c. 1950 -1980” (Ph. D. Thesis, University of Sheffield, History Department, 2012); Formes, B. Malia. “Beyond Complicity versus Resistance; Angela Woollacott, *Gender and Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.

⁴⁷ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 16.

⁴⁸ Anne-Meike Fetcher, “Gender, Empire, Global Capitalism: Colonial and Corporate Expatriate Wives”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* Vol. 36, No. 8 (September 2010) p. 1291.

⁴⁹ N. Chaudhuri and M. Strobel (eds.), *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*. Strobel also partnered in editing a book exploring women’s experiences beyond the boundaries of Western world. See Cheryl Johnson-Odim, and Margaret Strobel (eds.), *Expanding the Boundaries of Women’s History Essays on Women in the Third World* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992).

⁵⁰ See Haggis, “White Women and Colonialism”.

wrought in tensions that took various forms including gender, race and class.⁵¹ In the more recent times, Philippa Levine's edited work⁵² has expanded on this field addressing "the history of British colonialism from gendered perspectives on both sides of the coloniser/colonised divide, and in-between too."⁵³ Besides providing a theoretical framework with a more global outlook, these works have also made it possible to compare and contrast gender and colonialism in different countries and continents.

Scholars have also recently taken interest in the themes of empire and sexuality which is also central to appreciating gender trends in the empire. Ronald Hyam's work is one of the path-breaking works in this direction exploring sexuality in both the metropole and the colonies.⁵⁴ However, if one was looking for white women's experiences in the colonies they would be easily disappointed by Hyam's work as emphasis is largely on the sexuality of white men and that of the indigenous populations. Indeed, even outside of Hyam's work, the most discussed aspect of empire and sexuality centres on the experiences of indigenous women to be found in works by Luise White, Elizabeth Schmidt and Teresa Barnes,⁵⁵ among others. These works have contributed to our understanding of how the colonial environment shaped prostitution by indigenous women and how this prostitution also impacted on the colonial system. In many ways, they give agency to the indigenous women showing how they were fighting for survival in an otherwise restrictive and low-opportunity environment.

⁵¹ Fredrick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire and Colonial Cultures in Bourgeois World* (California: University of California Press, 1997).

⁵² Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵³ Myra Rutherdale, Review of *Gender and Empire* edited by Philippa Levine, *Gender and History*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2007), p. 607.

⁵⁴ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

⁵⁵ Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Schmidt, *Peasants, Traders, and Wives*; Teresa Barnes, "We Women Worked so Hard".

There has also been growing interest in the sexuality of white women in the colonies. One of the most prolific writers on empire and sexuality is Philippa Levine. She discusses indigenous and white women's sexuality in the British colonies. She uses examples from India, Australia and Asia, exploring the implications, controversies and dilemmas of prostitution. Levine also analyses the responses of the state and society to this trade.⁵⁶ Another scholar, Ann Stoler focuses on race and sexual morality in French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies in the early twentieth century. She correctly argues that sexual control in the empires was "a fundamental class and racial marker implicated in a wider set of relations of power".⁵⁷ There has also been increasing interest in white women and sexuality in colonial Africa. In Southern Africa, C. van Onselen has written ground-breaking works on white prostitution using the case of South Africa.⁵⁸ In one of his chapters, he examines debates over the occurrence of white prostitution and pimps in the Transvaal.⁵⁹ Also using the South African case study, Elizabeth B. van Heyningen and Timothy Keegan, in their separate studies, raise important questions about the attitudes of colonial regimes towards white women's prostitution and examine some of the controversies over its existence.⁶⁰ These studies, however, do not give us a bigger picture of white women's experiences outside their sexual experiences. We learn little about their aspirations as housewives, workers in formal employment or as political beings, among other things.

⁵⁶ Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics*.

⁵⁷ Ann L. Stoler, "Making an Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality 20th Century Colonial Cultures", in *American Ethnologist* 16, 4 (1989), p. 636.

⁵⁸ Charles Van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914* (London: Longman, 1982); *The Fox and the Flies: The Secret Life of a Grotesque Master Criminal* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007).

⁵⁹ Stoler, "Making an Empire Respectable", p. 636.

⁵⁹ Van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand*.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth B. van Heyningen, "The Social Evil in the Cape Colony 1868-1902: Prostitution and the Contagious Diseases Acts", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1984), pp. 170-197; Timothy Keegan, "Gender, Degeneration and Sexual Danger: Imagining Race and Class in South Africa, ca. 1912", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2001), pp. 459 – 477.

In the case of white women's sexuality in Southern Rhodesia, some works have discussed their sexuality largely in relations to the black population. In separate studies, E. Schmidt, J. McCulloch and J. Pape examine the alleged sex perils that took place in Southern Rhodesia and how, in part, these were instigated by the control of white women's sexual behaviour.⁶¹ In a more recent study, Oliver Phillips examines the 1915 Brundell's (the Superintendent of CID, British South Africa Police) report on prostitution, and uses this to explore the fears of the purported threat of interracial sex in Southern Rhodesia.⁶² He too makes similar conclusions to Pape and McCulloch regarding the impact (be they intended or unintended) of these anxieties. The scholars show how white women's sexual conduct was a concern of settler society and how the society sought to protect its women from the imagined black peril.⁶³ Again the studies do not provide a broader context of white women's experiences in terms of their relations with the state and the codes that define their parameters.

There have been shifts in the nature of focus in gender and empire and these have enriched and expanded the subject area. First, in terms of focus, there has been an increasing recognition of Britain as an important part of that empire. Woollacott underscores the significance of locating Britain "as one of the sites of the British Empire".⁶⁴ This is important because it allows for a comparative analysis of developments in the colonies and those in the metropole. Second, there have been changes on protagonists of gender and empire. As noted

⁶¹ Elizabeth Schmidt, "Race, Sex, and Domestic Labor: The Question of African Female Servants in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1939", in Hansen (ed.), *African Encounters with Domesticity*; Jock McCulloch, *Black Peril, White Virtue: Sexual Crime in Southern Rhodesia, 1902-1935* (Indiana University Press 2000); and Pape, "Black and White".

⁶² Oliver Phillips, "The Perils of Sex and the Panics of Race: the Dangers of Interracial Sex in Colonial Southern Rhodesia", in Sylvia Tamale (ed.) *African Sexualities: A Reader* (Cape Town, Pambazuka Press, 2011).

⁶³ See John Pape, "Black and White: The 'Perils of Sex' in Colonial Zimbabwe", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1990). Sex perils referred to perceived sexual threats that black women received from white men and white women from black men. The black peril, in particular, was the perceived sexual threat that black men posed on white women. Pape and some newspapers of the time interpreted the white peril to have meant the perceived sexual threat of white men to black women. In the Brundell Report white peril was, however, used to mean white women whose 'unruly' sexual behaviour caused a threat to the good image of white society as well as caused the black peril by their behaviour.

⁶⁴ Woollacott, *Gender and Empire*, p. 3.

above, in the initial phases, works on gender and empire sought to insert white women into the history of the British Empire, what Jane Haggis has termed recuperative history.⁶⁵ Such works write of white women in the colonial period “as though they were ‘people of gender’, enclosed within a ‘separate sphere’ created by patriarchy”.⁶⁶ As indicated earlier in this section, this recuperative history tended to create disjointed narrations of colonial events where the women were presented as existing in isolation of the rest of the colonial players. However, recently, works have emerged that seek to analyse the relationship between men and women of all races and thus demonstrate the interconnectedness of the colonial experiences of different populations.⁶⁷ In the case of Southern Rhodesia, for example, Terence Ranger makes reference to white women in one of his most recent works demonstrating how these women were part of the unfolding development of colonial Bulawayo in Southern Rhodesia.⁶⁸ Thus the women are discussed as part of the integrated experiences of this city and not in isolation of several other developments of the city.

More recently, works have also been written that break away from the “victim thread” and one set of such works includes biographies that speak of heroic women who made exceptional achievements. There are a number of such works that have increasingly come to document the experiences of outstanding white women in the colonies such as Flora Shaw (Lady Lugard);⁶⁹ Olive Schreiner;⁷⁰ Muriel Rosin;⁷¹ Ethel Tawse-Jollie;⁷² Diana Mitchell;⁷³

⁶⁵ Haggis, “White Women and Colonialism”.

⁶⁶ Simon Dagut, “Gender, Colonial ‘Women’s History’ and the Construction of Social Distance: Middle Class Women in Later Nineteenth-century South Africa”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2000), p. 555.

⁶⁷ See Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics*; Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; and Woollacott, *Gender and Empire*.

⁶⁸ Terence Ranger, *Bulawayo Burning: The Social History of a Southern African City 1893-1960* (United Kingdom: James Currey, 2010).

⁶⁹ Helen Callaway and Dorothy O. Helly, “Crusader for Empire: Flora Shaw/Lady Lugard”, in N. Chaudhuri and M. Strobel (eds.), *Western Women and Imperialism*, pp. 79 – 98.

⁷⁰ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.

⁷¹ Ushewedu Kufakurinani and Estella Musiiwa, “The Unsung Heroine: Muriel Ena Rosin’s Urban Political Experiences in Rhodesia, 1945- 1980” *Heritage of Zimbabwe*, No. 30 (2012)”, pp. 36-48.

Eileen Haddon;⁷⁴ Miriam Staunton;⁷⁵ and Jane Elizabeth Waterston,⁷⁶ among others. The documentation of the experiences of these women has challenged the homogenisation of white women's experiences and has shown that white women were not necessarily victims in the colonial setting. Several works have further illustrated how white women were in constant dialogue with dominant ideologies and often times appropriated these ideologies to advance their interests, which could coincide with those of the colonial regime. Such works, for example, have examined white women's efforts at extending western domesticity to Africans.⁷⁷ For colonial Zimbabwe, scholars have had to say more about white women's efforts at exporting western domesticity to African women than any other subject. This has meant that we know little about the white women themselves and what shapes the nature of their interactions with Africans. Little is also told of how the white women themselves were also affected by these interactions.

There are also a number of works by colonial/Rhodesian women written to demonstrate the importance of their fellow women in shaping colonial state and society. Good examples are works by Rhodesian women such as O Gumprich⁷⁸ and Jean Boggie⁷⁹ themselves outstanding

⁷² Donal Lowry, "'White Woman's Country': Ethel Tawse-Jollie and the Making of White Rhodesia" *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1997).

⁷³ Kate Law, "Liberal Women in Rhodesia: Report of the Mitchell Papers, University of Cape Town", *History in Africa*, Vol. 37 (2010).

⁷⁴ Law, "Writing White Women".

⁷⁵ Ibid. Miriam Staunton was one of the pioneers of the African Women's Clubs and was president of the Federation of the African Women's clubs for about 10 years.

⁷⁶ Estella Musiiwa, "I am More a Man than a Woman": Jane Elizabeth Waterston in South African Imperial Discourse, 1887 -1992", in *International Journal of Sustainable Development*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2009).

⁷⁷ Kate Law "'Even a labourer is worthy of his hire: how much more a wife?": Gender and the Contested Nature of Domesticity in Colonial Zimbabwe, c.1945-1978', *South African Historical Journal* 63.3 (2011); Kaler, "Visions of Domesticity"; E. A. Logan, "An outline of the History of the National Federation of the Women's Institutes of Zimbabwe: 75 Years of Service to Home and Country" *Heritage of Zimbabwe*, No. 19 (2000); Martin. Shaw, "Sticks and Scones: Black and White Women in the Homecraft Movement in Colonial Zimbabwe", *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2008), 256-257; Sita Ranchod-Nilsson, "'Educating Eve': The Women's Club Movement and Political Consciousness among Rural African Women in Southern Rhodesia, 1950-1980", in Hansen (ed.), *African Encounters with Domesticity*.

⁷⁸ O. Gumprich and E. Yates (compilers), *Women in Central Africa* (Mercantile Publishing House, Salisbury, 1953).

⁷⁹ She was the wife of Major Boggie who was a farmer in Gwelo and also member of the Legislative Council. She was also a writer of 'fictional' autobiographical works, among others.

in their life achievements. The former was one of the few women/female doctors in the country who arrived before the Second World War and served actively in the Federation of Women's Institutes in Southern Rhodesia (FWISR) - one of the largest women's organisations in the country - as the Convener of Health. In the early 1950s she, together with E. Yates, compiled a book on women in Central Africa that profiled women's activities and past experiences as individuals and as part of larger groups or women's organisations. Boggie also made her compilation of early Rhodesian women in 1938.⁸⁰ There are also a number of autobiographies by and biographies on white women some of which have been published in the *Rhodesiana*, later named *Heritage of Zimbabwe*.⁸¹ These works helped counter the dominant androcentric writing of Rhodesian history and they sought to celebrate the achievements of white women in the colony. Durba Ghosh describes such works as 'popular' writing which "have uncritically applauded the contribution of European women in the colonies".⁸² These works, however, must not be dismissed because, as Ghosh also acknowledges, they "share some of the same interests as their more academic counterparts".⁸³ In addition, they act as very useful sources in constructing what women thought of themselves and what they wanted others to know about their experiences.

In the post-colonial period, D. Kirkwood is arguably one of the first scholars to write academic works on white women in colonial Zimbabwe.⁸⁴ One of her works seeks to analyse how the idea of a suitable wife was embedded in some educational institutions in Britain and

⁸⁰ Jeannie M. Boggie, *Experiences of Rhodesia's Pioneer Women* (Bulawayo: Philpot and Collins Ltd, 1938).

⁸¹ See for example Paddy Vickery, "Mrs. E. Tawse-Jollie", *Rhodesiana*, No. 29 (1973); R. R. Langham Carter, "Alice Margaret Allen: Rhodesia's First Head-Mistress", *Rhodesiana*, No. 36 (1977), pp. 47 -52; Philippa Berlyn, "... of Women Who Left Their mark", *Heritage of Zimbabwe*, No. 22 (2008), p. 123 - 125; Philippa Berlyn, "On Ethel Colquhoun Tawse-Jollie", *Heritage of Zimbabwe*, No. 22 (2008), p. 126 - 128.

⁸² Durba Ghosh, "Gender and Colonialism: Expansion or Marginalisation", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (2004), p. 740.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Kirkwood has two articles on white women in Southern Rhodesia in Ardener and Callan (eds), *The Incorporated Wife*.

Rhodesia.⁸⁵ In the other work, she examines the experiences of white women as wives in various sectors of the Rhodesian society, arguing that these women were, for the most part, “incorporated wives”.⁸⁶ In recent times, Kate Law is one of the few scholars to conduct an academic and fairly wide research on the experiences of white women in Southern Rhodesia.⁸⁷ Her works go beyond the analysis given by Kirkwood offering wider and deeper discussions of white women’s experiences. Kate Law has not only done biographical works but has also made a ground-breaking analysis of the gender terrain of Southern Rhodesia’s settler society, between the 1950s and 1980s. Her analysis exposes the contradictions and challenges within this society emanating, in part, from the gender ideologies.

Unlike most works written on white women in Southern Rhodesia, Law’s work makes extensive use of interviews and the internet to record white women’s personal experiences making her study rich in its representation of white women’s experiences. Her work, however, has greater inclination towards the political and extraordinary women (such as Diana Mitchell, Eileen Haddon and Miriam Staunton) who made outstanding contributions to Rhodesian society. She is also less concerned with women’s social and economic contributions to the colonial state as well as their sexuality. In many ways, however, her work helps to frame and theorise white women’s experiences within the context of Southern Rhodesia. This study builds upon this concrete foundation and puts more emphasis on the experiences of white women as social individuals and as part of women’s organisations. This thesis also explores the experience of white women before 1950 and expands on the analysis of their sexual and non-sexual interactions with Africans. This thesis, unlike Kate Law’s, also

⁸⁵ Deborah Kirkwood, “The Suitable Wife: Preparation for Marriage in London and Rhodesia/Zimbabwe”, in S. Ardener and H. Callan (eds) *The Incorporated Wife*.

⁸⁶ Kirkwood, “Settler Wives in Southern Rhodesia”.

⁸⁷ Law, “Writing White Women”; “‘Even a labourer is worthy of his hire’”; “Making Marmalade and Imperial Mentalities: The Case of a Colonial Wife”, *African Research and Documentaries*, No. 113 (2010); “Liberal Women in Rhodesia”.

benefited largely from the National Archives of Zimbabwe such that ultimately we discuss different aspects of white women's colonial experiences though there are few areas of convergence.

Another rich source of the experiences of Rhodesian white women has been fictional novels some of which are auto/biographical in nature. The auto/biographical works of former Rhodesian whites such as Sheila McDonald, Doris Lessing, Jeanie Boggie, Alexandra Fuller, Peter Godwin and C. G. Tracey, among many others, help to reflect the experiences of white women and their roles and status in the colony.⁸⁸ They also speak on the race, class and gender matrix in colonial Zimbabwe. Despite being fictional, these works speak to colonial realities. Commenting on the relationship between literary fiction and reality, Wolfgang Iser posits that "If fiction and reality are to be linked, it must be in terms not of opposition but of communication, for the one is not the mere opposite of the other - fiction is a means of telling us something about reality."⁸⁹ Thus, novels on and by Rhodesians can be very telling when it comes to the ideologies that shaped colonial society in Southern Rhodesia.

Whiteness, white femininity and the construction of racial identity in Southern Rhodesian

This section consists of a brief overview of how whiteness and white femininity have been conceptualised and constructed in the Southern Rhodesian context.⁹⁰ Whiteness studies have

⁸⁸ Sheila Macdonald, *Sally in Rhodesia* (London, 1936); Doris Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* (London, 1949); Jeannie M. Boggie, *A Husband and A Farm* (Salisbury, 1959); Alexandra Fuller, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood* (London, 2000); Peter Godwin, *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun* (London: Macmillan, 2007); and C. G. Tracey, *All For Nothing? My Life Remembered* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2009).

⁸⁹ Wolfgang Iser, "The Reality of Fiction: A Functionalist Approach to Literature", *New Literary History*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1975), p. 7.

⁹⁰ For a comparative analysis of whiteness in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa, see Law, *Writing White Women*.

increased in recent years as scholars have begun to examine the construction of racial ideology. When the focus was on the construction of race for people of colour, whiteness was treated as normative and thus practically invisible. In recent years, however, there have been growing debates on what constitutes “whiteness” or “racism”. Writing on Australian whiteness, Ien Ang notes that whiteness in this region is not the same” whiteness in the United States, France or Britain, “as whiteness does not acquire meanings outside of a distinctive and over-determined network of concrete social relations”.⁹¹ Ang gives the example of Southern Europeans (Italians and Greeks) who migrated to Australia in the post-war period and were initially perceived as non-white in this region. This demonstrates that whiteness is not homogeneous or unchanging. Whiteness, she concludes, is therefore “not a biological category but a political one”.⁹²

Dawn Burton offers an explanation of whiteness similar to that of Ang, noting that “whiteness theory offers an explanation of ethnic and racial differences based on *power*, *privilege* and oppression.”⁹³ For Burton, whiteness is racism though not necessarily in the form of hatred, it however, “takes the form of systematic preferential treatment of whites”.⁹⁴ The case of colonial Zimbabwe confirms this construction of whiteness around the preferential treatment accorded to settlers. Such treatment saw the white community establishing itself well economically, and giving it considerable advantage over other races. The whites became the rulers and employers while the other races were located at the other end of the economic ladder occupying positions as the hewers of wood and drawers of water. Whiteness was thus associated with greater economic success and security. Even within the

⁹¹ Ien Ang, ‘I’m a Feminist But ... “Other” Women and Postnational Feminism’, Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*, p. 200.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Dawn Burton, “Non-White Readings of Whiteness”, *Consumption Markets and Culture*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2009), p. 349. Italics are original.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

African community, economically successful blacks could attract the nickname “*murungu*” which literally translates to white person. In his analysis of the experiences of Africans whose access to land in the African Purchase Areas suggested greater economic security, Clarence Mademutsa, notes that they were referred to as *varungu vechitema*, which literally means “whites who were Africans.”⁹⁵ Such Africans had acquired a certain degree of whiteness amongst their peers as a result of their greater access to economic resources, which were largely controlled or owned by whites.

Scholars such as Ruth Frankenberg have shown that white women’s lives and relationships were also gendered as much as they were raced.⁹⁶ Making similar conclusions, Vron Ware indicates that “to be white and female is to occupy a social category that is inescapably racialised as well as gendered.”⁹⁷ Being white and female had a strong bearing on the nature of white women’s experiences in the colonies, and this identity embodied such aspects as controlled sexuality, moral dignity and beauty “in contrast to the perceived sexually exotic bodies of indigenous women.”⁹⁸ As Kathy Deliovsky observes, whiteness plays a crucial role in the construction of white femininity:

White women's identities and lives are not only shaped by structures of gender inequality but also by white privilege. Signalled as the bearers of the "white race", they are both privileged and contained by this gendered and reproductive signification. This racialized reproductive signification functions to define the acceptable conduct of their "race", gender and to some degree, ethnicity and class.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ See Clarence Mademutsa, “‘*Varungu vechitema*’: The History and development of Purchase Area Farmers with reference to Rowe Purchase farmers” (BA Hons. Diss, University of Zimbabwe, Economic History Department, 2009). For more discussions on African Purchase Areas see Allison Shut, “We are the Best Poor Farmers”: Purchase Area Farmers and Economic Differentiation in Southern Rhodesia, C. 1925-1980” (PhD Diss. University of California, 1995).

⁹⁶ Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

⁹⁷ Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso, 1992), p. xii.

⁹⁸ Law, “Writing White Women”, p. 13.

⁹⁹ Kathy Deliovsky, “Normative White Femininity: Race, Gender and the Politics of Beauty”, *Atlantis*, Vol. 33, No.1 (2008), p. 50. For a similar observation see also Jawad Syed and Ali Faiza, “The White Woman’s Burden: From Colonial *Civilisation* to Third World *Development*”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2011).

Raka Shome's conceptualisation of white femininity is also worth mentioning. She uses the term, to mean "an ideological construction through which meanings about white women and their place in the social order are naturalized"¹⁰⁰ and notes that:

As symbols of motherhood, as markers of feminine beauty ... as translators (and hence preservers) of bloodlines, as signifiers of national domesticity, as sites for the reproduction of heterosexuality, as causes in the name of which narratives of national defense and protection are launched, as symbols of national unity, and as sites through which "otherness" - racial, sexual, classed, gendered, and nationalized - is negotiated, white femininity constitutes the locus through which borders of race, gender, sexuality, and nationality are guarded and secured.¹⁰¹

Thus, as an ideological construction, domesticity was also central to white femininity as it placed limits on the roles and status of white women. The configuration of domesticity within the colonial setting interacted with other forces such as class and race.

After settling in Southern Rhodesia, white women joined the dominant racial group as "the inferior sex within the superior race".¹⁰² As elsewhere in the colonies, white women's membership in this dominant group gave them a range of rights and concessions unavailable to indigenous women.¹⁰³ White women were not just inferior members of the dominant group but, as Strobel cogently notes, they were also participants in the historical process of British expansion benefiting from the subjugation of the colonised and they shared the attitudes of

¹⁰⁰ Raka Shome, "White femininity and the discourse of the nation: Re/membering Princess Diana", *Feminist Media Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (2001), p. 323.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Margret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. xi. Also see Strobel, "Gender and Race in the Nineteenth – and twentieth Century British Empire", in Renate Bridenthal (et al), *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987).

¹⁰³ Syed and Faiza, "The White Woman's Burden", p. 350.

paternalism, national chauvinism, ethnocentricism and racism that accompanied this subjugation.¹⁰⁴

White femininity and, by extension, white women's domesticity, were naturalised in Southern Rhodesia's heteronormative society. In the words of Deliofsky, "Heterosexual normativity is first and foremost about white patriarchal production of a white feminine ideal."¹⁰⁵ Heteronormativity was achieved and sustained through state and non-state apparatuses. Keith Goddard has shown how immigration acts enacted in the colony sought to prohibit anyone practising "homosexuality".¹⁰⁶ However, despite the pervasive homophobia characterising the Southern Rhodesian state and society, from the 1960s to the 1980s, "there was a thriving underground gay and lesbian scene amongst middle class whites and coloureds".¹⁰⁷

While a number of works have been written in an attempt to theorise whiteness and white femininity and examine their construction in racialised societies, few have used the case of Southern Rhodesia. Kate Law's thesis is one of the few works that attempt to look at the construction of whiteness and, to some extent, white femininity.¹⁰⁸ David Hughes', *Whiteness in Zimbabwe* is probably the only work to date that makes a much more sustained analysis of

¹⁰⁴ Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire*, xi.

¹⁰⁵ Deliofsky, "Normative White Femininity", p. 50.

¹⁰⁶ Keith Goddard, "A Fair Representation: GALZ and the History of the Gay Movement in Zimbabwe", *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2004), p. 78.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁰⁸ Law, "Writing White Women". Kate Law does not, however, use the term white femininity nor does she make it one of her objectives to explore its construction. However, a reading of her work shows that she does engage with its construction in Southern Rhodesia to a certain extent, particularly where she makes reference to what it meant to be a white woman in this country.

the construction of whiteness in Southern Rhodesia.¹⁰⁹ Hughes' work has attracted wide debate.¹¹⁰

Hughes offers a problematic interpretation of the construction of whiteness in Southern Rhodesia. He suggests that whiteness should be understood within the context of Rhodesia's physical environment, to which whites were greatly attached. He interprets this attention towards the environment as an escapist attitude adopted by whites to avoid interacting with blacks. He writes, "in their (white Zimbabweans) own minds, they turned away from native, African people and focused instead on African landscapes."¹¹¹ Thus, for Hughes, it is within this context that "whiteness and conservation ... co-produced each other."¹¹² To substantiate his claims, Hughes also draws evidence from fictional works on Southern Rhodesia and uses the case of the Kariba Dam as well as the experiences of white farmers in Eastern Harare where he examines white people's 'obsession' with dams and the environment at large.

Hughes' thesis has a number of problems. Dan Wylie challenges Hughes' interpretation of some of the literary texts used to interpret whiteness, and accuses Hughes of plundering "a variety of works, frequently from outside Rhodesia in what he takes to be analogous cases, and quotes from them selectively ... in order to buttress his statement about what 'whiteness'

¹⁰⁹ David McDermott Hughes, *Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape and the Problem of Belonging* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

¹¹⁰ Some of these reviews include Dan Wylie, Review Article: "Not quite a Refutation: A Response to David McDermott Hughes's Whiteness in Zimbabwe", *Safundi: The Journal of Southern African and American Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1-2 (2012), pp. 181 – 194; Andrew Hartnack, Review Essay: "Whiteness and Shades of Grey: Erasure, Amnesia and the Ethnography of Zimbabwe's whites", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1080 (2014); Amanda Hammar, Book Review, "Whiteness in Zimbabwe. Race, Landscape, and the Problem of Belonging", *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2012), pp. 216 – 221; Brian Raftopoulos, Book Review, "Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape and the Problem of Belonging", *African Affairs*, Vol. 111, No. 444 (2012), pp. 497 – 498; Léa Kalaora, Book Review; "Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape, and the Problem of Belonging", *African Studies Reviews*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (2012), pp. 211-212; and Tony King, Book Review, "Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape, and the Problem of Belonging", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2011), pp. 342 – 344.

¹¹¹ Hughes, *Whiteness in Zimbabwe*, p. xii.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

is.”¹¹³ Hughes’ analysis of whiteness in Southern Rhodesia also oversimplifies the racial relations that existed in Southern Rhodesia. As Wylie posits, it is an overstatement to link racism to the “aesthetic nature of the land”.¹¹⁴ The whites in the farms had different levels of relationships with and connections to their African labourers. Hughes also does not consider that there could be a gendered dimension to whiteness. As I will demonstrate, white women such as Miriam Staunton, who were involved with the African Homecraft movement were far from being escapist in their relations with Africans.

Hughes also overplays environmental determinism in the construction of whiteness. Whiteness was also reproduced outside links to the environment, particularly among the urbanites that had little, if any attachment, to the dams and landscapes that Hughes identifies. As will be shown, there were other forces at play, particularly those that promoted the privileged status of whites. The emphasis that Hughes puts on settler attachment to the environment also implicitly suggests that Africans were not as attached to it as whites were. If they *were*, what meanings would be attached to this? Would that now constitute ‘blackness’? In short, identities and categories are far too complex to be linked to the physical environment alone. Making a similar observation, Wyle notes that “the response to geographical spaciousness, the powerful thrill of the aerial view, or the pleasure of ‘park like’ vistas sparkling with water, can be viewed in cultures in many epochs, and might be ... biologically common to humans almost anywhere”.¹¹⁵

Kate Law’s thesis on white women in Southern Rhodesia also examines whiteness in the Southern Rhodesian context albeit not as its primary concern. She discusses notions of Rhodesian identity and how these were evoked. These notions were hinged on whiteness as

¹¹³ Wylie, Review Article: “Not quite a Refutation”, pp. 188-9.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

the Rhodesian settlers sought to legitimise their domination and control. Law examines how Rhodesian identity sometimes changed in response to crises. In its conceptualisation of whiteness, Law's thesis draws parallels on South African experiences noting that whiteness was also a form of identity which, although not divorced from the skin pigment, was largely socially constructed. However, as she acknowledges, her work does not directly "trace the development of whiteness in colonial Rhodesia."¹¹⁶

In colonial societies such as Southern Rhodesia, the association of whiteness with economic and social status was an intimate part of the colonial project. The Southern Rhodesian government aimed at improving the status of the white community through a series of social, economic and political measures. Its racial policies were grafted in the country's land, education, labour and health systems where white superiority and domination was promoted and entrenched. As I will show in this thesis, even such aspects as sexuality were avenues by which whiteness and white femininity were entrenched. White women were not only agents of whiteness but also part of the colonial project to maintain and entrench whiteness. Thus, for example, it became part of the objective of colonial societies to promote what was considered moral sanctity for white/western women as part of the construction of white femininity in particular and whiteness at large. Settler society frowned at interracial sex for both white men and women, though it was more intolerant where the latter was involved. It was believed that such sexual relationships would compromise whiteness at a number of levels including the level of reproduction of the imperial race.

We should, however, be cautious in our analysis of whiteness and its construction in colonial societies. As J. L. Fisher observes, "Scholarly reification of 'whiteness' runs the risk of

¹¹⁶ Law, "Writing White Women", p. 38.

homogenising difference, leaving little room for the recognition of multiple positionings or diversity within".¹¹⁷ Thus, while whiteness was embraced and entrenched by the white society in general and white women in particular, the extent to which this shaped their experiences was also affected by their ethnicity, places of origin, class and other variables. Being an Afrikaner or British or from mainland Europe connoted different 'shades' of whiteness. It is also important that in recognition of whiteness as a social construct we do not completely disassociate it from biology. This is because within the colonial system itself, the construction of whiteness was closely associated with skin pigment. The colonial state, for instance, was obsessed with creating separate structures and services for different races – coloured, white and black – and the definitions of such were clearly based on biology.¹¹⁸ As such, our theorisation of whiteness must clearly acknowledge the contingent historical association of this category with biology even as it has also been unstable and ever-changing.

Conceptualising domesticity

Domesticity is a historically constructed notion having several layers of meaning.¹¹⁹ The term is itself gender neutral but has often been employed when referring to women's confinement to the home. The concept has been retained by several generations of feminist historians of colonialism, who use it in subtly different ways. Thus, it emerges as quite a complex concept. In the words of Laurence Habib and Tony Cornford, "when domesticity is discussed... it is usually done with a strongly gendered interest and in conjunction with the life of women,

¹¹⁷ Josephine L. Fisher, *Pioneers, Settlers, Aliens, Exiles: The Decolonisation of White Identity in Zimbabwe* (ANU E Press, Australia, 2010), p. xi.

¹¹⁸ Tafadzwa Gwini's examination of the provision of education to the coloured community in the colonial era documents the obsessions of administrators with pigmentation and the removal of coloured children from white schools. Where administrators had doubts on the 'whiteness' of the children the administrators could launch investigations on genealogy to establish if these children were 'purely' white. See Tafadzwa Gwini, "An Examination of the Provision of Education of the Coloured Community in Southern Rhodesia 1890-1923" (Hons. Diss., University of Zimbabwe, Economic History Department, 2012).

¹¹⁹ Hansen, "Introduction", p. 3.

either as an oppressive regime or as a potential resource towards liberation.”¹²⁰ The concept conjures up images of a physical space such as a home, nature of work such as home keeping and occupation such as a household servant.¹²¹ McClintock builds upon this notion and extends domesticity to include domination, applying this concept in her analysis of imperial relations.¹²² What can be observed is that domesticity is fluid, heterogeneous and dynamic. It takes different forms across epochs, geographic space, age, race and classes. Because at each category, different aspects of domesticity are emphasised at different times and at varying degrees, domesticity becomes a very complex phenomenon which, as McClintock notes, “cannot be applied willy-nilly to any house or dwelling as a universal fact.”¹²³

As scholars like Hansen¹²⁴ and Hilde Heynen have argued, “the etymological nearness of ‘domesticity’ and ‘to domesticate’ is no coincidence.”¹²⁵ The word domesticate implies taming, making something (or someone) malleable and obedient. The verb is also “used to suggest disciplining and taming to bring an individual (or animal or technology) closer to a particular idea of civilised behaviour.”¹²⁶ The term also “evokes feminine notions of loyalty and attachment as well as docility and gentleness.”¹²⁷ These meanings are appropriated for this study and are employed in shaping the analysis of how this complex ideology worked in the Southern Rhodesian context.

The following can be considered to have been some of the central features of domesticity in European societies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: reproduction, parenting

¹²⁰ Laurence Habib and Tony Cornford, “Computers in the Home: Domestication and Gender”, *Information Technology and People*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2002), p. 160.

¹²¹ Hansen, “Introduction”, p. 3.

¹²² McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 35.

¹²³ *Ibid.* p. 34.

¹²⁴ Hansen, “Introduction.”

¹²⁵ Heynen, “Modernity and Domesticity”, p. 107.

¹²⁶ Habib and Cornford, “Computers in the Home”, p. 160.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

(motherhood), devotion to home pleasures and duties (organisation of the home) as well as true womanhood. The last element embraces piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness as virtues of true womanhood.¹²⁸ Joan Williams contends that the “moral mother” was at the core of traditional domesticity being “nurturant and empathetic.”¹²⁹ Indeed, this ‘domestic’ mentality, as will be demonstrated, also shaped the roles and status of some white women in Southern Rhodesia who went about doing welfare activities in the colony. All these attitudes and perceptions about work, family and women in society became what some scholars have termed a ‘cult of domesticity.’¹³⁰

This thesis makes several observations regarding the workings of domesticity. First, it is noted that this ideology has multiple layers. Secondly, that the fundamental ideals in these layers are not always congruent and, therefore, sometimes compete. Thirdly, that historically these ideals could be emphasised or upheld more than others over time largely to suit the interests of the dominant groups. However, as Janet Floyd cautions us, “the work of the domestic space itself need not be understood as reflective of, or as reasserting dominant values, always and without variation.”¹³¹ Fourth, that state and non-state players negotiated and interacted with the “multiple domesticities”¹³² in different and complex ways. Fifth, that these multiple domesticities, which “emerge at different times... are neither coterminous with

¹²⁸ Catherine Lavender, “The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood”, n. d. <http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/386/truwoman.html> (2 May 2010).

¹²⁹ Joana C. Williams, “Domesticity as the Dangerous Supplement of Liberalism”, *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1991), p. 71.

¹³⁰ For a fuller discussion of the Cult of Domesticity see Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860”, *American Quarterly* Vol. 18, No. 2, Part 1 (1966), pp. 151-174; Lavender, “The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood.” It should be noted that the idea of the cult of domesticity has become something of a cliché. This probably because the word “cult” implies a secret society, or secret knowledge; but no one engages with the idea of secrecy or membership – they just reproduce the use of the word.

¹³¹ Janet Floyd, “Domestication, Domesticity and the Work of Butchery: Positioning the Writing of Colonial Housework”, *Women's History Review*, 11: 3 (2007): p. 398.

¹³² This phrase is borrowed from Veena Das, Jonathan M. Ellen and Lori Leonard, “On the Modalities of Domesticity”, *Home Cultures* Vol. 1, No. 3 (2008): p. 349.

family nor indeed with household.”¹³³ Thus domesticity is not necessarily about the private sphere, that is home confinement, but can also be exported to the so-called public sphere. As Hilde Heynen correctly observes, domesticity can also “be discussed in terms of legal arrangements, spatial settings, behavioural patterns, social effects and power constellations”.¹³⁴

As noted, domesticity goes beyond the private/domestic space/sphere as it can be expressed and played out even in the ‘public sphere’, be it in the world of work or politics. This oscillation of domesticity between public and private spheres is, probably part of a process that V. Das et al call an “itinerant domesticity.”¹³⁵ The public/private dichotomy is, in many ways, thus collapsed or at the very least compromised. Indeed, feminists have challenged the separation of the ‘private’ and ‘public’ asserting that “the processes and experiences of the home and family are indissolubly linked with those of the state and the institutions of politics.”¹³⁶ In fact, as this thesis will show, these processes even go beyond state and institutions of politics. It is in this context that the remark by *The Times* in 1900 that “all institutions are but homes on a large scale”¹³⁷ is employed. From this perspective, it is also possible to identify various institutions in the colonial regime (itself an institution) and examine the workings of the domestic ideology as the home front is sometimes duplicated in the different institutions.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Heynen, “Modernity and Domesticity”, p. 105.

¹³⁵ This phrase is borrowed from Veena Das, Jonathan M. Ellen and Lori Leonard, “On the Modalities of Domesticity”, *Home Cultures* Vol. 1, No. 3 (2008): p. 349.

¹³⁶ Amy Kaler, “Visions of Domesticity in the African Women’s Homecraft Movement in Rhodesia”, *Social Science History*, 23 (1999) p. 269.

¹³⁷ Quoted in Anna Davin, “Imperialism and Motherhood”, in F. Cooper and A. L. Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire and Colonial Cultures in Bourgeois World* (California: University of California Press, 1997), p. 133.

Origins of domesticity in Britain and Southern Rhodesia

The Rhodesian settler community, like several other British settler societies around the world, was greatly influenced by the Victorian era in many of its societal values including its gender terrain. Referring to Rhodesian women's lack of political participation in the 1960s, Muriel Rosin,¹³⁸ one of the three women to be members of parliament during the colonial era, blamed this on "a certain lingering of the Victorian attitude."¹³⁹ D. Kirkwood also notes that men and women in Rhodesia "accepted with little questioning the social rituals which derived from the metropolitan culture which they wished to reproduce."¹⁴⁰ Ruth Evans, born in Rhodesia in 1935, made a similar observation about efforts to duplicate the way of life in England:

Society in England was sort of transplanted into Rhodesia. For example, people in Rhodesia liked to plant flowers that they had in England in their garden and to grow some English trees and that sort of stuff. It made them feel at home and comfortable and they just carried on with what they used to do back home.¹⁴¹

Thus cultural values were imported from England coupled with material aspects of English life. However, the extent to which Victorian domesticity was reproduced in colonial societies in general and Southern Rhodesia in particular should not be overstressed. While Victorian domesticity may have influenced British colonies; it is, however, important to emphasise that the local colonial environment reproduced a peculiar form of domesticity albeit deriving from Victorian culture. Ann Laura Stoler echoes a similar observation, noting that "Colonial

¹³⁸ For a detailed discussion of Muriel Rosin's urban political experience see Kufakurinani and Musiiwa, "The Unsung Heroine", pp. 36-48.

¹³⁹ "She's the Only Woman MP in the Federation", *Edinburgh Evening News*, 24 March 1961. See Marshall H. Medoff, "Determinants of Political Participation of Women", *Public Choice*, Vol. 48. No. 3 (1986), p. 245, who identifies cultural, ideological and male conspiracy as some of the factors that militate against women participation in politics.

¹⁴⁰ Deborah Kirkwood, "Settler Wives in Southern Rhodesia: a Case Study", in S. Ardener and H. Callan (eds), *The Incorporated Wife*, p. 149.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Ruth Evans, Harare, 22 March 2012.

cultures were never direct translations of European society planted in the colonies, but unique cultural configurations, homespun creations in which European food, dress, housing, and morality were given new political meanings in the particular social order of colonial rule.”¹⁴²

As it is generally acknowledged that British settler communities adopted, to a degree, Victorian culture in their gender relations, it becomes pertinent to explore the nature and form of Victorian domesticity and briefly trace its origins. Victorian domesticity emphasised women’s confinement to the physical space of the home “as domesticity and motherhood were considered by society at large to be a sufficient emotional fulfilment for females.”¹⁴³ Women were also to be subjected to male authority and few occupations were open to them as careers.¹⁴⁴ They were also expected to uphold very high moral standards when compared to their male counterparts. For women, this meant sexual abstinence before and fidelity after marriage; and racial exclusivity throughout. Domesticity in British society was neither a homogeneous nor a static identifier of Victorian gender relations but approximately represented trends dominant and common, largely, among the middle class in Victorian England. As J. Tosh observes, in Victorian society prescription and practice in the domestic ideology were, to a greater extent, taken to unprecedented lengths.¹⁴⁵ Broadly speaking, women were thus excluded from the public sphere in many ways whilst the domestic ideal was promoted largely by the middle class:

Its (domesticity) influence became pervasive and was subscribed to by people from widely differing classes. It was supported by government regulations e.g. that women teachers and civil servants be dismissed upon

¹⁴² Ann Laura Stoler, “Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1989), p. 136.

¹⁴³ Lynn Abrams, “Ideals of Womanhood in Victorian Britain.” 9 August 2001, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/victorian_britain/women_home/ideals_womanhood_01.shtml (24 June 2012).

¹⁴⁴ P. W. Thomas (nd.), “A Woman’s Place in c19th Victorian History”, http://www.fashion-era.com/a_womans_place.htm (10 April 2010).

¹⁴⁵ J. Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (Bury St Edmund: St. Edmundsburg Press, 1999), p.27.

marriage, and by the behaviour of private employees, who often dismissed married women.¹⁴⁶

However, while the domestic ideology may have been dominant, this did not necessarily transform into reality for every Victorian family as there were always exceptions to the rule. As Stacy Gills and Joanne Hollows note, “the idea that nineteenth-century femininity was organised around domesticity... becomes problematic when considering the politics of class, ethnicity and race.”¹⁴⁷ Margaret Allen notes that in some regions such as Lancashire there remained an established tradition of married women who worked outside the home. In some instances, the marriage bar was simply ignored.¹⁴⁸ Quoting Neal Ferguson, she writes:

Although women are required to resign on marriage from the Civil Service, from teaching posts under local authorities, from banks and retail shops, and from many of the best managed businesses, nothing of the sort happens to charwomen and cleaners.¹⁴⁹

This notwithstanding, the ideology remained a very influential force in ordering the lives of Victorian men and women. And as Allen acknowledges, “it was held widely that it was right, natural, and even necessary, for the moral order that married women should stay at home where they would be responsible for the domestic work and for the bearing and rearing of children.”¹⁵⁰ Thus married women were not expected to work except under special circumstances such as their husband’s illness or unemployment.¹⁵¹

Different theories have been proffered in trying to explain the origins of Victorian domesticity in particular and domesticity in industrialised societies in general. The consensus

¹⁴⁶ Margaret Allen, “The Domestic Ideal and the Mobilisation of Woman Power in World War II”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1983), p. 401.

¹⁴⁷ Stacy Gillis and Joanne Hollows, “Introduction”, in S. Gillis and J. Hollows (eds.), *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ The marriage bar referred to restrictions placed upon married women in their employment because of their status as married women.

¹⁴⁹ Neal Ferguson quoted in Margaret Allen, “The Domestic Ideal”, p. 401.

¹⁵⁰ Allen, “The Domestic Ideal”, p. 104.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

is that domesticity was a product of both biological and non-biological forces, though there is no agreement on which contributed most. Women's mobility in industrial and pre-industrial societies was limited by child-bearing. However, the industrial revolution arguably separated home and work and, by that stroke, created the private and public spheres which became instrumental to the domestication of women as they were left at home while men went to the workplace. Hitherto, the home was a place of work, with cottage industry, and a residential accommodation as opposed to being a private shelter for the members of a small family.¹⁵²

Thus, before the nineteenth century, the private/public dichotomy that has come to be associated with home versus work was not pronounced.¹⁵³ With the removal of the workplace from the home, emanating from urbanisation and industrialisation, the household was reorganised as the family's private retreat.¹⁵⁴ In the process, it is argued; women became economically dependent on men who had direct access to capital.¹⁵⁵ It is for this reason that scholars like Heynen have concluded that domesticity is a nineteenth century construction that "refers to a whole set of ideas that developed in reaction to the division between work and home."¹⁵⁶ Newspapers, magazines and writings of evangelical Christian groups worked towards "reinforcing the association between femininity and the home and in convincing women that their 'natural' duties were domestic."¹⁵⁷ Abrams makes a similar observation about the role of print media in entrenching domesticity, noting that "in popular advice literature and domestic novels, as well as in the advertisement columns of magazines and

¹⁵² Heynen, "Modernity and Domesticity", p. 104.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Tamara Hareven, "The Home and Family in Historical Perspective", in Tony Bennett and Diane Watson, *Understanding Everyday Life* (Oxford: Blackstone, 2002), p. 35.

¹⁵⁵ Of course this cannot be passed as a universalised fact given the class distinctions in industrial societies. The situation was certainly different with poorer men or some men from the working class.

¹⁵⁶ Heynen, "Modernity and Domesticity", p. 5.

¹⁵⁷ Gillis and Hollows, "Introduction", p. 4.

newspapers, domesticity was trumpeted as a female domain.”¹⁵⁸ In this way, the association between home and femininity was naturalised.

Writing on women in Victorian Britain, Lynda Neads notes that, “the ideal of femininity was encapsulated in the idea of a woman's mission, which was that of playing a model mother, wife and daughter. Women were also seen as moral and spiritual guardians.”¹⁵⁹ This idea of a woman’s mission was thus essentially domesticity. Different emphases were placed on the various aspects of domesticity in different epochs. Anna Davin demonstrates that in early twentieth century England, “women’s domestic role remained supreme, but gradually it was their function as mother that was most stressed, rather than her function as wife.”¹⁶⁰ This development was driven by arguments for the propagation of the imperial race in the empire. Child-bearing was thus justified as “a national duty not a moral one”¹⁶¹ and the centrality of women to this cause meant that the domestic ideology remained crucial and entrenched in Victorian England.

The home/domestic space represented peace, safety and purity as opposed to the public world of work which represented dirt, immorality and brutality.¹⁶² This is partly why women were discouraged from participating in the public sphere as they were seen as custodians of moral virtues in the home where men could retreat from the brutal outside-world of work and politics. Because of the emphasis on purity and morality, a woman engaging in prostitution, for instance, was seen as having fallen and such a trade defied Victorian domesticity.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Abrams, “Ideals of Womanhood in Victorian Britain”.

¹⁵⁹ Lynda Nead, “Women and Urban Life in Victorian Britain” 04/11/2004, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/victorian_britain/women_out/urban_life_04.shtml> (24 June 2012) p. 1.

¹⁶⁰ Davin, “Imperialism and Motherhood”, p. 90. See also Anna Davin, “Imperialism and Motherhood”, *History Workshop*, No. 5 (1978) and Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire*, p. 33.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 91.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* p. 130.

¹⁶³ See Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics*.

Purity and piety were also entrenched in religious circles. While women were expected to be pious and chaste, the same was not of their male counterparts.

Debating domesticity

In gender discourses, the debate over the domestic ideology has been extensive, especially on the impact of private domesticity on women and their roles and status in society.¹⁶⁴ Judith Giles notes that feminism, at its worst, refuses “to see housework and home-making as anything other than essentially degrading.”¹⁶⁵ Therefore, leaving home “is a necessary condition of liberation.”¹⁶⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, a polemical critic of women’s domesticity, argues that it condemned women to an unfulfilling life. For her, the woman is “doomed to the continuation of the species and the care of the home – that is to say, immanence.”¹⁶⁷ Ann Oakley maintains that housework cannot be considered ‘proper’ work as it denied women their real sense of identity and was “directly opposed to the possibility of human self-actualisation.”¹⁶⁸ In her recommendations, Oakley advocates the abolition of the housewife role arguing, in the words of L. Johnson, that “the primacy of the housewife role in women’s lives today... plays a major part in hampering progress towards sex equality.”¹⁶⁹ Some feminists in the 1970s called for a domestic revolution in which new arrangements would be established that would allow women to fully participate in public life. Such arrangements would include “the provision of collective domestic services – communal kitchens, laundry

¹⁶⁴ The term private domesticity will be used to refer to domesticity that stress that women’s place is the home.

¹⁶⁵ Judy Giles, “A home of one’s own: women and domesticity in England 1918-1950”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (1993): p. 240.

¹⁶⁶ Judy Giles, *The Parlor and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), p. 141-2.

¹⁶⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Harmondsworth. Penguin Books, 1981), p. 449.

¹⁶⁸ Ann Oakley, *The sociology of Housework* (London, Martin Robertson, 1974) quoted in Gillis and Hollows, “Introduction”, p. 7.

¹⁶⁹ Lesley Johnson, “‘Revolutions Are Not Made by Down-trodden Housewives’: Feminism and the Housewife”, *Australian Feminist Studies* Vol. 15, No. 32 (2000): p. 239.

facilities and child care.”¹⁷⁰ Such were the radical perceptions held of domesticity by third wave feminists.

The debate on housewifery as depriving women of self-fulfilment has been taken up by scholars such as Judy Giles who challenge this perception. According to her, the “assumption that domesticity is *always* monotonous and *always* stifling for all women has led to a lack of sufficient willingness to confront what it is about housework, home-making, and domesticity that (also and equally) gives pleasure to large numbers of women.”¹⁷¹ Using empirical evidence, Giles identifies some women whose aspirations were homebound and yet still enjoyed home comfort. She notes that these women “were variously motivated by dignity, love, pride, and the satisfactions of order.”¹⁷² Giles’s evidence shows that the label of domesticity as stifling and depriving women of fulfilment is not universal. Without necessarily dismissing housewifery’s significations of drudgery and confinement, Stephanie Genz similarly advocates deconstructing the “unhappy housewife myth” so as “to keep women from objectifying and pathologizing their domestic personas.”¹⁷³

A further strand of feminist scholarship - the ‘domestic feminists’ - has been critical of third wave feminism. Domestic feminists like Catherine Beecher celebrate women’s domestic roles and use this to campaign for greater participation in the public sphere rather than remain confined to the private domain.¹⁷⁴ Domestic feminists do not dismiss the significance of women’s role in the home but justify the need for women to be included in the public spaces because of women’s very strength that, they claim, “lay in their natural connection to virtue

¹⁷⁰ Heynen, “Modernity and Domesticity”, p. 108.

¹⁷¹ Giles, “A home of one’s own”, 240. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Stephanie Genz, “‘I am Not a Housewife, but...’ Postfeminism and the Revival of Domesticity’ in S. Gillis and J. Hollows (eds), *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture*, p. 52.

¹⁷⁴ Gillis and Hollows, “Introduction”, p. 4.

and self-sacrifice, qualities reinforced by their isolation from the immoral public sphere.”¹⁷⁵ In this light, therefore, Beecher argues that society should tap into the investment put in women’s domesticity and allow women to arbitrate in the public space *precisely* because of their domesticity which allegedly made them morally superior to men.¹⁷⁶ However, this assumption of women’s moral superiority over men, is untenable and essentialist. Notwithstanding its essentialism, the arguments by domestic feminists “demonstrate how domesticity has been imagined as compatible with feminism rather than its antithesis.”¹⁷⁷

Another dimension popularised by feminists, such as Veronica Beechey and Germaine Greer, examines domesticity in relationship to the capitalist mode of production. These feminists used a Marxist frame to argue that the domestication of women led to the exploitation of their labour and to “the transfer of ownership and control over the woman-wife’s labour power to the man-husband.”¹⁷⁸ One perception of second wave feminists is that, “the confinement of women to the home rendered them isolated, powerless and, lacking a sense of identity from their own labour.”¹⁷⁹ For Greer, the life of the housewife was one of absolute servitude that turned them into “the most oppressed class of life-contracted unpaid workers, for whom slaves is not too melodramatic a description.”¹⁸⁰ Women engaged in domestic labour have also been seen as some kind of reserve labour force that can be exploited by capitalism, as cheap labour, when the need arises.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 5.

¹⁷⁸ Eva Gamarnikow, “Sexual Division of Labour: The Case of Nursing”, in Annette Kuhn and AnnMarie Wolpe (eds), *Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 101.

¹⁷⁹ Gillis and Hollows, “Introduction”, p. 6.

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in Stephanie Genz, “‘I am Not a Housewife, but...’ Post-feminism and the Revival of Domesticity’ in S. Gillis and J. Hollows (eds), *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture*, p. 50.

The reserve labour thesis seems plausible, to an extent, when one looks at some developments in many parts of the world including Southern Rhodesia. Commenting on European women and the world wars, Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser indicate that “Far more than during World War I, women enabled industries to increase production and keep functioning. In Great Britain ... about twice as many women worked in war industries or the armed forces in World War II as in World War I.”¹⁸¹ Similarly, as I have shown in a separate study,¹⁸² the employment of women in Southern Rhodesia drastically increased during World War I and II. Another possible case of exploitation of women’s labour power is during recessions. For example in Southern Rhodesia, when the economy was shrinking or facing problems such as during the 1930s Great Depression or the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) period (1965 – 1980), which brought sanctions, women’s labour could easily be side-lined. In 1966, for example, the Rhodesian government proposed to dismiss working wives from the civil service to make way for men who had lost jobs because of the sanctions or for school leavers.¹⁸³ The argument that women are a reserve labour to be exploited or sacrificed in crisis periods is, however, problematic because the relationship between crisis and women’s unemployment or retrenchment is not always direct. For instance, when the construction industry, where sexual segregation in the labour market is relatively high, is hit by a crisis, men are much more likely to be affected than women precisely because the latter dominate in this industry.

In a sociological study on housework, Stevi Jackson challenges the notion that the relegation of women to private domesticity was necessarily to serve the interests of capital. She argues

¹⁸¹ Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present Vol. 11* (Penguin Books: London, 1988), p. 309.

¹⁸² U. Kufakurinani, “‘While a Career is Vital for a Man It is Optional for a Woman’: White Women in the Southern Rhodesia Public Service, 1914 – c1965” M.A. Diss., University of Zimbabwe, Economic History Department, 2007.

¹⁸³ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 11 June 1966.

that it would be erroneous to infer that because restrictive policies against, for instance, women's employment were made by the capitalist state, then they must, of necessity, have been serving the interests of capitalism.¹⁸⁴ For Jackson, the state's intervention may have helped the collective interests of capitalists but this was achieved through the preservation of patriarchal relations and it worked against the freedom of individual capitalists to exploit cheap labour as women were excluded from the labour market. She argues that, "women's entry into regular, independent wage labour threatened to undermine the authority men wielded and to deprive them of the services they expected of their wives. It also raised the possibility of women competing for the same jobs as men."¹⁸⁵ Jackson thus concludes that "it was the strength of patriarchal interests which ensured the continued existence of a sphere of household production outside capitalism and which kept alternatives to housework off the political agenda of organised labour."¹⁸⁶ To substantiate her thesis, Jackson notes that women were allowed to continue to work where they did not appear to be a threat to patriarchy. Such work included needlework or working in their husbands' businesses¹⁸⁷ and "these traditional forms of work were quite compatible with the Victorians' deification of the home and so passed almost unnoticed."¹⁸⁸

Jackson's sociological interpretation is persuasive and offers an alternative understanding of the domestication of women. It partly explains why in times of crisis such as the Great Depression in Southern Rhodesia the employment of married women, which was relatively cheaper within the white community, was never enthusiastically explored despite it being the best option for the capitalists reeling under the constraints of the depression. Jackson does

¹⁸⁴ Stevi Jackson, "Towards a Historical Sociology of Housework: A Materialist Feminist Analysis", *Women's Studies Forum* Vol. 15, No. 2 (1992), p. 159.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 161.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 159.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in Jackson, "Towards a Historical Sociology of Housework", p. 159.

acknowledge that housework did not “develop in isolation from capitalism but rather in ‘dynamic articulation’ with it.”¹⁸⁹ Thus, the nexus of women’s domestication, patriarchy and capital cannot be easily dismissed. However, even capitalism and patriarchy alone may not sufficiently explain the complexities in women’s domestication. On this note, Simon Morgan’s remark is particularly revealing:

Subsequent research has demonstrated that widespread acceptance of women’s essentially domestic role was compatible with engagement in a *whole range of causes* related to *social reform, imperial endeavour*, and even *political* campaigning, as long as women were able to claim that such activity remained within the elastic and permeable boundaries of their ‘sphere’.¹⁹⁰

Thus, as Morgan observes, an analysis of the causes of domesticity must necessarily go beyond the lens of capitalism and patriarchy, and contextualise the political and the imperial discourses, among others.

In light of some of the debates presented above, it is thus not uncommon to see, in most literature, domesticity being labelled as a cult, a way of life and a pervasive ideology largely hinged on patriarchal hegemony that seeks to perpetuate gender imbalances and, more often, serve the demands of capitalism. Even scholars like Genz who seek to revisit these projections and demythologise the ‘unhappy housewife myth’, note that they do not provide housewifery/domesticity “with a radically new meaning that wipes out its previous significations of drudgery and confinement.”¹⁹¹ The arguments that scholars have raised cannot be totally dismissed and neither can they also be universalised. As Penny Boumelha postulates, the major problem is in the representation of domesticity for women “as obvious

¹⁸⁹ Jackson, “Towards a Historical Sociology of Housework”, p. 168.

¹⁹⁰ Simon Morgan, “Between Public and Private: Gender, Domesticity, and Authority in the Long Nineteenth Century”, *The Historical Journal* Vol. 54, No. 4 (2011): p. 1198. The emphasis is mine.

¹⁹¹ Genz, “I am Not a Housewife”, p. 52.

and natural [when it] is partial, factitious and ineluctably social.”¹⁹² Domesticity is therefore a problem in so far as its association with women is naturalised when this should not be the case. The naturalisation of domesticity for women is driven largely by forces that seek to legitimatise segregating women and entrenching unfair gender stereotypes that sustain patriarchal hegemony. In the thesis, I will use material evidence from white women’s experiences in Southern Rhodesia to engage with some of the debates on domesticity.

Ideology versus practice

Having outlined the major tenets of and debates on domesticity, it must be reiterated that the domestic ideology was a powerful force that shaped the lives of women in the Victorian era and in colonies such as Southern Rhodesia. This, however, is not to deny the agency of the individual women. In the words of P. Levine, “it is very rare to find a thorough consonance between ideology and practice in any instance.”¹⁹³ Thus, this thesis does not suggest that women were some kind of mindless beings controlled by some powerful force and, therefore, had no influence whatsoever on their destiny or identity. This study does not see domesticity as hegemonic, choking white women and their progress as Betty Friedan seems to suggest in her book, *The Feminine Mystique*.¹⁹⁴

Indeed, as will be demonstrated, women could negotiate and undermine the different layers of domesticity, taking advantage of its elasticity to pursue many things beyond, and even within, the home front. Individual choice was no doubt paramount insofar as the aspects of

¹⁹² Penny Boumelha quoted in Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900* (London: Hutchison Education, 1987), p. 13.

¹⁹³ Levine, *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900*, p. 13.

¹⁹⁴ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1963). In this book Friedan has a section titled “The problem that has no name” in which she describes the experiences of women in America as constituting “a problem that has no name shared by countless women” (p. 21). This problem was associated with the unhappiness of the housewife.

domesticity a woman would choose to integrate but even more important, on whether or not to entertain the dominant forms of domesticity at all. In this context the study will address the element of “wild” or deviant women within the Rhodesian context, that is, those women who transgressed or “rebelled” against the dominant forms of domesticity. However, “the fact that women frequently transgressed these boundaries ... did not preclude it [domestic ideology] from comprising a powerful organising discourse.”¹⁹⁵

The discussion has so far provided an overarching frame within which the concept of domesticity will be employed in this study. It has also demonstrated how the domestic ideology evolved within industrialised societies. As has been shown, the categorisation of domesticity as oppressive to women, by most feminists, cannot be universalised nor can it be out-rightly dismissed. It has been shown that the “meaning of domesticity should not be understood... as stable and universal.”¹⁹⁶ This ideology is complex and it manifested in many layers in which different aspects were emphasised over time and space. This thesis will narrow its analysis to particular forms and spaces in which domesticity manifested in Southern Rhodesia in relationship to the historical experiences of white women.

The scope of the thesis

White women in Southern Rhodesia had wide ranging experiences and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to capture all the important experiences of these women. From the outset it should be noted that this thesis is largely a macro-study of white women in Southern Rhodesia. Such a study helps to have a bird’s eye view and analysis of the experiences of women but also does not accommodate some more specific or particular experiences.

¹⁹⁵ Morgan, “Between Public and Private”, p. 1198.

¹⁹⁶ Gillis and Hollows, “Introduction”, p. 12.

Although I collected individual stories of white women and those of women's organisations, in this study I analyse them within the broader contexts of the overall theme of domesticity. Many aspects about white women had to fall by the wayside as research material had inevitably to be selected. Certainly the story of white women's experiences in Southern Rhodesia is not complete in this piece. This thesis does not discuss the experiences of missionary women who are themselves worthy of a separate study. Some of these women came to the country before colonisation and the nature of their activities and experiences, though affected by the domestic ideology, constituted a unique set of experiences.

Sources and methods

The study is based largely on primary sources mostly from the official/institutional archives namely National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) and the Rhodes House library (RHL). It also uses primary documents from personal (home) archives.¹⁹⁷ In both the institutional and personal archives are correspondences by individual women, women's organisations and government officials. These archives also include minutes, newspaper articles, diaries, biographies, personal letters and newsletters, among other sources. A combination of both personal and official archives has helped to make a more nuanced analysis of domesticity vis-à-vis the roles and status of white women in Southern Rhodesia. As Antoinette Burton cautions us the archive, whether institutional or personal, should be subjected to "continuous suspicion and radical doubt."¹⁹⁸ Indeed, scholars are increasingly acknowledging that

¹⁹⁷ For an interesting analysis of the relationship between home and institutional archives see Tanya Fitzgerald, "Archives of Memory and Memories of Archive: CMS Women's Letters and Diaries 1823-35", *History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society*, Vol. 34, No. 6 (2005), pp. 657-674. Fitzgerald notes that there is an intricate relationship between these two as the institutional archive could also have been produced in the home.

¹⁹⁸ Antoinette Burton, "Thinking Beyond Boundaries: Empire, Feminism and the Boundaries and the Domains of History", *Social History*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2001), p. 66. For other critical reviews of the use of archives in gender studies see Cheryl McEwan, "Building a Postcolonial Archive? Gender, Collective Memory and Citizenship in Post-apartheid South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 29, No. 3 (2003); and

[institutional] archival documents are not transparent texts and that these “must, of course be read with care and questions about their production.”¹⁹⁹ As Tanya Fitzgerald aptly notes, “As spaces that store material about the rulers and the ruled, the silences that surround archives are deafening.”²⁰⁰ This implies that other players are either absent or misrepresented. Colonial archives such as those used in this thesis were generated largely by the colonial state and society and as such there is disproportionate representation of the voice of the colonised or marginalised. For this reason we should not only interrogate the content of the archive but also the archive itself “to reveal its privileges, silences and absences.”²⁰¹ Echoing Burton’s remark cited above Fitzgerald points out that “Archives function to institutionalize historical memory and the public persona of the archive should neither be taken for granted nor readers seduced by its contents.”²⁰² Indeed, in my research there were instances when the archive was silent or certain details were absent. For example, I had difficulties getting material on prostitution amongst white women beyond 1920. Thus, in an effort to overcome some of the silences and absences, I triangulated sources and employed fine grained reading as well as reading across the grain. The “silences and absences”, for instance, speak volumes about the attitude of the colonial state and society towards the trade.

Sources such as personal letters and diaries tend to dominate the personal archives. If official archives tend to represent the perceptions of the state and its officials, the personal archives help to counter the official discourse by presenting the perceptions and experiences of ordinary citizens. Helen Dampier’s evaluation of the South African settler women’s diaries also applies to Rhodesian women. She writes:

Todd Shepard, “History Is Past Politics? Archives, ‘Tainted Evidence’, and the Return of the State”, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 115, No. 2 (April 2010), pp. 474-483.

¹⁹⁹ Woollacott, *Gender and Empire*, p. 2.

²⁰⁰ Fitzgerald, “Archives of Memory and Memories of Archive”, p. 659.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*

The importance of settler women's diaries lies not in the details they may provide about the Eastern Cape in the nineteenth century, but in what the texts reveal about the women themselves... Women's diaries are especially significant because the diary and letter were often the only written forms of expression and commentary available to women.²⁰³

In this research, diaries and letters were also used to help reveal more on

the nature of women's experiences and these were particularly useful in illustrating some of the intimate thoughts. However, the letters and diaries are not innocent from bias as they too are produced with potential audiences in mind hence a tendency to censor some issues that may be subject to censure by society.

The personal letters to family and friends and diaries have been particularly useful in expressing the perceptions of various people on expected norms and values for women. These sources have acted as mirrors of both the individuals and the society by highlighting, among other things, perceptions and constructions of normative roles of gender within the colonial context. Admittedly, while these sources have the strength of giving first-hand accounts for both women's organisations and individual women, they are subjective and, therefore, limited in their presentation of how other players such as white men, the colonial state and Africans perceived white women in terms of their expected roles and status. The print media, in the form of national newspapers (especially letters to the editor), newsletters and magazines produced on and by white women's organisations and individual women helped, among other things, to give a broader view of public opinion and individual attitudes towards white women.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Dampier, "Settler Women's Experiences of Fear", p. 21.

²⁰⁴ Some of the women's organisations that produced newsletters/magazines were the Association of Women's Clubs, Federation of African Women Clubs, Business and Professional Women's Clubs, National Housewives Register, Rhodesia Association of University Women and the University of Rhodesia Women's Club Newsletter.

Aside from the above sources, the research employed twenty-nine in-depth interviews four of which were with white men. Finding interviewees in the initial phase of the research proved difficult partly because of the increased racial tensions in the country which had been accelerated by the land resettlement of the year 2000 in which many white farmers lost their farms. However, some of the women interviewed in an earlier project on white women in the Public Service of Southern Rhodesia helped in locating potential interviewees who, subsequently, led me to other individuals from their networks. I also joined the History Society where I received immense assistance and a platform to present some of my research findings.²⁰⁵ Interviews of white women conducted by others were also used and I received some of these from informants while others are lodged in the National Archives of Zimbabwe. The interviews brought clarity to a number of issues refuting and, at times, confirming some of my findings in the archives. Using archived interviews helped to access informants that I would never have had access to because they have died or relocated. The interviews also gave white women a voice in addition to the voices from newsletters, diaries, personal letters and letters to the editor in newspapers or magazines.

However, interviews had their limitations. Memory loss, for example, frequently catches up with oral evidence probably more than in most forms of evidence and the usual problems of dates, locating or remembering events, places and names were met. Another limitation was that some of these interviews were in third person, meaning that interviewees would prefer to give information about their relatives as opposed to their own experiences and, sometimes, the story being told would be hearsay as opposed to being direct personal experience. This is

²⁰⁵ The History Society of Zimbabwe was established before the independence of Zimbabwe which was in 1980. It is largely dominated by white membership. I have only seen two of us black Zimbabweans in the few times I have attended the presentations. My observation in its Journals and the few sessions I attended is that its historical topics are, to a greater extent, nostalgic concentrating largely on the historical experiences of white Rhodesians. There have been efforts, however, to expand membership as well as diversify the topics discussed but the Society has not been successful in attracting black Zimbabwean historians.

true of all the forms of interviews accessed including those at the National Archives.²⁰⁶ Some of the white women tended to perceive their experiences as insignificant and not worthy recording because they were “mere housewives” or were not involved in politics or they would say that they did not do anything that left a significant mark. The women whose interviews are deposited in the National Archives tended to speak more about men in their lives (husbands or fathers), especially those that became influential in Rhodesian society. This down-playing of women’s significance reflected in the archived interviews and in the ones I conducted confirms the stereotyping of women as appendices in the male dominated society.

There was also a tendency for interviewees to speak in glowing terms of themselves and their family members or undermine certain issues that would bring negative images of white society. This seemed to happen when topics on racism and prostitution were raised. It is possible that such responses were affected by factors such as gender and race. Kate Law talks about the insider/outsider element which exists in interview processes.²⁰⁷ Being a black male researcher, I was an outsider in the interviews with white women and this definitely shaped the atmosphere and the nature of responses given. For example, it was difficult for informants to express or confess explicit racial prejudice. In the occasions where this was acknowledged, it was usually in third person. Commenting on his research experience as a white person amongst former Rhodesians, Rory Pilosof indicates that some of his interviewees were “comfortable” with using racist or prejudiced language adding that, “indeed, it is unlikely that they would have used such language in an interview with another ... researcher.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Some of the interviews accessed from the National Archives of Zimbabwe include Oral/BA 1 - Mrs Gladys Barratt (born 1899) Interviewer: D. Hartridge, Gatooma, 30 June 1969; Oral/AL 1 – Mrs Berenice Mapes Alvord (Born 1891) Interviewer: J. D. McCarthy, 25 October 1973 and Oral/CH 1- Gertrude Mary (‘Petal’) Coghlan-Chennells (Born 1902) Interviewer: D. Hartridge, Matopos, 4 November 1970.

²⁰⁷ Law, “Writing White Women”, p. 88.

²⁰⁸ Pilosof, “The Unbearable Whiteness of Being”, p. 203.

Notwithstanding some of the limitations of the interviews, the information from interviews remained useful because there were some basic facts about some experiences, which remained true or could be verified. I was also able to corroborate some interviews with written documents. As Alessandro Portelli opines, the value of interviews may not so much have to do with adherence to fact, “but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism and desire image.”²⁰⁹ In this context, therefore, “oral sources are credible but with *different* credibility.”²¹⁰ The study also made use of emails and the internet in general for communications and sourcing of information, sometimes as follow ups to interviews for clarity.

The study uses both maiden names and those acquired from husbands upon marriage (such as Mrs. Jones). The latter is used where it has not been possible to establish the former. The use of first names is intended at giving these women their individual identities as opposed to perpetuating their incorporation. The decision to use maiden names is also inspired by one Sheila Griffiths quoted in this thesis who celebrated the fact that her becoming a member of the National Housewives Register (NHR)²¹¹ brought her back her identity as opposed to an identity borrowed from her husband or child (e.g. Mike’s wife or Joana’s Mother).²¹² This demonstrates a determination by some white women for individual independent identity as opposed to an identity tied to their husbands or children which emphasised their domestication.

²⁰⁹ Alessandro Portelli quoted in Law, “Writing White Women”, p. 86.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ I discuss this organisation in detail in Chapters One and Three.

²¹² Sheila Griffiths, “What NHR Means to Me”, *NHR Newsletter* (June 1978).

While this thesis is largely a macro-study, it also employs some case studies for example in our understanding of women's domestication in the work place and their political experiences. The case studies are convenient as they help to make detailed analysis without resorting to generalisations. In some instances, they act as useful indicators on some trends. For example, the case study of the public service used in the study employed more women than the private sector. For this reason, some pointers can be made using the public service about the general working experiences of white women in colonial Zimbabwe. The case studies also help to make the analysis manageable especially in terms of content. The study also uses a thematic approach. This approach helps to tackle the nature of the research. The development of an ideology is quite complex and, at times, difficult to trace its detail evolution over time and space. Breaking the analysis into specific themes related to the ideology and then follow their evolution seemed the most appropriate approach but again this was not entirely free of challenges of periodisation as some trends were simply difficult to restrict to or define by specific periods.

Finally, this thesis employs some statistics to illustrate some of the arguments. Statistics help to demonstrate trends and make scientific interpretations of changes such as population trends including sex ratios, employment patterns among other things. However, there were some limitations with some of the statistics. At times it was difficult to find statistics representing the whole colonial period to allow for a wider appreciation of changes occurring over time. In other instances statistics were packaged in ways that made them unusable. For example, I wanted to get statistics of housewives during the colonial period but these appeared bunched together with what was called 'inactive population'. This population included inmates and visitors into the country. It was thus

difficult to have an accurate representation of the statistics representing housewives. Analysis of official and non-official correspondences, however, helped to give an impression of the changing trends in housewifery. In the instances where statistics used cover brief periods, these still help to illustrate the arguments being made and their being brief do not invalidate the overall argument.

Thesis structure

Chapter One

This chapter analyses the domestic spaces where white women spent much of their time, especially when they were housewives. It examines the nature of encounters that white women had in this space and, because of the centrality of the housewife to this space, the chapter makes a detailed examination of the institution of housewifery. The chapter investigates how housewifery was constructed, negotiated and appropriated by white women in Southern Rhodesia.

Chapter Two

The chapter examines the plight of white women who took up wage employment. It also presents some of the arguments made for and against white women's employment that reflect changing perceptions about women's proper place in society. The chapter narrows its discussion to the Public Service of Southern Rhodesia and notes that the conditions of service for white women and the limitations upon their choices of career were part of the domesticity project. Finally, the chapter discusses how white women responded to their domestication in the workplace and assess some of the concessions made which helped reformulate their positions in the workplace but without necessarily destroying the system that sustained the subordination of women.

Chapter Three

The chapter focuses on white women's organisations and their roles within settler society. These organisations played a pivotal role in shaping the colonial developments and the chapter discusses their nature and the activities they conducted in relationship to the domestic ideology. It argues that these organisations played the roles of 'mothering the empire' and were themselves domesticity-oriented in their contributions. The chapter indicates that most women's organisations generally did not seek to radically challenge the normative gender roles although they at times displayed frustration and dissatisfaction with the existing roles and status of women in Rhodesian society.

Chapter Four

This chapter is primarily concerned with the encounter of white women with the Africans. It discusses the forces that shaped and informed these interactions and demonstrates the outcome of the encounter. The chapter discusses white women's contributions towards the social welfare of Africans and analyses the motives for such involvement. It also looks at the white women's encounter with Africans within different settings including the domestic settings. The chapter also explores the attitudes of the so called liberal white women and the nature of their interactions with Africans.

Chapter Five

The last chapter discusses the experiences of women who defied domesticity. It shows that there were at least two classes of such women, namely, those who rebelled against social norms and, secondly, those who penetrated the traditional male fields such as executive management, business ownership and politics. From each of these two categories, the study picks one case. From the first category, the chapter looks at debates on white women

prostitutes in early Southern Rhodesia and from the second category it picks the example of Muriel Rosin who took up a political career in Southern Rhodesia from the mid-1940s up to 1980.

CODESRIA - LIBRARY

CHAPTER ONE

WHITE WOMEN AND THE DOMESTIC SPACE: HOUSEWIFERY IN THE
RHODESIAN CONTEXT**Introduction**

In this chapter, and that follow, the study analyses the domestic ideology within the Southern Rhodesian context. The chapter discusses the experiences of white women in relation to domestic spaces. Indeed, the domestic ideology has always found its greatest expression in the form of homemaking/housewifery as a prescribed occupation for women. To a greater extent, therefore, this chapter will analyse the institution of housewifery and investigate how it was constructed, adopted and deployed by white women in Rhodesia. The chapter also discusses the evolution of housewifery over time and space and explores the various perceptions about this occupation. Building upon earlier conceptualisation of domesticity, the study employs empirical evidence to explore different aspects of housewifery in Rhodesian settler society in both urban and non-urban settings. Housewives or homemakers, as some preferred to be called, were stay-at-home wives as opposed to those who engaged in formal employment or followed a career path. Though there is a tendency of emphasising the experiences of women when discussing domestic spaces, it is important to acknowledge that “both women and men live in households and society”¹ and, therefore, their worlds are intertwined.

The sections in this chapter revolve around the experiences of white women in private domestic spaces. The first section explores the various forms that housewifery took in the Rhodesian context and demonstrates its heterogeneity and dynamic nature over time and

¹ Hansen, “Introduction”, pp. 16-17.

space. The second section attempts to account for white women's taking up housewifery as an occupation and locates this within the context of the dominant domestic ideology and personal choice. This section is followed up by a discussion on the responses of white women to the institution of housewifery and indicates that women contested various attributes of this occupation though most subscribed to it. The chapter then proceeds to examine how housewifery was also exploited by the captains of Rhodesian commerce who saw potential consumers in the housewives. The chapter also demonstrates that the Rhodesian housewives were not passive in the face of exploitation by industrial capital as they sometimes challenged what were perceived as exorbitant prices for household consumables. The fifth section looks at the institution of housewifery on the farms which offered a unique experience for the white women. The chapter also makes a brief reference to the violent experiences of white women in the domestic spaces.

Mapping housewifery in Southern Rhodesia

Barbara R. Bergmann described housewifery as an occupation, "with characteristics quite different from all others."² In this occupation, the housewife was expected to cook, wash dishes, do the house-cleaning, laundry work, child care and fulfil a "personal relations" component, which included sexual relations.³ In the Rhodesian context, this description of a housewife would be inadequate as housewifery was a far more complex and dynamic institution. To Bergmann's list could be added the supervision of domestic workers who engaged in housework. On farms or remote stations, housewifery expanded to include a whole series of activities, some commercial, and extending beyond the farmhouse. The expanded definition, which accommodates the farmers' wives, is in sync with the early (pre-

² Barbara R. Bergman, "The Economic Risk of Being a Housewife", *American Economic Review*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (1981), p. 81.

³*Ibid.*

industrial) concept of housewifery in Britain. Stevi Jackson notes that “early housewifery encompassed a far broader range of tasks than modern housework.”⁴ She also points out that it “was an integral part of economic life and entailed production for exchange as well as for household use.”⁵ Amongst this range of “tasks” were the production of fruits and vegetables, the milking of cows, brewing beer and cider, the breeding of poultry and pigs, the making of butter and cheese, concocting herbal remedies, making candles as well as spinning flax and wool.⁶ The same can be said of Rhodesian women on the farms. Thus, housewifery in Rhodesia, in many ways, was a combination of both the ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ concepts of this occupation with the farms largely associated with the former and the urban set-up with the latter.

There were some general and common unwritten expectations of a housewife, whether she was an urbanite or not. A housewife, for example, was expected to take care of the children’s welfare, particularly their health, education, entertainment, among other things. She was expected to have continuous and direct contact with her children as they grew up, run the household as well as take care of the welfare and upkeep of her husband. If there was a domestic worker, the wife trained and supervised their labour. Despite notable similarities, on the whole, housewives’ experiences varied from one family, or environment, to another. Indeed, the experiences of housewives in Rhodesia were not homogeneous.⁷ There were certainly differences in the experiences influenced by class and even geography. Urban housewives, for instance, had a fairly different experience from those in the non-urban areas such as farms and mines. Even within the same setting, there were some notable differences.

⁴ Jackson, “Towards a Historical Sociology of Housework”, p. 154.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ It was difficult to establish the statistics of housewives per given period in Southern Rhodesia. The closest I got to such statistics is when census reports made reference to what was called the inactive population. This population included housewives, inmates and visitors to the colony and did not disaggregate these categories.

In the case of the urban areas in the post-Second World War era, Irene Staunton's remark is quite revealing. She notes:

Turning to the little I knew of urban white women in Rhodesia, meaning Salisbury, I think their situation was far more complex and varied than it might first appear. It was a very demarcated and class-based society. Women in the poorer suburbs of Cranborne, Hatfield, Mabelreign, Marlborough would have had rather different lives and attitudes (even if they shared similar aspirations) than women who lived in the affluent suburbs of Highlands, Borrowdale and Chisipite.⁸

As I will demonstrate below, housewifery was also dynamic. A housewife in the early colonial period, for example, had to contend with a variety of challenges different to those of, for instance, the post-Second World War.

The experiences of the pioneering housewife have been captured widely in Rhodesian literature including biographical works. An editorial piece in the *You* magazine of July 1964 reflected some of the different experiences of housewives over time:

The pioneering women of 1964 are a little better off in the bush than their "mothers" 35 years ago. Ingenuity kept your food cool in the 1920's... Now, though they have no electricity, they have a paraffin fridge, a luxury which the old-timers didn't dream of.⁹

It is clear that the dictates of the new and different environment often coined new values and ways to adapt. One Mrs. Frances Kennedy, married to a miner, recalled her pioneer days thus, "I was a miner, housekeeper and mother and they were strenuous years.... My husband gave me £20 for my birthday and I bought a little mine with it and called it the B. P."¹⁰ Such practice for a woman would have been uncommon in Britain. There are many similar tales of

⁸ Autobiographical note by Irene Staunton sent by email as attachment <weaver@mango.zw> (4 April 2012).

⁹ "Our 1964 Pioneers", *You: Rhodesian Woman and Home* (July issue, 1964), p. 20. For some references to white women's tough pioneering experiences in Gwelo town see Diana Jeater, "No Place for a Woman: Gwelo, Southern Rhodesia, 1894-1920." *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 26 No. 1 (2000), pp. 29-42.

¹⁰ Kirkwood, "Settler Wives in Southern Rhodesia", p. 154.

such extraordinary experiences by, especially, pioneering women which are recorded in biographies, memoirs etc.

The pioneer wives had to contend with helping their husbands build structures, clear forests and make do with the little that was available. This experience was not peculiar to the pioneer days. Even as late as the 1960s, women who accompanied their husbands to virtually new areas of European settlement had pioneering experiences. Meg Cumming narrated her relocation together with her husband to the largely uninhabited tsetse-infested remote areas of Gokwe which “was itself a pioneering experience”.¹¹ Her husband had been tasked with the establishment of the first Tsetse Research Station at Sengwa in 1966. Using the South African example of settler English women, Helen Dampier, however, cautions us from stereotyping settler women’s experiences as heroic and brave noting that, “Much of the time they (settler women) were not brave, victorious or heroic, but selfish and greedy or fearful, lonely and ill. Their experiences were not uniform ... but varied and complex, not always ending in triumph and success.”¹²

In this new environment, the basic source of even basic supplies was very far away and so was access to basic amenities like education and health. Throughout the period that Meg stayed in Sengwa, she resorted to teaching her children through long distance primary education, providing medical assistance to African labourers living in the vicinity, and also developed a hobby of taming wild animals like warthogs. Such domestic experiences undoubtedly differed from those of the urban housewife who, for instance, was not compelled to teach her own children by correspondence as they had schools within accessible distances. Indeed, in the remote locations, more often than not it was the mother’s duty to teach the

¹¹ Personal Interview with Meg Cumming, Harare, 6 March 2012.

¹² Dampier, “Settler Women’s Experiences”, p. 10.

children by correspondence when they reached school age.¹³ In a letter to *The Rhodesia Herald* in 1950, one J. Cormack (presumably a mother) wrote, "If you have a family and live in the country, 10 to 1 you will have to educate them yourselves. A wife has to be a teacher as well as mother."¹⁴

Because of poor access to advanced health facilities (and other basic necessities), either because these were not yet in the country or simply because of the remoteness of settlement, child-bearing and rearing was, for instance, a different experience for the post-Second World War housewife in the town as compared to the housewife of early colonial days or the one who was remotely located. Indeed, in the early colonial period, the death of family members was common as a result, in part, of poor access to medicine. The stories of pioneering families are filled with saddening losses of infants and young children. Walter Krienke reflected on some of the experiences of his pioneering grandparents during the first decade of colonisation:

Whilst opening up this property [the Stoneridge farm] we all suffered many hardships, and there was much sickness in the family. This period of sickness will serve general illustration of the wonderful pluck, bravery, and stout heartedness, of the womenfolk. With the sole exception of my mother, every member of our family went down with fever at the same time. Day and night she toiled, nursing and tending eleven sick persons. Three were critically ill, and one, Othilia, died on the 11th February, 1892.¹⁵

Making reference to one Mrs Clara Jane Tapsell, who came to Rhodesia with her husband in 1893, Folkertsen wrote, "Food was scarce and fruit and vegetables were not to be had. She (Mrs. Tapsell) lost three children in infancy through lack of medicine and malnutrition."¹⁶ In the face of high death rates, Rhodesian families in the early periods thus tended to be

¹³ Personal interview with Adele, Harare, 7 February 2012.

¹⁴ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 27 May 1950.

¹⁵ Walter Krienke, "Northwards to Mashonaland in 1891". in Jeannie M. Boggie, *Experiences of Rhodesia's Pioneer Women*, p.51.

¹⁶ Beb Folkertsen, "Gwelo Central Group", *NHR Newsletter*, December 1977.

relatively big.¹⁷ Mrs. Fox made reference to her grandmother, Noll Farmer, who had five daughters and the eldest, according to Mrs. Fox, “was the first person to die of cerebral malaria in Rhodesia.... Even the youngest daughter of my grandmother had four children and our mother had four children.”¹⁸

Having such relatively big families naturally further complicated the life of a housewife. It was such complicated experiences that characterised early housewifery differently from the later period when medication, family planning methods and technology became relatively advanced and available. In mentioning the challenges faced by white women, it is not suggested that these experiences were peculiar to white women in the country. In fact, African women experienced these and more, especially under colonial rule. Challenging the emphasis that scholars gave on white women’s troubles as pioneers in South Africa, Dampier posits that “Black women on the frontier endured all these conditions at the same time, hence they are not hardships that can be used to single out white women settlers as special.”¹⁹

I have already hinted on the poor access to basic amenities in health which was experienced by housewives in various magnitudes in the colonial period. This was particularly true of the earlier colonial days as well as the remote areas even late in the colonial period. As a result of poor access to health facilities, housewifery became a complicated undertaking, especially where issues like child birth, bringing up children and running everyday household activities were concerned. In an archived interview, one Rhodesian woman, Gertrude Mary Coghlan-Chennells discussed one of her mother’s experiences with child birth that shows the difficult circumstances under which pioneer women had to give birth:

¹⁷ Personal Interview with Mr and Mrs Fox, Harare, 30 March 2012.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Dampier, “Settler Women’s Experiences of Fear”, p. 11.

My mother told me ... that some man turned up at the wagon while she was in pain and in labour, and she wished he would go away, but hung on and he didn't go away until after everything was over. When he heard the baby cry he jumped up and said, "What on earth is that?" And my father said, "I don't know, but I think my wife has got an infant."²⁰

Without medical expertise or facilities, the woman gave birth and clearly no one had any idea of what was happening or what had to be done. This, of course, increased the health risks for both the baby and its mother.

Historical developments have also had their share of contribution to the experiences of Rhodesian housewives. The First and Second Chimurenga, for instance, destabilised families and both men and women lived in uncertainty and fear. One Mrs. Annie Fletcher reflected on her experience during the first Chimurenga of 1896 in Bulawayo:

I carried the small child, and leading the other, we made the way to the club [where everyone was going for safety]. Here we found "confusion worse confounded", with vengeance. Into the club we jostled – men and children. We could hardly gain admittance; there were so many women and children, and men crowding in and out. The alarm was unexpected; and all sorts of things were dragged in to the club.²¹

The normal and everyday experience of the settler society was disrupted and many had to make do with makeshift arrangements in running the family. Normal supplies of basic commodities were, for instance, disrupted. "I cooked over an open fire at the back", writes Annie Fletcher, "there wasn't much to cook. Meal £10 a bag. Eggs, when obtainable, £1 10s 0d. to £2 per dozen; very little sugar, no butter, rinderpest meat, which we were told to boil eight hours [sic]."²²

²⁰ Oral/CH 1- Gertrude Mary ('Petal') Coghlan-Chennells (Born 1902), Interviewer: D. Hartridge, Matopos, 4 November 1970.

²¹ Quoted in Chapter titled "Assegais and Battle Axes", Jeannie M. Boggie, *Experiences of Rhodesia's Pioneer Women*, p. 21.

²² *Ibid.*

The First and Second World Wars, on the other hand, saw an increasing number of women moving out of the cocoons of private domesticity as they replaced men who went to the war front or simply took up the ever increasing jobs created by the war economy.²³ In some instances, like in the Second World War, women were engaged in voluntary activities such as collecting Stramonium (*Datura stramonium*). These are dried leaves of the jimson weed that have medicinal properties. They were delivered to Britain where they proved indispensable in the treatment of war victims. In Britain, the world wars shifted the boundaries of home to mean nation and in the case of Rhodesia, the British Empire was the home in which women were to play a pivotal role as “Mothers of the Empire”. Commenting on the impact of the Second World War in Britain, Margaret Allen notes that, “Some of the central ideals of the domestic ideal were attacked during the war, as women were encouraged to cut down on the time they spent on housework.”²⁴ A similar situation was obtained in Southern Rhodesia probably not at the same scale as in Britain. For example, refresher courses were introduced for married women who had stopped work as clerks, typists and bookkeepers upon marriage.²⁵ As the twist in the domestic ideal gave women a new emphasis of identity as “mothers of the empire”, husbands and children could now be sacrificed in the name of the war.

The increasing activities of women outside the home compromised their prescribed roles as mothers and wives. During the Second World War, women’s organisations were quick to notice this. In 1944, the president of the FWISR wrote, “the gradual breaking down of the old conception of family life which has been characteristic of this century has been greatly

²³ See Kufakurinani, “While a Career is Vital for a Man”.

²⁴ Allen, “The Domestic Ideal”, p. 403.

²⁵ NAZ, S482/198/40, Government Scheme for commercial training of women to replace men 1940. The scheme became controversial partly because instead of the mandated training of married women who had done the clerical courses beforehand, it also proceeded to recruit first time students and, because the fees were subsidised heavily by the state, its operations posed a huge threat to established commercial schools.

accelerated by war conditions.”²⁶ Measures were, therefore, implemented so that the home-front would not totally fall apart. FWISR, for example, decided to intervene by opening the first permanent crèche in Salisbury to give preference “to the children of mothers who are working all day”.²⁷ It was, however, hoped that this facility would “not encourage mothers to get jobs when they do not require doing so”.²⁸

Somewhat similar to the world wars, the Zimbabwean war of independence (the Second Chimurenga) that reached its peak in the 1970s saw women engaging increasingly outside housewifery, sometimes being recruited as army and police reserves or as part of auxiliary forces. However, the most popular area of participation was in war-related charity work. The contribution of white women towards efforts against the Liberation war must not be overemphasised. Godwin and Hancock note that attempts to call-up women never attracted much support:

Apart, however, from the busyness of women involved in war charity work, one of the striking features of Bulawayo and Salisbury life in 1978-79 was their largely uninterrupted patterns of ‘feminine’ social activity: managing the home, delivering or collecting the children, shopping and playing bridge or tennis, chattering with friends over tea or drinks.²⁹

Whether the women involved themselves in political campaigns, professions, the war effort, farm activities or voluntary work among others, as long as this meant more time outside the home confines, housewifery was compromised in one way or the other.

Boggie, writing an autobiography of her farm experiences between 1917 and the 1950s, illustrates the point made immediately above. At one time she became absorbed in the

²⁶ McClintock, “W.I. Notes: The President Deals with a Variety of Subjects”, *VUKA*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (September 1944), p. 67.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Godwin and Hancock, *‘Rhodesians Never Die’*, p. 305.

organisation of campaigns for her husband in local politics and when her husband complained about his shirt having two buttons off and his socks having developed holes, she replied, "sorry old dear! I haven't sewn on a button nor darned a sock nor a stocking since the last stage of the campaign began. In fact, I've sometimes been so busy that I have washed my neck with my left hand while drying my face with my right hand."³⁰ She was expected to have done these domestic chores despite having domestic workers and many farm labourers. In a nutshell, outside activities were thus seen as resulting in women's loss of their perceived true sense of femininity which was constructed around housewifery, among other things. It is this neglect of 'feminine' duties that was feared for women that took outside interests. Thus women's organisations and the society at large continuously reminded women that they owed it to their husbands and children to be housewives before serving their outside interests.

For some women, housewifery was not always a permanent status. When children had grown up or when times became economically strained, housewifery could be suspended as women took up part- or full-time jobs. Writing, in 1977, one Sheila Jones indicated how she had to sacrifice her belief in housewifery to make ends meet and balance the two worlds of home and work. "Having always held the view that a mother should be at home (if she can possibly afford it) I have never had a full-time job, though I have had the occasional part-time temporary jobs."³¹ As this thesis will show, even the responses of women, the Rhodesian state and society at large, towards housewifery also differed over time and space. In the first half of the twentieth century, housewifery was heavily encouraged for married women and, in fact, was the expected and normal thing to be done by these women.

³⁰ Boggie, *A Husband and A Farm*.

³¹ Sheila Jones, "Sheila Jones of Bulawayo Morning and Evening Groups", *NHR Newsletter* (December 1977).

Housewifery as the ideal for Rhodesian women

The formulation and entrenchment of the domestic ideology in Southern Rhodesia was the work of various forces in this country. The colonial state and society in many ways ordered the roles and status of white women in Southern Rhodesia. The former instituted policies and pieces of legislation that sustained domesticity for white women. Women's organisations too played their role in encouraging domesticity, criticising anything that tended to take a different course and used print media (magazines and newsletters) for domesticity propaganda.

The idea of home as the suitable place for a married woman was further buttressed by fellow white women. For instance, in a letter to *The Rhodesia Herald* in 1930, one Mrs. R. Darlington, complained about the employment of married women in preference to the single women in the Public Service, "What does one get married for? I ask you, why, to keep a house, rear a family, perhaps cook the meals, darn hubby's socks etc. The married woman has a husband to keep her that's one reason why she gets married - to cease work. Who has the single girl to keep her?"³² She signed her letter as follows, "I am etc. (Mrs.) R. Darlington (married and unemployed as it should be.)"³³ No doubt she was very proud of this position and this was shared by many of her contemporaries. Her belief, which resembled Victorian domesticity, was that once married, a woman had to take up domestic duties at home and employment was ideally a preserve for the single women.

In the official circles, the stereotyping of married women as destined for housewifery also lingered on. This is notwithstanding the liberalisation of posts for married women in the

³² *The Rhodesia Herald*, 6 March 1930.

³³ *Ibid.*

1930s. Thus, “until 1971, a woman who married while occupying a permanent post in the civil service was required to resign or was discharged. If she wished to stay on, she had to accept a temporary position and the concomitant poorer leave, holiday and promotion benefits or profits.”³⁴ For the state, therefore, a married woman’s place was the home and her commitment was first to her children and husband. The temporary post she was offered after marriage would allow her to be flexible in terms of leaving work or having holidays to accommodate her husband’s programmes. All this served to sustain and entrench the domestic ideology.

By the 1970s, there was a clearly marked change in perceptions towards housewifery by women largely in the urban areas. Though many may have continued to uphold the old notions of women’s place being the home, from a perusal of correspondence and several expressions by women, it is clear that in the second half of the century there was a growing discomfort with housewifery amongst women. Writing to the *NHR Newsletter* in 1977, Sue Johnson observed that, “a lot of women... [had] a complex about being ‘just’ housewives.... They felt *embarrassed* to say to other people that they are housewives – it sounds too boring.”³⁵ The newsletters produced by the NHR since the beginning of the 1970s are also awash with contributions that questioned the notions of housewifery as woman’s proper occupation. This is in contrast to the pride in housewifery reflected by Darlington quoted above, and the many calls by women’s organisations before the 1950s for women to elevate their femininity by taking housewifery more seriously. If this does not demonstrate the difference of perceptions of housewifery over time, definitely it does show the heterogeneity of Rhodesian women’s perceptions of housewifery.

³⁴ Godwin and Hancock, *Rhodesians Never Die*, p. 23.

³⁵ Sue Johnsen, “A Woman’s Place is in the Home”, *NHR Newsletter* (December 1977). Emphasis added.

The watersheds in the changes of perceptions over women's place in society can be found in the First and Second World Wars. As the thesis demonstrates, in both wars, white women were encouraged to participate in the war efforts in various categories particularly outside the home. These developments, among others, helped gradually erode the stereotypes of women's place in the domestic sphere as their labour was mobilised to aid the war efforts. This, undoubtedly, also contributed to the reformulation of the nature and form of housewifery.

Sometimes the decision to become a housewife was by choice while at times circumstances simply could not permit any alternative decision. On the whole, however, the domestic ideology which was pervasive in Rhodesian society seems to have played a significant role in driving women into housewifery. Apart from the obvious fact that housewifery was taken up in Rhodesia as part of the importation of Victorian culture, there are several other factors that help explain the rooting of housewifery in Rhodesia as the ideal for married women. Socio-economic forces as well as statutory measures restricted married women in the domestic arena, in the process helping to construct and entrench the domestic ideology. While legislative measures that barred married women from employment were repealed in the 1930s, the notion that women had to quit work upon marriage prevailed throughout the colonial period. As late as 1977, Beb Folkertsen of Gwelo was defending the notion that a woman's place was the home, arguing that "a stay-at-home wife and mother is a very important person as, being the pivot of the home, she carries great responsibility",³⁶ adding that the wife and mother would play a crucial role in rearing children. Sue Johnson wrote in

³⁶ Beb Folkertsen, "Beb Folkertsen of Gwelo Tells us Why She is a Stay-at-home wife", *NHR Newsletter* (December 1977).

the same year, "I feel it is essential to be at home for the first five years of one's children's lives."³⁷

The interests of the husband were always paramount in a patriarchal society such as that of settlers in Rhodesia. This scenario is well captured by the concept of incorporation discussed in the introductory chapter. In many instances, housewifery was justified to serve the interests of the husband. Rhodesian society believed that if a married woman took up a career, this would compromise her role as wife and mother. It was argued, for instance, that she would not be the patient listener she should be to her husband as she, too, would be worn out by a day's work. "Although a husband [could] enjoy a higher standard of living because of his wife's job, he often loses that relaxed listener to his problems that a stay-at-home wife can be when she hasn't had to cope with her own business problems."³⁸

Different women's organisations, on a number of occasions also actively campaigned for the entrenchment of private domesticity for girls and women. In her address to the 1938 Annual Congress, the chairperson of the FWISR, Mrs. Trotman, remarked:

The Women's Institute key word was 'home and country' [sic]. Home and family must come *before everything else*. The *greatest service* a woman could give to mankind was *housekeeping* in the true sense of the word, including the care of children and their upbringing.... In fact, it is the fulfilment of our definite duties that is required of us in the world's civilisation.³⁹

³⁷ Sue Johnsen, "A Woman's Place is in the Home", *NHR Newsletter* (December 1977).

³⁸ Folkertsen, "Beb Folkertsen of Gwelo Tells us Why She is a Stay-at-home wife".

³⁹ *Home and Country*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1938), p. 5. Emphasis added.

As I will demonstrate, women's organisations (and individuals too) also argued that the acculturation of women into domesticity had to begin in the schools, hence the various campaigns to introduce domestic sciences (housewifery) in the school curriculum.⁴⁰

Rhodesian Magazines such as the monthly *Home and Country*, established by the FWISR, and *You: Rhodesian Woman and Home*, became popular among women and, like the *Home Chat*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Ideal Home* and other women's magazines in Britain, tended to celebrate women's identities as housewives and mothers discussing topics in hygiene, beautification of the house, sewing and cookery, among other domestic-oriented subjects. Catherine Harwood notes that women's magazines in Britain, "tried to elevate the image of women as homemakers by aiming to dignify what elsewhere could be seen as drudgery... encouraging women to buy their way to the new domestic freedom."⁴¹ Similarly, in Southern Rhodesian magazines, domesticity was valorised as a woman's proper destiny and, therefore, women had to be exposed to and educated in various aspects of this terrain.

It was common that women gave up careers for housewifery upon marriage or having a child. In some instances, when this was the first child, this often meant the beginning of a long spell of housewifery, until such a time that all the children became 'old enough'. Writing to the *NHR Newsletter*, Heather Uzzel explained her own experience, "I left [work] to have my daughter, now 12, and haven't worked outside the home since, feeling strongly that a mother is needed at home. I also have a son of six."⁴² However, in other instances, women could get back to their career paths and punctuate them with child births.

⁴⁰ See Chapter Three.

⁴¹ Catherine Horwood, "Housewives' Choice – Women as Consumers between the Wars", *History Today*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (March 1997), p. 23.

⁴² "Profiles of our Local Organisers – Heather Uzzel", *National Housewives Register (NHR) Newsletter* (June 1978).

It was also common for wives to suddenly find themselves without a career after the transfer of their husbands to another town or some rural setting or having married a husband, such as a farmer, who would be stationed in a remote area. In such instances, these women could be forced to withdraw into private domesticity possibly because they could not find an occupation to match their careers. The transfer of male civil servants, for example, was very common in Rhodesia and, in such cases, their wives were also forced to abandon their careers, at times for ever, and become permanent housewives. Jill Lamount, for example, was forced by circumstances to leave her work and join her husband who had been transferred from Salisbury to Que Que [now Kwekwe]. With a tone of exasperation, she wrote:

When I arrived in Que Que in August 1976 as the result of my husband's transfer from Salisbury I have to admit to feelings of sadness and disruption in my way of life, after having been well established with friends and things to do in the main centre of our country for over twenty years.⁴³

In Que Que, Mrs. Lamount became a housewife having left her employment in Salisbury. She was unable to find a suitable occupation in the new town. Judging from the correspondences, this experience of husband transfers was quite common in Rhodesia. Miriam Staunton, wife of a Native Commissioner, at one point expressed her frustration towards her husband's constant moving. In a poetic verse in one of her letters to her brother in Britain, she protested:

I am an angry and exasperated woman!
I am a maddened and infuriated wife!
No one knows when the removal van is coming
These transfers are the burden of my life!
They say it may be next week or November
I don't know when I am to pack
I have a multitude of things to remember
I would like to give moronic males the sack!⁴⁴

⁴³ Jill, Lamount, "What NHR means to me", *NHR Newsletter* (December 1979).

⁴⁴ RHL, MSS AFR. S. 2398, Staunton Papers, To J.D Cheales (Brother), 20 October 1958.

Commenting on the psychological effect of such transfers, a contemporary observer noted, “outwardly the women take these moves in their stride, but the heartbreaks of separation from established ways of life, of friends and very often family, leave an empty weariness that can be soul destroying.”⁴⁵

While the state, husbands and society at large may have contributed to women withdrawing into the cocoons of private domesticity, individual choice cannot be out-rightly dismissed. Carole Sargent, a Rhodesian housewife in the 1970s wrote to the *NHR Newsletter*, “These days I am generally to be found in the home but this is by choice”,⁴⁶ adding that she refused to be condemned to the drudgery of housework because of her “very femaleness”.⁴⁷ This experience is certainly not peculiar to either Carole or to this period of colonial rule. It also shows that one must be cautious not to overstate the influence that the domestic ideology had in ordering women’s lives. Noteworthy, however, is the fact that it is not always easy to decipher the extent to which personal choices were overridden by, or emanated from, ideological forces. Undoubtedly, the relation between social ideology and personal choice is complex with the latter sometimes taking place within parameters drawn by the former.

In many cases, women’s resorting to housewifery could be influenced by limited opportunities which were sometimes imposed by their immediate environment. Some areas were so remote and isolated from ‘civilisation’ that even with good educational qualifications, women who moved to such places with their husbands found themselves with little option but to be housewives. The case of Meg Cumming has already been mentioned and is quite revealing. She obtained a degree in Zoology and Entomology from Rhodes University in South Africa in the late 50s and married Dave in 1966. Dave took up a job at

⁴⁵ (Author unknown), “Talking Point”, *You: Rhodesian Woman and Home* (February 1964), p. 1.

⁴⁶ Carole Sargent, “A Woman’s Place is in the Home”, *NHR Newsletter* (December 1977).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Sengwa research station “about 100km beyond the tiny hamlet of Gokwe, itself considered to be the back-of-beyond”.⁴⁸ She could not be employed at the station because then, government policy was against employing wives where their husbands were stationed.⁴⁹ Ultimately, she became a housewife. However, she did not allow herself to be limited by her circumstance. In her role as housewife, Meg helped Dave with his research and writings and she taught her children by correspondence course and also took care of household chores, among other things. “Dave spent his days at the office block or in the field” she recalled, “while I learned to cook, sew, wrote letters, read, entertained passing visitors (almost entirely male), and wandered happily around the bush.”⁵⁰

Being a housewife, at least before the Second World War, was also very much a status symbol. It was a social and economic statement that reflected on the ability of the husband to fulfil his expected role as the provider for the family. One letter to *The Rhodesia Herald* illustrates the social implications of housewifery in the early colonial period. It read, “when I was a child it was considered a disgrace for a woman to abandon her home.”⁵¹ Thus, it was not unusual for husbands with a relatively stable income to discourage their wives from working or the wives of such husbands opting not to work. Maia Chenux-Repond, who came to Rhodesia in 1957, notes that “in the middle class, a man of standing did not want his wife to work.”⁵² This saw the wives channelling their energies to “voluntary work which the husbands did not react against as this did not threaten their status as the providers.”⁵³

⁴⁸ Meg Cumming, “Sengwa Wildlife Research Station: The Wife’s Tale”, August 2011, Personal Account by Cumming, received 6 March 2012.

⁴⁹ Personal Interview with Meg Cumming, Harare, 6 March 2012.

⁵⁰ Cumming, “Sengwa Wildlife Research Station: The Wife’s Tale”.

⁵¹ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 5 September 1950.

⁵² Personal Interview with Maia Chenux-Repond, Harare, 24 June 2011.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Commenting on women in the poorer and affluent suburbs, Irene Staunton notes, “the former probably worked, the latter didn’t at least in terms of having full-time job.”⁵⁴

The significance of housewifery as an economic and social statement is clearly indicated by Deidre Blatch, at one time the Local Organiser of the Umtali group of the NHR, as she explained why she could not afford to be a housewife:

Marrying young and having neither deposits stored up in the bank, nor extra funds in from ‘other sources’, we experienced lean and hard times in those early days. Consequently, I have worked off and on throughout our married life – questions like ‘is a woman’s place in the home? etc., have little relevance to me therefore.’⁵⁵

For the greater period of Zimbabwe’s colonial history, having a working wife was actually identified with families that were relatively unstable financially. A magazine cited by Godwin and Hancock, commenting on the early 1970s, indicated that, “a wife would be forced to find a job if her husband earned less than \$500 a month.”⁵⁶

Responses to housewifery

Sara Mills observes that “women negotiate meanings within the context of dominant discursive fields; whilst the dominant discourses may place emphasis on confinement, passivity and protection, these discourses are themselves challenged and reaffirmed by representations reproduced by both men and women.”⁵⁷ Thus housewives were not passive victims of the dominant domestic ideology. This thesis has already provided evidence to demonstrate the support that housewifery had among white women. This support, as

⁵⁴ Autobiographical note by Irene Staunton sent by email as attachment <weaver@mango.zw> (4 April 2012).

⁵⁵ “Profiles of Our Local Organisers”, *NHR Newsletter* (June 1978).

⁵⁶ Godwin and Hancock, *Rhodesians Never Die*, p. 31.

⁵⁷ Sara Mills, “Gender and Colonial Space”, in Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (eds), *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*, p. 713.

indicated, helped construct and entrench the ideology of domesticity for women and, indeed, also put pressure on young women to conform to the generally accepted roles and status of housewifery. However, despite this wide support to housewifery, housewives did not necessarily enjoy everything about this occupation or find every aspect of it fulfilling and as such contested and negotiated their roles as housewives. Contesting housewifery took different forms. For example, some women simply chose not to marry and be tied down to a husband and children. Others took up a career path as one way of escaping housewifery and left the domestic work to the servant. In many instances, taking a career path did not necessarily mean a total abandonment of domestic responsibilities, it was but simply an additional load as women continued to supervise or oversee the domestic realm.

Giles' remark on housewives in Britain is equally true of the Rhodesian case. She observes that:

Becoming a housewife was never simply a case of slipping effortlessly into a ready-made role imposed from without, but required an active self-assembling of the elements constituting 'housewife' and a continuous participation in the process of making sense of the term.⁵⁸

Thus, for those who became housewives, the process of redefining, contesting and negotiating their identity as a housewife was always a part of housewifery. Indeed, not all housewives accepted this occupation in its entirety and as will be shown, while in some instances housewifery was transient, in others it could be a permanent occupation, sometimes not as a deliberate choice. For some, domestic labour was employed to assist with the drudgeries of housework. All this became part of a process of negotiating and contesting housewifery or elements that constituted this institution.

⁵⁸ Giles, "A home of one's own", p. 240.

Indeed, for some Rhodesian white women, housewifery did not come naturally as was argued in many quarters of society. Carole Sargent's account of her experience in the 1960s makes interesting reading on this point:

Within a matter of days [after marriage] I discovered that the responsibility for running the home and – even more dramatically – for cooking, rested squarely on my reluctant shoulders. My husband had made the parallel discovery that he had married an accredited idiot where matters domestic were concerned. It was a classic case of one woman's place being anywhere other than in the home. Of course all this was back in the relatively unliberated 60s and I felt the insignia of 'Bad Housewife' burning guilt like the mark of Cain.⁵⁹

This experience suggests that domesticity for women was not natural but a social construction and women like Carole were under pressure from society to conform to social expectations.

The responses of white women towards housewifery were complex and cannot be reduced to simply resistance or accommodation. For example, even those women who conformed or subscribed to housewifery did not necessarily love or enjoy every aspect of this occupation. Women who detested housewifery or some of its elements devised ways to negotiate this occupation. One option was to employ servants if they could afford it.⁶⁰ In such instances, the wife would assume a supervisory role and relegate the drudgery of housework to servants. Such women could also channel their energies towards voluntary work as well as participate in different activities organised by various women's organisations littered across the country. With a lot of time at their disposal, such privileged housewives were also involved in a lot of social activities such as playing bridge, tennis as well as meeting at tea parties. In this way, housewifery was also contested and negotiated.

⁵⁹ Sargent, "A Woman's Place is in the Home".

⁶⁰ For more detailed discussion on the domestic servants see Chapter Four.

Undoubtedly there were also cases where women were more 'radical' in expressing and registering their dissatisfaction with housewifery or some of its aspects. The best place to find these dissatisfactions would be in the increasing divorces that characterised the post-Second World War era. Tables 1 and 2 below show the number of divorces that took place between 1954 and 1969 in Southern Rhodesia.

Table 1: Number of divorce cases between 1954 and 1963⁶¹

Grounds for divorce	1954	1957	1958	1961	1962	1963
Adultery	22	31	30	54	27	26
Cruelty	106	105	114	181	167	177
Desertion	186	190	233	187	183	227
Other grounds	-	2	-	-	-	-
Total	314	328	377	422	377	430
Plaintiffs:						
Wife	171	182	188	243	230	259
Husband	143	146	189	179	147	171

Table 2: Number of divorce cases between 1964 and 1969.

Grounds for Divorce	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
Adultery	43	36	54	54	39	38
Cruelty	180	170	202	238	267	267
Desertion	174	194	205	195	221	232
Other grounds	-	1	-	-	-	1
Total	397	401	462	487	527	538
Plaintiffs:						
Wife	239	256	303	314	337	366
Husband	158	145	149	173	190	172

The tables, among other things, show that women by far dominated as plaintiffs in divorce cases except in 1958. Clearly white women were taking initiatives to escape marriage when they felt it was not working out as expected. The tables also show a steady rise of divorce

⁶¹ Both tables 1 and 2 were adopted from B. Goldin, *The Problem in Rhodesia: Unhappy Marriage and Divorce*. (Salisbury: Kingstons Ltd, 1971), pp. 24 – 25.

cases (41.6 per cent) between 1954 and 1969. These figures only represent those cases that reached official records but there were certainly many cases that went unreported.

Also, on a daily basis, women must have confronted their children and/or husbands over their roles, duties and status in the family. An interesting case example is an experience of one newly married Carole Sargent, in the 1960s, which I will quote at length:

I do remember striking a blow for female emancipation quite early in our marriage. My husband believed and does to some extent still believe in the happy existence of fairies who flutter around picking up after him... and numerous were the occasions when I fell for the old 'Do you feel like a drink? Super, then I am sure you won't mind bringing me one too on your way back from the kitchen.' At the time I have in mind, he was the possessor of one suit and since his company placed a high premium on smartness this suit was a very precious entity in our lives. I had walked into the bedroom one night to find my husband happily tucked up and three parts asleep and "the Suit" residing in a crumpled heap on the floor. With great restraint I suggested that he pick it up. Answer came there, none [sic]. However, after the manner of womankind the world over, I persisted and eventually communication was established. It swiftly degenerated into one of those unhappy marital exchanges on the lines of 'My mother would have picked it up for me. My sisters would have picked it up for me so why don't you just pick it up and put it away...' I forthwith issued the memorable ultimatum, 'Either you pick up your own suit or I will jump on it.'... 'You wouldn't dare,' he said. Since I'm sure the neighbours had been roused by the sounds of verbal conflict I can only thank a merciful providence that the walls weren't transparent and they missed the sight of a very angry woman leaping up and down on a very inoffensive – looking suit.... Perhaps in some future Olympics we may yet see "Suit Jumping" listed as an event for the frustrated homebound.⁶²

It is difficult to establish how widespread such experiences were or how representative they were of the attitudes of Rhodesian men. Sargent represents Rhodesian women who stood up to challenge this relegation to 'insignificance'. It is thus not surprising that she writes, "I resist vigorously the idea that my very femaleness condemns me to a round of drudgery."⁶³ Thus, not every woman readily accepted domesticity as natural. Carole's reaction, and that of

⁶² Carole Sargent, "A Woman's Place is in the Home", *NHR Newsletter* (December 1977).

⁶³ *Ibid.*

many other white women, helps us to re-imagine the domestic space, in the words of Delap Griffin, as “an arena of active negotiation, agency and remembering... a site of flux for some central social identities, rather than a realm of constraint and timeless domestic labour.”⁶⁴

As has been shown in the introductory chapter, scholars such as Friedan, de Beauvoir, Oakley and many other feminists of different backgrounds have come to conclude that housewifery is at the centre of women’s deprivation of happiness and failure to realise their ultimate fulfilment. Friedan, for example, describes housewifery as “the problem that has no name.”⁶⁵

De Beauvoir writes:

In domestic work... woman makes her home her own, finds social justification, provides herself with an occupation, an activity, that deals usefully and satisfyingly with material objects – shining stoves, fresh, clean clothes, bright copper, polished furniture – but provides no escape from immanence and little affirmation of individuality.⁶⁶

In the words of Johnson, for de Beauvoir, being a housewife “encapsulates all that she saw wrong with women’s lives.”⁶⁷ However, as Giles notes, it would be incorrect to assume that domesticity is always stifling, unsatisfactory, boring and a source of unhappiness for all women.⁶⁸ Writing in 1964, one Rhodesian woman, Blanche Cunliffe, expressed satisfaction in the “sameness” of everything which she experienced as a housewife:

My kind of life, on the surface, may not be so different from many others. It is in one’s individual joys and interests that one overcomes the “sameness” of everything, and carves one’s personal path through life.... So with life being lived to the full at home and the anticipation and planning of

⁶⁴ Quoted in Morgan, “Between Public and Private”, p. 1209.

⁶⁵ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, pp. 15-32.

⁶⁶ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 470.

⁶⁷ Johnson, “Revolutions Are Not Made by Down-trodden Housewives”, p. 238.

⁶⁸ Giles, “A Home of One’s Own”, p. 240.

holidays to come, *I find my kind of life very happy and satisfactory indeed!*⁶⁹

In 1980, Hannah Elston of Umtali made remarks that further confirm the argument that housewifery was not necessarily a depressing occupation. Responding to Vladimir Lenin's description of women as "downtrodden because all housework is left to them",⁷⁰ she protested, "I personally disagree with Lenin as do thousands of other women in the world. How can anyone, let alone Lenin a mere male, say that we are downtrodden or underdeveloped because we *enjoy* housework."⁷¹

Ms. Elston went on to describe a series of benefits that a woman can enjoy as a housewife including the exercise involved, the satisfaction and pride after a successful cleaning or bed-making as well as in cooking and in being responsible for the health of the family. Having made a lengthy list of the benefits, in her final remarks she wrote:

The excitement of buying a new broom or dust pan is as great for the housewife as buying a new motor car is for the sales rep. The challenge of the housework must not be underestimated. Any woman who has a family will know that on occasion the house looks as if a bomb has hit it. The satisfaction of putting your house in order is as great as an accountant who balances his year-end account. Doing one's work is very economic in many aspects, the least of which is a servant or servant's salary. The points I have raised are all part and parcel of making a woman feel useful, needed, clever, imaginative, equal, productive and a MARTYR.⁷²

This mentality that sought to valorise housewifery was not peculiar to Rhodesian women such as Elston.

⁶⁹ Blanche Cunliffe, "My Kind of Life", *You: Rhodesian Woman and Home* (January, 1964), p. 13. Emphasis added.

⁷⁰ Quoted in "Hannah Elston of Umtali", *NHR Newsletter* (December 1980).

⁷¹ "Hannah Elston of Umtali", *NHR Newsletter* (December 1980). Emphasis added.

⁷² *Ibid.* Capitals in original.

The following excerpt from Barbara Welter's famous "The Cult of True Womanhood" demonstrates that Elston's perception of housewifery was shared in other parts of the industrialised world (in this case North America) in which domesticity was being carved as the proper niche for women:

According to Mrs. Farrar, making beds was good exercise, the repetitiveness of routine tasks inculcated patience and perseverance, and proper management of the home was a surprisingly complex area: "There is more to be learned about pouring out tea and coffee, than most young ladies are willing to believe." Godey's went so far as to suggest coyly, in "Learning v. housewifery" that the two were complementary, not opposed: chemistry could be utilized in cooking, geometry in dividing cloth, and phrenology in discovering talent in children.⁷³

These were all attempts to promote housewifery as a useful and worthwhile occupation. Of course the point that Elston, and many others who shared her perspective, did not make (or entertain), but is emphasised by many feminists, is that all these 'beneficial' activities excluded the wife from the labour market, thereby relegating her to an "economically non-rewarding" domain. Thus, Eva Gamarnikow, a Marxist feminist, posits that "the man-husband control[s]... the woman labour power, the goods and services she produces are use values rather than exchange values."⁷⁴ Such arguments, however, need not be overemphasised or over-generalised because, as will be shown, in the Rhodesian case wives on farms or peri-urban plots, for instance, produced goods for themselves and for their families that had exchange value. Such included milk, cheese, eggs, vegetables, among other things.

By 1945, prominent Rhodesian women were already challenging the domestic ideology that restricted women to housewifery. Nora Price (herself employed full time), the then

⁷³ Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860", p. 165.

⁷⁴ Gamarnikow, "Sexual Division of Labour: The Case of Nursing", p. 99.

chairperson of FWISR, made efforts to at least have the issue discussed and debated by the Women's Institutes around the country. Her opinion of women and housewifery ran in contrast to that of Mrs. Trotman, her immediate predecessor, who saw housekeeping as the centre of womanhood (see above). In one of her periodical contributions to *VUKA* as chairperson of FWISR, Price expressed her views on the subject, which she registered during one of her tours of the Women's Institutes in the country:

That evening (in Shabani) I opened a debate... on 'women's place in the world of today and tomorrow'. I tried to prove that women had earned the right to take responsibility, but although all agreed that this was so, I am afraid that the men relegated us to the nursery and the kitchen, poor dears, so old fashioned!⁷⁵

Clearly Nora was frustrated by the ideology that sought to confine women to the home front and, for her, men were to blame. However, for Ann Napier, another Rhodesian woman, blaming men was misreading the source of the problem. She wrote, "We have no reason to blame men over our own inadequacies... many women use husbands and children as an excuse for not being able to do many things outside the home."⁷⁶ These two different perceptions echo the debate by different scholars on the extent to which patriarchy was responsible for women's subordination.⁷⁷

In the 1970s, NHR played a very important role in helping women cope with housewifery at a time when, as Johnsen notes, "a lot of women" now found it to be embarrassing.⁷⁸ It introduced measures that were believed to make housewifery a less dull occupation by

⁷⁵ "WI Notes: Chairman's Review of a Tour of Institutes", *VUKA*, Vol. 2 No. 7 (March 1945). The full name of the journal was *The Official Journal of the Rhodesia National Farmers' Union and the Rhodesia Tobacco Association*. It was a monthly journal largely for farmers but the FWISR was also given space to also publicise its activities and keep its members updated with Women's Institutes activities, among other things. The Chairperson would make a statement update in every issue and other notable members could also make contributions in this space.

⁷⁶ Heather Uzzel "A Woman's Place in the Home' – Our Suggested Topic for this Newsletter", *NHR Newsletter* (June 1975).

⁷⁷ For some of these debates, see Jackson, "Towards a Historical Sociology of Housework".

⁷⁸ Sue Johnsen, "A Woman's Place is in the Home", *NHR Newsletter* (December 1977).

exposing women to stimulating activities and ideas. In fact, the mission statement in the initial newsletters referred to NHR as “A meeting point for the lively minded women.” Thus on the one hand the organisation sought to revive housewifery as an occupation that women could be proud of. On the other hand, it became a platform for women, especially housewives, to openly debate, contest and negotiate housewifery. Housewives were encouraged to form groups and advance their education and discuss stimulating topics beyond the home oriented subjects such as home economics. The scope broadened to include art, science, history, religion, sociology and anthropology, among other subjects. Many housewives took up careers as a result of encouragement from their fellow members and thus abandoned housewifery, or at least had their roles in the home re-oriented.⁷⁹

Not every NHR woman may have necessarily taken up a career outside the home as a direct result of her membership. However, the organisation had an impact on how women began to perceive themselves, their roles and status in the home. The process was subtle and, apparently, effective in the redefinition of housewives and their world view. Sheila Griffiths, a member of this organisation, made an interesting remark that confirms this observation. She wrote, “Before joining NHR I had two titles: - Mike’s wife and Donald/Joanna’s mother. Now I have another title – Sheila Griffiths – Me.”⁸⁰ This was because NHR encouraged women to also think of themselves and their best interests and provided platforms such as study groups for them to explore these interests. In this way, NHR was contesting the insignia of “the incorporated wife”⁸¹ in which the wife had to sacrifice her interests and be incorporated into those of the husband. In a way, NHR encouraged white women to have own independent identities. Despite increasing challenges over the years to, and questions about, housewifery, one would agree with Godwin and Hancock remark on Rhodesian white women

⁷⁹ See chapter 5.

⁸⁰ Sheila Griffiths, “What NHR Means to Me”, *NHR Newsletter* (June 1978).

⁸¹ For the application of this concept, see Sheila Ardener and Hilary Callan (eds), *The Incorporated Wife*.

in the 1970s that “while exceptional women did exceptional things, most adult white women accepted their roles as wives and mothers. Their principal form of work was house management.”⁸²

The housewife as a consumer

Rhodesian and international capital was quick to see a market for domestic goods ranging from kitchen utensils, mechanical devices (e.g. Vacuum Cleaners) to food consumables. For this reason, the housewife became a target for international and local manufacturers. *The Rhodesia Herald* of 20 October 1950 captures this interest in the housewife as a consumer; “Rhodesian industrialists have realised, perhaps more quickly than their counter parts in older countries, that if they are to succeed in the production of food products, cleaning materials and household equipment, they must please the housewife.”⁸³ Rhodesian industrialists appealed to housewives to buy Rhodesian products, “So housewives, next time you go into a shop for household stores or equipment, ask for Rhodesian products first.”⁸⁴

Newspapers, magazines (especially for women) were filled with adverts of different domestic commodities targeted specifically at the housewife. An example of one such advert that sought to exploit the market provided by housewifery read:

Rhodesian housewives can now buy any of the famous Royal products, knowing that they are supporting the “Buy Home Products” campaign. For on February 8th the complete Royal Range, including all the new flavours of Instant Puddings, Jelly Powders, Tapioca Puddings, Jelly Powders and Chiffon Desserts will be home products. On this date Sir Roy Welensky officially opens the new factory in the Salisbury industrial sites and as he “presses the button” full production will begin.⁸⁵

⁸² Godwin and Hancock, *Rhodesians Never Die*, p. 31.

⁸³ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 20 October 1950.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *You: Rhodesian Woman and Home* (February, 1963), p. 44.

Here one of the key advertising concepts was that the “famous” Royal products were now “home” made as their factory was now opening in Rhodesia. This meant that they now qualified to be part of the “Buy Home Products” campaign.

Another example of the growing significance of women as consumers of domestic products can be seen in the establishment of the Electrical Association of Women in 1925. By 1950, the association had 106 branches providing “both information and a channel for women to express their discontent with any particular gadget.”⁸⁶ In that year, the Association sent a questionnaire to some 10 000 white women asking about their opinions on electrical irons, cookers, cleaners, heaters and other electrical equipment in the home.⁸⁷ Earlier in 1950, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry had appointed three members of the Salisbury Women’s Institute “as judges of the window dressing [of electrical gadgets] in the Buy Rhodesia week.”⁸⁸ It was noted that these women represented “the average Rhodesian housewife.”⁸⁹ These developments demonstrate the recognition of the women/housewives as significant consumers of electrical home products hence the determination of industry and commerce to value the opinions of their consumers.

The housewife in Rhodesia, however, was not a passive consumer at the mercy of industry. For example, they registered concerns about the quality of the products and, at various forums, indicated that if the quality did not please them, they would simply stop buying the products. White women also challenged increasing prices of basic commodities. The Women’s Institutes and several other organisations, for instance, engaged with different

⁸⁶ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 4 October 1950.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 3 May 1950.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

relevant authorities on many occasions to address the cost of living and map the way forward. *The Rhodesia Herald* of 15 March 1950 noted one such meeting where the Salisbury Women's Institutes met with Mr. Edmund Watson and Colonel W. M. Knox, President and Secretary, respectively, of the Chamber of Commerce. At this meeting, the Women's Institutes representatives registered their concern over "the cost of living and prices of essential commodities, subjects that are as thorns in the heart of every Salisbury housewife".⁹⁰

On other occasions housewives suggested the adoption of more pro-active measures to challenge the increase in prices for basic commodities which was soaring the cost of living. A letter signed by one 'Housewife- Salisbury' in *The Rhodesia Herald* protested against the bread prices, particularly the extra 2d. (2 pence) that was required to pay for delivery. She described this extra 2d. as a penalty and proposed that, "the suburban housewife should, for one week, refuse to buy from the boys and it is a good bet that the delivery charge would either be reduced or taken off altogether."⁹¹ Another housewife, from Avondale, also protested against the extra 2d. as follows, "Surely this latest bread racket is the limit, -2d. to have a loaf of bread delivered?" She was also concerned about the hygiene and quality of the service, "if such a fee is necessary, cannot we get value for our 2d. by having the bread delivered cleanly. The boy calling here has not even a clean cloth over the loaves, and I hate to think how much dust is collected every time he opens the 'tin box.'"⁹²

For other women the rising cost of living, as a result of increases in prices for basic commodities, could only be addressed by a more militant approach. One woman noted that she refused to buy "if the price is excessive" and advocated the establishment of a

⁹⁰ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 15 March 1950.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *The Rhodesia Herald*, 08 March 1950.

housewives union concluding as follows, “I find that women grumble among themselves, but no one has the energy to do anything about it. The remedy lies in our hands.”⁹³ A housewives union specifically targeted at these issues was, however, never formed but something close to this was established in 1971 as the National Housewives Register. As will be shown, this association tackled broader issues that affected the housewife including the rising prices of home products.

White women on the farms

The farms offered a unique and complex reproduction of domesticity for the farmer’s wives and, in the rare cases for white women who owned farms. It was also on the farms that Rhodesian domesticity acutely departed from Victorian domesticity.⁹⁴ In a brief assessment of the experiences of farmer’s wives, Blair Rutherford notes that the wife, together with the workers on the farm, was subordinate to the European farmer.⁹⁵ The farm itself was unique in that it was both a workplace and ‘home’ and this “combination of ‘home’ and ‘work’ meant that the wives of white farmers played an important role on the farm, given that ‘home’ was valorised as a crucial site for ‘wives’ in state and academic discourses.”⁹⁶

The interviews conducted confirm Rutherford’s observation. Indeed, often housewifery on the farm was a complex occupation involving multi-tasking in home-making/housekeeping or its supervision, managing the welfare of the husband and children, running some ‘side-line’ farm activities, such as poultry and bee-keeping, as well as overseeing the welfare of the

⁹³ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 05 July 1950.

⁹⁴ For an interesting analysis of the workings of domesticity on a farm environment (the case of USA) and how it interacted with capitalism see Jane Adams, “Individualism, Efficiency, and Domesticity: Ideological Aspects of the Exploitation of Farm Families and farm Women”, *Agriculture and Human Values* (Fall 1995).

⁹⁵ Blair Rutherford, *Working on the Margins: Black Workers, White Farmers in Post-colonial Zimbabwe* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2001), p. 33.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

labourers and their wives and children. Mrs. Fox made reference to the experience of her grandmother, Noll Farmer, born in 1890, who “being community minded, organised a school on the farm for children of the farm labourers.”⁹⁷ Noll also ran something like a medical centre for her farm workers.⁹⁸ Mrs. Fox also did the same when, together with her husband, they went to resettle in Raffingora in the 1970s. She recalled, “When we moved to Raffingora. We had an extensive labour force and we used to keep malaria tablets, cough mixture, diarrhoea tablets for our workers. If it was beyond me, because I am not a nurse, I would send them to hospital.”⁹⁹ *The Observer* of November 1965 outlined an overall picture of the Rhodesia farmer’s wife which echoes similar roles of the farmer’s wife to those that have already been noted:

The farmer’s wife – pretty with the well-bred looks of prosperous English shires – manages a wide range of jobs with easy competence. She supervises the farm school to which African children also come from smaller farms in the area. She runs the farm [shop], which displays soap, saucepans, overalls, row after row of what seem to be pink dresses and all sorts. She gives housecraft classes to the African wives; and, with her husband, supervises any first aid or midwifery arrangements needed.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, these trends were very common with several farmers’ wives and for them the borders of home would, therefore, be expanded beyond the farm house to include the farm itself and the welfare of the workers. These ‘benevolent’ acts, as Kirkwood observes, were safety valves against large turnover of labour which could be detrimental to the farm.¹⁰¹

As hinted earlier, the white women on the farms sometimes ran ‘side-line’ farm activities which, in several instances, actually contributed much to the survival of the farm and the

⁹⁷ Personal Interview with Mr and Mrs Fox, Harare, 30 March 2012.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ *The Observer*, 21 November 1965.

¹⁰¹ Kirkwood, “Settler Wives in Southern Rhodesia”, p. 151.

family in particular. Commenting on her paternal grandmother as a farmer's wife, Irene Staunton writes:

On the farm, where her husband struggled to learn how to make agriculture pay, she had quickly to learn how to raise and look after chickens, and not a few, but in their hundreds. Over several difficult decades, she held the family together with her sales of eggs, chickens, and butter to Salisbury.¹⁰²

Noll Farmer also has a similar story of active involvement with farm enterprise in order to sustain the family. Mrs. Fox, the grand-daughter, recollected:

All the five sisters [Noll Farmer's daughters] went to Dominican Convent and during the depression [in the 1930s]; no one had any money in those hard times. Granny Farmer made an arrangement with the Dominican sisters to pay the school fees by making jam for the boarding students. After all the sisters left school, she continued making jam for the school for two years to clear the debt.¹⁰³

The diaries of Adeline Hannah Peacocke nee Rubridge, a farmer's wife, which cover the period from 1908 to 1925, demonstrate, in amazing detail, a highly active participation in farm activities. Adeline took greater responsibility in the balancing of farm books, making of cheese for the town market, milk production, among other activities, and all these details were meticulously recorded in her diaries.¹⁰⁴ Bridget Newmarch also retold a similar experience, "After Charles and I were married in 1956, I took over all the livestock and developed the livestock farm – except for the bees."¹⁰⁵ These experiences were shared, in more or less similar fashions, by several other white women on the farms.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Personal Interview with Mr and Mrs. Fox, Harare, 30 March 2012.

¹⁰⁴ Diaries of Adeline Hannah Rubridge, 1908 -1925, C/O Joy Neville Peacocke.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Bridget Newmarch done by Irene Staunton, Harare, 2001, sent by email as attachment, Irene Staunton, <weaver@mango.zw>, (4 April 2012).

It is tempting to conclude that, because of the patriarchal nature of Rhodesian society, the farmer/husband controlled the income accrued from the activities of the wife. Rutherford seems to propel this idea noting that white farming women:

Were 'incorporated wives', defined as integral parts of the farmer's domestic authority in *his* 'family' and his farm and not, for instance, as independent economic agents in themselves... they also contributed to *his* farm (or 'domestic') economy through gardening and dairy sales and by providing the proper nurturing to his workers' welfare.¹⁰⁶

The impression given by Rutherford is that of a hostile patriarchal world in which men were parasites waiting to pounce and suck on the sweat of their wives. A version of this argument has been made by third wave feminist scholars who place patriarchy at the centre of women's subordination and oppression. One such scholar, Gamarnikow, argues that in the domestic mode of production, 'women-wives' are dependent on their 'men-husbands' and this mode of production "depends on the transfer of ownership and control over the woman-wife's labour power to the man-husband."¹⁰⁷

However, reading through the experiences of a number of farmer's wives, for example, that of Mrs. Peacocke which is reflected in her diaries, one becomes cautious of universalising Rutherford's conclusion or that of third-wave feminists on domestic modes of production in patriarchal societies. In Mrs. Peacocke's diaries, one does not get the impression of control by the husband or contribution by the wife to *his* domestic economy but the impression of a mutual partnership whose aim was to achieve the best interests of the *family* and not those of the husband *per se*. Thus, for example, children would be sent to school from these proceeds as in the case of Noll Farmer mentioned above. Thus, Kirkwood's evaluation of the role played by wives on the farms is quite convincing and reflective of realities on the ground:

¹⁰⁶ Rutherford, *Working on the Margins*, p. 33. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁷ Gamarnikow, "Sexual Division of Labour: The Case of Nursing", p. 100.

Because farming was such a precarious occupation and failure and bankruptcy seemed often so close, the farmer and his wife *were partners* in the enterprise in a very real sense. Frequently ruin was avoided only by the wife's work with poultry, dairy and vegetable garden and the immediate cash which this produced.¹⁰⁸

Clare Peech, who was born in Rhodesia in 1958, paints an even more liberal picture of the farmer's wife and her farm enterprise. She notes that the "wife would have monies she earned from running the store, dairy etc. as 'pocket money', *solely for her* and if she was making a lot that would then be for the benefit of the family and used for extensions to house, holidays, treats, entertainment."¹⁰⁹ Thus, this so-called control of women's labour power that is said to occur in patriarchal and capitalist modes of production must not be overstated in the Rhodesian case particularly on the farms. In fact, the perception of women as mere instruments or victims of patriarchy or capitalism becomes reductionist, especially if applied as a universal fact.

The women on the farms, like the career woman in the town, could extend their interests and abilities beyond the confinements of the farm house largely because of the presence of domestic workers. However, as noted earlier, these domestic workers only lightened the drudgeries of housework and did not necessarily lift up, completely, the household responsibilities from women's shoulders. Mrs. Peacocke, who had at least two domestic workers in the house at any given time writes in her diaries of darning, washing and ironing clothes herself, among other domestic chores. For example, on the 22 December in 1909 read, "I made two skirts for Darkie's (one of her African workers) wife and did most of the darning."¹¹⁰ Therefore, the extension of women's housewifery beyond the farm house put more pressure and weight upon their shoulders. Reading through Peacocke's diaries, one gets

¹⁰⁸ Kirkwood, "Settler Wives in Southern Rhodesia", p. 151. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁹ Clare Peech clarepeech@zo1.co.zw, Email, "Further Enquiries (28 August 2012). Emphasis added.

¹¹⁰ Diary of Adeline Hannah Rubridge, 22 December 1909.

the impression of a hard working wife. She accounted for everything that happened on the farm, including the number of chickens hatched; animals born and those that died; newly purchased or sold animals; wages paid; income being made on daily, monthly and yearly basis. Over and above these activities, she still undertook her housework such as cooking, sewing and ironing, though with the assistance of her African servants.¹¹¹

During the Zimbabwean war of independence, 1966-1980, Rhodesian women became increasingly involved in the running of farms. "White women in rural areas", writes Godwin and Hancock, "were assuming full responsibility for running farms while their husbands were away on call-up."¹¹² Mrs. Fox also noted how she had to run their farm in Raffingora while her husband was on call-up in the second half of the 1970s.¹¹³ In one of the *NHR Newsletters*, Paddy Jones narrated her experience as a farmer's wife when her husband was on call-up:

I am no farmer though I am learning fast, and have never given an injection before. Somehow or other needles broke, *muti* [medication] got sprayed on me, instead of going in the cow, but eventually she got the required dose. After three days and more efficient injections, she died.... Having had so much *shupas* [troubles] with cattle the boys [African labourers] obviously forgot about the ducks and chickens and rabbits. They had all disappeared on Sunday when I found that the animals had no water. Lugging buckets of water around in the hot morning sun was even easier than finding the two who were on duty. Monday evening, just as it was getting dark, found me frantically chasing ducks, trying to get them into the run.... So it went on every other day: the rabbits had no *skoff* [food] or the chickens no water and the cows calving right, left and centre.¹¹⁴

The Zimbabwean liberation war thus, saw many farmers' wives having to expand their responsibilities on the farms. This came with its own challenges and complications to housewifery on the farm. These images of an actively involved and work-oriented housewife call us to question and challenge the stereotyped representations of white women as

¹¹¹ Diaries of Adeline Hannah Rubridge, 1908 -1925.

¹¹² Godwin and Hancock, *Rhodesians Never Die*, p. 306.

¹¹³ Personal Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Fox, Harare, 30 March 2012.

¹¹⁴ Paddy Jones, "On Call Ups", *NHR Newsletter* (June 1977).

individuals who enjoyed “a lazy existence: playing cards or tennis, gossiping, drinking tea, shopping, arranging flowers and organising the servants”.¹¹⁵

The farmer’s wives, like the Rhodesian urban women, were also a heterogeneous lot. Some were having a successful farming enterprise while others were not. In some instances, husbands did not own the farms and could be simply farm managers. It is within this context of heterogeneity that we cannot completely dismiss the presence of farmer’s wives that enjoyed “a lazy existence.” Libby Garnet illustrates this point:

It was a very interesting mix because there were women like my mother, she was always busy. She helped my dad even with the tobacco.... She was doing everything, she never sat down. Then there were other women who were different and did not know how to do all that which my mother did and had a much more comfortable existence. These women would play bridge, have parties and play tennis. *A lot of them didn't do very much work but trained somebody instead.*¹¹⁶

While the existence of the “lazy-type” women cannot be trivialised, the characterisation of Rhodesian housewives, however, must transcend this stereotype as is clearly shown by the lifestyles of several other women, for instance, on the farms and other remote settlements.

Despite the active roles that the farmer’s wives played in the different farming activities, the state did not see them as vital elements to the farming enterprise. For instance, as the embers of the Second World War were dying the state began a process of settling ex-service men in different parts of the country as farmers. Concerns were raised over their lack of experience as farmers and the state instituted measures to train them. However, the same training was not given to farmer’s wives. Rather, the National Rehabilitation Board recommended that the

¹¹⁵ Godwin and Hancock, *Rhodesians Never Die*, p. 31. For further discussions on the myth of the lazy white woman in colonies see Fetcher, “Gender, Empire, Global Capitalism”, pp. 1284-1288.

¹¹⁶ Personal Interview with Libby Garnet, 2 April 2012. Emphasis added.

wives be trained by the FWISR. This organisation was, however, inexperienced in matters of training farmer's wives and ill-equipped in terms of resources for that undertaking.

The FWISR responded to their nomination for training farmer's wives in protest stating that the best it could do was to arrange courses of supplementary lectures "if afforded proper facilities" and added that even then they did not feel the courses "could be regarded as adequate training for a farmer's wife."¹¹⁷ The FWISR noted that the wife was "entitled to the same training as her husband as far as farming goes, if she desires it, and that housecraft should be taught her by experts."¹¹⁸ FWISR clearly appreciated the wider role that the housewife would have to play on the farm and felt she deserved to be so equipped. Of course, and not surprisingly, the FWISR noted that housecraft would be part of that training package too. No special training, however, was ever given to farmer's wives by the state and many had to learn through experience. Notwithstanding lack of government direct support, white women, as has been shown, became involved in the running of the farms and this involvement increased during the liberation struggle when men were called up. When farm wives were widowed, they too became increasingly involved in running the farms but in most instances they remarried and withdrew from running the farms.

Rhodesian housewives and domestic servants

The issue of domestic servants and their roles during the colonial era has been a subject of discussion among scholars.¹¹⁹ In this section, I narrow my discussion perceptions that settler

¹¹⁷ Kathleen McClintock, "Women's Institutes Notes: Government Answers to Congress Resolution", *VUKA*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (January 1944), p. 43. McClintock was the then Chairperson of The Federation of Women's Institutes of Southern Rhodesia. An update by the chairperson on the activities of Women's Institutes was published yearly in the periodical publication *Vuka* which was a mouthpiece for Rhodesian Farmers Association.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ See Schmidt, "Race, Sex and Domestic Labour"; Charles William Pape, "A Century of 'Servants': Domestic Workers in Zimbabwe 1890-1990".

society had over keeping domestic servants. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, colonial society painted an image that the European woman was under sexual threat of African men who dominated domestic service in Rhodesia. In essence, it was the housewife that was feared for most because she, unlike any other group of women, was much more frequently in contact with African male servants.¹²⁰ Writing on the sex perils¹²¹ in Southern Rhodesia, John Pape notes that, "The combination of a household economy heavily reliant on black male labour and a 'Pioneer' society numerically dominated by men was the foundation upon which much of the colonial racial/sexual relations were developed."¹²² In 1930, W. Bazeley, a Native Commissioner, noted; "It is undoubtedly true that in most 'Black Peril' cases, and in nearly all cases of *crimina injuria*, the culprit is or has been a domestic servant."¹²³ Thus, black peril cases were largely associated with male domestic servants and, consequently, the housewife and her daughters were thus seen as under threat from the servants.

Having domestic servants was perceived in some circles as compromising the institution of housewifery. Some critics argued that having servants led to housewives 'neglecting' their prescribed duties such as taking care of children. Sue Johnsen opined:

I do agree with an article I read that "children can be neglected by mothers who stay at home all day." It is easy to say "Oh, be quiet I am busy" and in this country, particularly, many non-working mothers leave children at home with nannies just as much as women who are working.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Chapter Four gives evidence of cases where, according to Brundell, the housewives approached their domestic male servants for sex. Brundell called this a result of nymphomania.

¹²¹ This study discusses further the sexual encounters between white women and African men in Chapter Four and also in Chapter Five. For a greater discussion of sex perils also see Pape, "Black and White"; McCulloch, *Black Peril, White Virtue*; and Phillips, "The Perils of Sex and the Panics of Race".

¹²² Pape, "Black and White", p. 699.

¹²³ Quoted in John Pape, "Black and White", p. 699.

¹²⁴ Johnsen, "A Woman's Place is in the Home", *NHR Newsletter* (December 1977).

The children who grew up dependent on the domestic workers, some argued, would “lose all sense of the dignity and joy of work”.¹²⁵ For Mrs Trotman, the Chairperson of the FWISR, it was bad citizenship to leave children to the care of domestic workers:

Women, who dash about helping on this committee and in that charitable cause, whilst they leave homes and families to the care of the natives, are **not** good citizens no matter how much good they may be doing outside their own homes.¹²⁶

The presence of a full time mother, it was believed, would instil the values of dignity and, without domestic servants the children would grow up, learn to be responsible and do their own work.

The image of Rhodesian wives as indulging in an idle behaviour and having a lazy existence has already been hinted on. By having domestic servants, most women especially in the urban areas found themselves with abundant spare time. Herein lay the source of the perception of white housewives as having a lazy existence punctuated by social activities. Having been forced to be a housewife by the transfer of her husband to Kwekwe, Mrs. Lamount found herself having little to do in the new and unaccustomed environment. She remarked, “Not only did I no longer have a job to do but all day in which not to do it.”¹²⁷ Such a scenario could easily drive housewives into what she described as “a mental rut.”¹²⁸ It is this idle existence that became a cause of concern for the NHR and was being criticised by society. Writing to *The Rhodesia Herald* in 1950, one contributor signed as “Worker” gave an impression of an idle lifestyle for the modern housewife in Rhodesia. This housewife,

¹²⁵ Catherine Langham, “The Native Question”, *Home and Country*, Vol. 1. No. 5 (1940). p. 13.

¹²⁶ Chairperson’s Address, “Thirteenth Annual Congress of the Federation of Women’s Institutes of Southern Rhodesia, Salisbury, July 5th-6th, 1939”, *Rhodesia, Home and Country*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1939. Bold is in the original.

¹²⁷ Jill Lamount, “What NHR Means to Me”, *NHR Newsletter* (December 1979).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

according to “Worker”, spent much of her time “discussing the latest piece of gossip... goes out to play cards, or to indulge in some other interest of her own.”¹²⁹ It is the brewing of such negative images of housewifery that partly explains why, as Sue Johnsen, quoted earlier notes, women in the 1970s were increasingly becoming embarrassed at being housewives.

The universalisation of the experiences of the modern housewife by “Worker”, however, must be treated with caution. One ‘Housewife’ responded in the same daily and indicated that her own experience did not fit into the frame presented by “Worker”. She wrote:

I myself am the mother of a small child and a baby and I find that I am kept busy looking after them and my home, as I have no nanny. There are many mothers like myself who fight an unending battle against the high cost of living... and yet do not go out to work because they feel their duty lies in their home and children.¹³⁰

Admittedly, some white women may have been kept busy with everyday housework, especially in the absence of servants. However, we cannot dismiss the existence of those whose lifestyles fitted the description made by “Worker”.

Violence in domestic spaces

This section seeks to make a brief overview assessment of domestic violence in white homes of Southern Rhodesia. As Arthur Horton correctly notes, the term domestic violence does not have a standard definition.¹³¹ Domestic violence generally refers to “crimes occurring between any family member with victims of any age”.¹³² Domestic violence also refers to crimes between past and present intimate partners. In heterosexual relationships, women have

¹²⁹ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 13 September 1950.

¹³⁰ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 18 September 1950.

¹³¹ Arthur Horton, “Domestic Violence: The Untold Story”, *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 32.

¹³² *Ibid.*

been found to be greater victims of domestic violence. While there has been a lot of literature that portray white women in the colonies as victims of dominant ideologies such as patriarchy which seek to discriminate against them, there has not been much focus on their intricate domestic experiences such as domestic violence. There are a number of possible explanations for this, two of which will be discussed. First, such experiences may have been common for women but because they are usually private, it is difficult to find them documented unless they attracted the attention of the public or the government. Secondly, the subject matter was not probably as topical as it is today and certainly what may be perceived as domestic violence today might not have been perceived as such then. Thus the use of the term itself with reference to the 'violent' experiences that white women had in the domestic spaces could be considered ahistorical and possibly misleading. It is for lack of a better descriptive term that the term 'domestic violence' is used.

The existence of domestic violence on white women is easy to dismiss because of their privileged status. Domestic violence is one method employed to control and suppress women in most patriarchal societies. Diana Russell's work on white South African women's experiences (during apartheid) as victims of domestic violence is quite revealing. Although her work is largely about incestuous abuse, it also chronicles domestic violence on white women at the hands of their husbands as well. In Russell's work, one interviewee, Nida Webber, made reference to two cases of abuse. In one case Nida was the victim and in the other it was her mother. She recollected:

Two or three times a week my brothers and I would hear our parents through the closed door shouting and fighting in the bedroom. We knew he was trying to have sex with her. He'd say things like, 'you will! I am the boss in this house!'¹³³

¹³³ Diana E. H. Russell, *Behind Closed Doors in White South Africa: Incest Survivors Tell Their Stories* (New York, St. Martin's press, 1997), p. 15.

When Nida got married, she also experienced domestic violence at the hands of her husband:

My husband started hitting me about two months after I got pregnant. He hit me because he was very jealous. Everywhere I go, men always give me attention. He didn't like I would forgive him and then he would do it again.¹³⁴

Several other stories in Russell's collection of white women victims of incestuous abuse are also rich as sources of women as victims of domestic abuse at the hands of their husbands. Russell's work suggests that white women's abuse in the colonies was much more prevalent than has been acknowledged.

There has not been any rigorous study on the same subject on the Southern Rhodesian society. However, this should not be mistaken to mean that such violence was absent. In my research, I found statistics that suggest that violence against white women in Southern Rhodesian homes was much more widespread than scholars have cared to acknowledge. *The Rhodesia Herald* of 15 May 1950, for example, reported two cases in which divorces were granted to women "on the grounds of cruelty."¹³⁵ Goldin's research on divorces in Southern Rhodesia indicates that between 1954 and 1969 they were a total number of 2174 out of 5060 divorces were on grounds of cruelty.¹³⁶ One of my interviewees referred to her relation who had suffered domestic violence at the hands of her husband. When the family suggested a biography of this abused woman she retold her gruesome experiences at the hands of the husband but her children stopped the project to save the name of the father and the family.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹³⁵ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 12 May 1950.

¹³⁶ Goldin, *The Problem in Rhodesia*, pp. 24-15. See also Table 1.

¹³⁷ Anonymous interviewee, Harare, 15 August 2011.

Conclusion

The chapter has explored housewifery in the Rhodesian context and examined the forces that drove women into this occupation. The nature and impact of housewifery on the Rhodesian society was also assessed. The chapter noted that women negotiated, challenged and adopted housewifery in different and dynamic ways. Indeed, the experiences of housewives as well as their attitudes towards housewifery were neither homogenous nor static. It has also explored the complex experiences of the housewives in the urban and farm domestic spaces. An analysis of perceptions that society had of the employment of domestic servants was also made. Finally, the chapter acknowledged the existence of violent experiences of white women in the domestic spaces and it underscored the need for further research in this area.

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CHAPTER TWO

WHITE WOMEN IN FORMAL WAGE EMPLOYMENT, c1914 -1980

Introduction

In the previous chapter this thesis discussed the institution of housewifery as one expression of domesticity. In this chapter, the study shifts attention to the white women who chose to earn an income outside the home. This phenomenon spread to unprecedented levels with the advent of the Second World War as white women, more than ever before, hatched out of the cocoons of private domesticity and took up professions. Statistics indicate that between 1926 and 1941 alone, the employment of women in different sectors increased by 60 per cent.¹ The chapter thus also seeks to explain this phenomenal increase in women's employment as well as other factors that allowed for white women's participation in the labour market. It also documents the responses of Southern Rhodesian society to changes in women's roles and status. These responses are succinctly captured, in part, in the debates that took place on women's proper place in society. The debates took place in various media including newspapers and women's magazines and they became more intense in the second half of the twentieth century.

The questions of whether married women should take up formal employment or not, which dominated the press in the post-Second World War era, were in reality a reflection of a society going through negotiation, contestation and re-configuration of its domestic ideal. These questions were not peculiar to Southern Rhodesia but were part of a wider discourse,

¹ Census of the Population of Southern Rhodesia, Part VII, Industries and Occupations of the European Population, 6 May 1941.

taking place in the industrialised world, on women and formal employment. Once white women in Southern Rhodesia arrived on the work scene, they faced a range of discriminatory practices emanating, in part, from the dominant domestic ideology. The subordination of women in the workplace, unfair conditions of service and limitations to opportunities available to them is what culminated in their being domesticated in the workplace. The limited career avenues for women also culminated in occupational crowding² or what Monica F. Cohen has called “professional domesticity”,³ a scenario in which women took up wage work that was symmetrical to housework/domestic labour. Domestication, in the context of this chapter, is thus being used to accommodate these restrictions as well as to invoke images of subordinate and inferior positions that, in many ways, duplicated the private domestic setting and hierarchy where the man was head of the family and the provider. The chapter also examines how white women responded to their domestication in the workplace.

In a nutshell, the chapter thus examines how the domestic ideology dialogued with the changing socio-economic environment in shaping attitudes towards working women as well as shaping the nature of experiences these women had in their professions. The evidence used is largely biased towards women in the Public Service of Southern Rhodesia and even within this category, the clerical and administrative division in particular is used to illustrate most of the arguments made in this chapter.⁴ This has largely been necessitated by the nature of available sources. Because the clerical division employed the bulk of women in formal

² This refers to a concentration of certain groups or classes in specific occupations. In this case, occupational crowding refers to the concentration of women in certain types of jobs. For more discussions on the crowding hypothesis see Barbara Bergmann, “Occupational Segregation, Wages and Profits When Employers Discriminate by Race or Sex”, *Eastern Economic Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1974), pp. 103-110.

³ Monica F. Cohen, *Professional Domesticity in the Victorian Novel: Women, Work and Home* (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1998).

⁴ For a discussion of the structure and historical development of the Public Service of Southern Rhodesia before 1953 see D. J. Murray, *The Governmental Systems in Southern Rhodesia* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1970).

employment throughout the colonial period, it can be used to make a fairly representative assessment of the experiences of white women in the Public Service of Southern Rhodesia.⁵

The chapter has four sections and the first section, among other things, attempts to explain women's adoption of the career path and, by extension, 'abandonment' of the home. The second section looks at the debates about women's place in society most of which appeared in the print media. The third section discusses white women's experiences in the workplace using the case study of the Public Service of Southern Rhodesia and illustrates the many ways in which women were domesticated. The final section examines white women's contestation of their domestication in the workplace.

Hatching from the cocoons of housewifery

As shown in Chapter One, there were many forces that encouraged housewifery as the proper destination for white women. However, over time private domesticity increasingly came under threat as women moved out of the cocoons of housewifery. Apart from the Second World War, there were a host of other factors that had to do with personal choices and changing attitudes towards women's place in Rhodesian society. This section, among other things, seeks to assess the factors that contributed to white women taking up formal employment. It also attempts to explain the skewed nature of opportunities that were available for women willing to take up careers in Southern Rhodesia. Thus, just as in the

⁵ Some works have been written on other sections of Southern Rhodesia's government service as well as on the Public Service itself. See Monica King, "Serving in Uniform: Women in Rhodesia Defence Forces and the Police, 1939-1980" (BA. Honours Dissertation, History Department, University of Zimbabwe, 2000); Ivo Mhike, "'A case of perennial shortage': State Registered Nurse Training and Recruitment in Southern Rhodesia Government Hospitals, 1939-1963" (MA Diss., Economic History Department, University of Zimbabwe, 2007); and Samora Jaruka, "White Civil Service in Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1953" (BA Honours Dissertation, Economic History, University of Zimbabwe, 2006).

industrialised societies, most women occupied clerical, teaching and nursing posts and this trend constituted what can be termed occupational crowding.⁶

As already shown the First and Second World Wars played a very important role in the increased employment of female labour as women replaced men who went to the war front. Commenting on the impact of the First World War on women's employment in the Public Service, the Committee on Women Clerks and Typists in 1917, led by Arthur Bagshawe, indicated that, "the employment of a certain number of ladies is due directly to the abnormal conditions caused by the war and the employment of others is indirectly due to the same cause".⁷ Prior to the war, clerical posts had been largely occupied by men, but this was to change with the coming of the First World War. Once women started to be employed for clerical services, their advantage as cheaper labour was quickly recognised as they were paid less than men for the same work. The Committee on Lady Clerks and Typists, sanctioned by the government in 1917 to make investigations and recommendations on women clerks, thus made the following recommendations:

In the opinion of the Committee the experience of recent years shows beyond doubt that a certain number of posts in the Civil Service can be filled by ladies not only more economically but more efficiently than by male clerks and that the permanent retention in the Civil Service of a certain number of ladies is justified.⁸

The recommendation of the Bagshawe Committee on Lady Clerks in 1917 must be appreciated within the context of the economic value of lady clerks who were paid less than their male counterparts for the same work. The committee thus advised, "Certain forms of the

⁶ For a discussion on occupational segregation in Europe see Shirley Dex, *The Sexual Division of Work: Conceptual Revolutions in Social Sciences* (Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books Ltd, 1985); and Anderson and Zinsser, *A History of Their Own*.

⁷ NAZ, A3/7/23, Civil Service; Women Clerks and Typists, Report Submitted by the Committee on Lady Clerks and Typists, 11 April 1917.

⁸ Ibid.

clerical work ... such as the record work of some offices could be carried out with greater *efficiency and economy* by suitable lady clerks".⁹

The Second World War had even more far reaching effects on women's formal employment and the mobilisation of 'women's power' was even more intense. My research suggests that more than any other historical event, the Second World War presented greater opportunities for women to take up employment in government service. The demand for women's labour was probably felt most in the Defence services where more men left for the war front. Until the Second World War, both the Defence Forces and the Police were predominantly male domains.¹⁰ However, increasingly more women joined the forces and their labour became highly valued. In 1941, correspondence on white women's labour in the Defence services summed up the desperate labour situation in this part of the government. It noted that the formation and expansion of industry and air services, contributed to a large demand for women recruits between the age of 18 and 45. The national expansion of the administrative services (Air and Defence Headquarters) also meant a growing demand for women to fill positions as civilian clerks.¹¹ In this light, the defence officials noted, "it is clear therefore that the demand is real, urgent and unlikely to diminish."¹² The situation seemed hopeless hence the conclusion by the correspondence on women's labour policy that, "all useful 'free female labour' ha[d] already been absorbed".¹³ At one time, the army contemplated recruiting white women clerks from those already employed in the civil service. However, the Rhodesian government resisted this proposal for it would only cause more confusion in

⁹ NAZ, A3/7/23, Lady Clerks in Civil Service: Increase in Salaries 1917-18, Committee on Lady Clerks and typists, 23 March 1917.

¹⁰ King, "Serving in Uniform", p. 78.

¹¹ NAZ, S726 W13/1/1-15/1/1, Women Power Policy 1940-1945, Correspondence on Women Power Policy from Defence House Headquarters, 17 November 1941.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

government service as a whole, given that the Public Service was also reeling under its own labour shortages as a result of the war.

In a desperate bid to harness female labour to replace men on active service in the Public Service and tone down the labour shortages, the colonial state embarked on a number of schemes. Two of these schemes are particularly remarkable. The first was a scheme for the registration of all white women promulgated by an Act of Parliament in 1939. The second scheme involved the (re-)training of women clerks for “free” to replace men. The state announced this scheme in 1940. Both schemes demonstrated an increase in the significance of female labour for the Public Service. The 1939 National Registration Act introduced compulsory registration of white women in the colony between the ages of sixteen and fifty-five. All the white women of sixteen years and above who came into the country were required to register within seven days of their entry into the country or register within ten days after attaining the age of sixteen. Employers were also supposed to supply the registrar with statistics on their white women employees.¹⁴ The Women National Service League (WNSL), established in 1939 was supposed to oversee this registration.¹⁵ The registration exercise was to enable human resource forecasting by which the state analysed its existing human resources (potential and actual) in anticipation of wartime labour demands.

Judging from the correspondence, the results of the registration exercise do not seem to have been used by the state and there was so much confusion over the implementation and adoption of this exercise. By 1940, doubt was being cast in some circles on the success of the efforts of the WNSL in overseeing the registration exercise. A letter from the Rhodesian Air Group Headquarters read, “The Women’s National Service League as a medium for the

¹⁴ M. King, “Serving in Uniform”, p. 14.

¹⁵ This organisation and several others are discussed in Chapter Three.

registration of women has been a dismal failure, whatever they may say to the contrary.”¹⁶ I discuss in Chapter Three the activities of this organisation and show some of the possible reasons for this perceived failure. At this point, however, it will suffice to indicate that the establishment of this organisation demonstrated unprecedented levels of willingness on the part of the state to tap into the labour of white women. Married women responded positively to the opportunities for employment provided by the war. Indeed, as evidence of the increasing employment of married women during the war, the demand for crèches increased and pressure was on the women’s organisations and the government to provide day care for children, especially of working mothers.

The second measure, which was on the (re-) training of women in the refresher course scheme, was introduced in Salisbury and Bulawayo. Refresher courses were largely in shorthand, book-keeping and typewriting. Housewives with previous office experience were targeted to take up these refresher courses so that “they would be fit to fill senior positions vacated by men called away for military service.”¹⁷ In Salisbury, the scheme did not arouse much controversy as there was only one Private School and this school was nominated to participate in the scheme. In Bulawayo, the nomination of one school to participate in the scheme out of the three existing private commercial schools generated discontent and scathing criticism from the other two schools.¹⁸ Pressured by the exigencies of the war, the government played a crucial role in the re-configuration of women’s domesticity since married women were being encouraged to suspend housewifery for the professions. Noteworthy, this is the same government that, before 1930, had made it illegal for married

¹⁶ NAZ, 482/456/39, From the Rhodesian Air Training Group, Head Quarters, to the Prime Minister, G. M. Huggins, 2 October 1940.

¹⁷ NAZ, S482/198/40, Kivell’s Commercial Classes to the Education Officer H. D. Sutherns, 18 February 1941.

¹⁸ The other private schools felt that the chosen school now had an unfair advantage over others because it was subsidised by the government in its operations, its fees were now more competitive than the other two schools that had not been chosen.

women to be employed and, thus, had helped entrench the ideal of home as destiny for the married woman.

Apart from the war-induced demand for women's labour, another explanation for the increase in women's employment, already noted, is to be found in the rising cost of living during and after WWII. Tatenda R. Ganyaupfu has demonstrated that the cost of living in Southern Rhodesia rose modestly during the war. "By 1940", he writes, "the cost of living in Southern Rhodesia increased slightly marked by a 3% rise in the cost of food, fuel, rent and lighting and a 23% advance in retail prices."¹⁹ Expressing how she was affected by the rising cost of living, one Rhodesian woman wrote to *The Rhodesia Herald*, in 1950, "I go to work Sundays, holidays, and every day as a hotel receptionist – because I have got to, just to make ends meet ... my husband and I do not drink intoxicants; do not keep any Native Servants, and seldom go to the pictures. And yet it will take us all our time to pay for the licence of our little car."²⁰ Sheila Jones, writing to the *NHR Newsletter* in 1977, explained her decision to take up employment, "Just recently, with the kids growing up and the cost of living doing the same, I have embarked on a brand new career and have become a part-time teller at a building society."²¹ Thus, across different time periods, white women at times faced similar pressures which pushed them to seek wage employment. However, for some women the economic reasons to work were not enough justification to leave the home. "Housewife", cited earlier, wrote "There are mothers like myself who fight an unending battle against the high cost of living, struggle to economise, do without all luxuries, and yet do not go out to work because

¹⁹ Tatenda R. Ganyaupfu, "Economic Stabilisation Through Government Regulation: A Review of Price Controls in Southern Rhodesia, 1939-1952" (Hons. Diss., Economic History Department, University of Zimbabwe, 2013), p. 30.

²⁰ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 16 September 1950.

²¹ Sheila Jones, "Sheila Jones of Bulawayo Morning and Evening Groups", *NHR Newsletter* (December 1977).

they feel that their duty lies in their home and children”²² For “Housewife”, it seems nothing could justify ‘abandoning’ housewifery for a career.

Although the Second World War and the increasing cost of living were important in influencing women to take up employment, there were not the only factors. Other factors included divorce, death or incapacitation of the husband who was usually the breadwinner. These factors were on the increase, especially with the coming of the Zimbabwean war of independence, from the mid-1960s. The liberation war maimed and killed more men than it did women. The war also contributed to marriage breakdowns partly as a result of separation between husbands and wives induced by call-ups. But even more important and influencing women’s take up of wage employment, as this thesis shows, was the changing attitude of the government as the largest employer.

To a greater extent, the government’s attitude towards women’s formal employment was informed by the domestic ideology that perceived women’s place as the home. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, for example, some employers were sceptical about employing ‘good-looking’ women because it was believed these women would soon marry and abandon their jobs for domesticity. In 1909, for example, a report by the Public Service Board of Inquiry on the desirability of employing women in the Public Service stated that, “if the proposal to employ ladies be adopted I would suggest that they should be specially trained before acceptance; [and] *they should not be very attractive.*”²³ In the words of Kirkwood, “From the employer’s point of view plainness was a stronger recommendation

²² *The Rhodesia Herald*, 18 September 1950.

²³ Report of Public Service Board of Inquiry 19/10/1909. Emphasis added. It is not clear whose sentiments exactly this statement represents. The document fails to give further insight on the source of these views apart from that already given.

than character.”²⁴ To some extent these fears were justified because, as Kirkwood notes, “the marriage rate was very high”²⁵ and once married, women were expected to retire to domestic responsibilities. Commenting on the high marriage rate of women in the Public Service before WWII, particularly with nurses and teachers, E. Jollie-Tawse wrote, “Without being unduly exacting one would wish that the Rhodesian Education Department had less success as a matrimonial agency”²⁶ and with reference to the nurses she noted, “The hospital was an even shorter cut to matrimony than the school. Together [nursing and teaching] they have provided two-thirds of Rhodesian wives.”²⁷

Legislation was also used to bar married women from entering wage employment in government service. In October 1917, the government issued a Notice against the employment of married women in the clerical division. Part of this notice read, “No lady clerk shall be appointed to a clerical post in the service of the Administrator (excluding the Posts and Telegraphs Department) unless she has attained the age of at least 17 years and is *unmarried* or a widow.”²⁸ However, this changed over time as the state realised the value of women’s labour (married or single) and legislation was amended to accommodate this increasing appreciation. Government Notice no. 191 of 1925, for example, permitted the employment of married women with “the special consent of the Minister.”²⁹ These restrictions (whether social or legal) on the employment of married women were extended to other departments of the Public Service such as teaching and nursing. In the 1930s, however, legal restrictions were repealed as married women could now be employed but on temporary basis. The Civil Service Regulations of 1931 allowed for the employment of married women

²⁴ Kirkwood, “Settler Wives in Southern Rhodesia”, p. 147.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Quoted in Kirkwood, “Settler Wives in Southern Rhodesia”, p. 147

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Government Notice no. 401, 9 October 1917. Emphasis added.

²⁹ Government Notice no. 191, 17 April 1925.

in the clerical service but only in “a purely temporary capacity.”³⁰ All these changing policies of the state opened up avenues for married women to take up wage employment. These changes also showed that there was a continuous dialogue between the domestic ideology and the changing socio-economic environment.

In the absence of alternatives to child care, married women’s engagement in formal employment would have been limited. For child care, there were many alternatives that white women exploited, ranging from the use of crèches, domestic labour and even friends and relatives. The most utilised alternatives were domestic labour and crèches. Reflecting on the significance of domestic labour in allowing white women to leave their homes, *The Observer*, in November 1965 noted:

For £4 a month and keep, the housewife can get an African nanny or a houseboy who will relieve her of the children, do the housework and with some instruction the cooking too. The many who found that this leaves them with too much time on their hands go out and earn perhaps £15 a week as secretaries, which may well enable them to afford a second car or put down the deposit for a £400 swimming pool on hire purchase.³¹

Of course this phenomenon should not be regarded as universal because there were some white women who worked and did not have domestic servants. This is particularly true of white women coming from lower classes of the white society who did not afford domestic servants. I cite few such examples in Chapter Four.

Debates on women’s place in society: the post-Second World War era

In Southern Rhodesia, the period after the Second World War witnessed increased debates over what was considered to be the proper place for women in society. These debates were

³⁰ Civil Service Regulations 1931.

³¹ “White Rhodesian”, *The Observer* (21 November 1965).

triggered by the war-induced increased employment of white women which continued even after the war. Table 4 below indicates that between 1931 and 1936 the employment of white women increased by about 16 per cent while the period between 1936 and 1941, which covered the war, saw the percentage increase doubling.³² Admittedly, the increase in population of white women in the country partly explains the increased employment of white women. However, the fraction per 1000 females shown in the same table, suggests that the increase in women's employment was not as a result of the increase in their population. The arguments that were raised about women and employment can be loosely divided into three. The first were those that noted that married women's proper place was the home and this could not be compromised. Secondly, there were those who argued for women taking up careers, especially when there was an economic need in the home.

Table 3: Number of gainfully employed white women between 1926 and 1941

Year	1926	1931	1936	1941
No. of employed white women	2, 738	3, 197	4, 675	6, 913
Gainfully employed women Per 1,000	157	176	186	246

Adapted from the Report on the Census of the Population of Southern Rhodesia, Part VII, Industries and Occupations of the European Population, 6 May 1941

The third category included those who felt that both a career woman and a housewife were important and deserved appreciation of their efforts. These debates were, interestingly, largely amongst women themselves and they featured in women's newsletters and magazines as well as in the public media, thereby making the subject one of national interest and debate.

³² Census of the Population of Southern Rhodesia, Part VII, Industries and Occupations of the European Population, 6 May 1941.

The arguments against women's employment outside the home were based on traditional and dominant notions of women's place in society. As noted, once married, it was believed that a woman's duty was first and foremost to her family, that is her husband and children, and everything else followed. The plight of the children when a woman took up a career was a constant point of reference in the debates. During the Second World War, for example, the perceived increase in "immoral conduct" of white children in government schools was attributed to the increasing absence of women from home as they made their contributions to the war effort.³³ The FWISR's Standing Committees for Education in March, 1944 reported:

Since the congress sat in 1943 we have investigated with the Government Official Resolutions no. 7 regarding more consideration being given in government schools to the preparations, being cognisant of the lack of strictly moral behaviour on the part of the pupils, and informed us that teachers are doing what they can to rectify this state of things. The authorities attribute the increase in lack of strict moral behaviour to the fact that so many mothers are employed on War work making home influence and supervision for the proper direction of the children's sense of morality difficult.³⁴

In the same year, FWISR's Convener for Social Service, Mary G. Mackenzie, in her contribution to *VUKA* discouraged women's continued employment after the war adding that, "a mother who is only with her children at bed time is evading one of her greatest responsibilities in life – the day to day shaping of the child's character".³⁵

Reference to children in justifying women's place in society continued to be made even after the war. In March 1950, for example, one woman who signed as "A Mother" wrote to *The Rhodesia Herald*, "The number of crèches springing up today is a pointer to the modern

³³ It is not clear what there meant by immoral conduct. This could mean so many things including unaccepted sexual behaviour. I discuss in greater detail in chapter three the nature of contributions that women made as part of their war effort during the Second World War.

³⁴ NAZ, S824/198/2, Federation of Women's Institutes: Education Matters, 1943 – 1950, Standing Committees for Education FWISR, 22 March 1944.

³⁵ "WI. Notes: Social Services Versus the federation", *VUKA*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (October 1944), p. 67.

mother who is more interested in her monetary affair than seeing that her children have the amount of affection and maternal influence that is their just right.”³⁶ This remark was not received lightly by one Mr. J. D. Laver who responded thus, “I would like to point out that the people who denounce mothers who work today have obviously not made any endeavour to see the matter in its true perspective. It is stubborn prejudice.”³⁷ For Mr. Laver, to dismiss the argument that working mothers were more interested in money and less in the welfare of their children was “the height of stupidity”.³⁸ It is interesting that a man was coming to the defence of working women while some women were criticising their fellow kind for taking up employment. Perhaps his wife was a working mother and he had witnessed the advantages of working. This case reflects the wider debates on the role of ideology in restricting women’s liberties.

Contributions were also made to support the argument that, contrary to suggestions being made about the neglect of children, working women actually helped improve the welfare of the children. “Another working mother” noted:

I am a home lover and would far rather stay at home, but I want to give my children opportunities which I could not have when a child, but my husband’s salary is not sufficient with today’s high cost of living, to live a normal life (we do not go to dances, sun-downer parties, etc.) and so I go to work. But still I have not money to burn. If I give up my job, my children would have to give up their dancing, horse riding etc. and would have to give up their thoughts of a career one of which is to become a veterinary surgeon.³⁹

These arguments were advanced in various forms but making more or less the same point that a working mother had the interests of her children at heart and that this was *precisely* why she took up employment.

³⁶ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 15 March 1950.

³⁷ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 16 March 1950.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 11 September 1950.

To counter the argument that working mothers neglected their children, it was argued that in fact, being a housewife did not necessarily entail giving the children necessary attention. Housewives, it was argued, could also neglect their children. One contributor to *The Rhodesia Herald* was sarcastic about the idea of a housewife being available for the children:

I was amused by the letter from 'Home is Where the Heart is.' I gather, to put in a nutshell, that she cooks, washes and feeds her children, and even finds time for a hurried wash herself. She wears old clothes and doesn't use cosmetics. I find the picture singularly unattractive. With all this work I wonder when she finds time to look after her children. Do they stay in the room when she sweeps? Do they sit in the wash room while she washes and irons? Since she is busy until 10 at night, when does she find the time for the intensive soul cultivation which makes her children appreciative of her efforts?⁴⁰

"Worker", whom I cite in the previous chapter, reflected on what she was observing at the time in and around Rhodesia. She noted that, "the average young married woman who decides to stay at home to keep the home fires burning is hardly the domesticated and house-bound type".⁴¹ "Worker" proceeded to demonstrate that this modern housewife was actually too busy with everything but the home, leading to the neglect of children and other domestic responsibilities.⁴²

The working mothers were also blamed for the rising cost of living because of the supposedly increased purchasing power of families with working mothers, and this, it was contended, increased demand for commodities and, therefore, pushed their prices up. This argument had not been scientifically proven and simply made women scapegoats of a problem that had been initiated and sustained by other factors. In reality, the escalation of the cost of living had more to do with the Second World War and post-war reconstruction period than the taking up

⁴⁰ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 30 September 1950.

⁴¹ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 13 September 1950.

⁴² *Ibid.*

of formal employment by women. If anything, women were taking up employment to cushion families from the adverse effects of the high costs of living. Thus even women who believed strongly in housewifery found that they had little choice but to take up formal employment. One contributor indicated that she had “the strictest views on the rearing of children” believing that it required “a very great deal of a woman’s attention”.⁴³ However, because she had to earn a fairly decent salary, she was “obliged to leave [her] considerable domestic responsibilities”.⁴⁴ She concluded, “And so it is with regret that I am forced to sign myself ‘BACK TO WORK AGAIN’”.⁴⁵

Appeals were thus made to appreciate the working mother rather than denigrate her. Mr. Laver, cited earlier, noted that the role played by working mothers was something to admire rather than criticise:

A mother who has the ability and character to go out and work (as well as running a home and bringing up her children – already a full-time job) is to be admired. She is doing it for a purpose – usually that of earning the extra needed to establish her own home and who benefits from the influence of home life more than her children? ... some mothers work in order to give their children the benefit of a better education than they could normally afford – surely that is also to be admired than criticise.[sic]⁴⁶

The same was reiterated in another letter to *The Rhodesia Herald* which pointed out that Rhodesian women “should actually give other women credit for being fond of their children and doing their best for them”.⁴⁷ Doing this best for the children was being made possible by the working women’s ability to finance the needs of her children. In another appeal, attention was brought to the role that working women have in helping their families out of debt.⁴⁸

⁴³ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 26 October 1950.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Capital letters are in the original.

⁴⁶ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 16 March 1950.

⁴⁷ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 30 September 1950.

⁴⁸ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 13 September 1950.

In the 1970s, the Rhodesian Association of University Women (RAUW)⁴⁹ seemed to have adopted a more liberal approach that gave equal weighting to both being a housewife and a career woman. At their AGM in 1973, Joan Whitmore, who was guest speaker and the then national president of the South African Association of University Women, indicated that “parents must be induced to equip their daughters fully for a career as this and marriage, are no longer mutually exclusive alternatives, but rather complimentary as marriage is becoming more of an economic partnership.”⁵⁰ At the same AGM, the outgoing president, Mrs Cartwright, stressed that though RAUW strove to enhance the status of women in Rhodesia through campaigns for equal opportunities and equal pay with men, RAUW had “to equally defend the right of wives and mothers to devote a substantial portion of their energies to their homes, husbands and children, believing the family unit to be the best basis for a stable society and that mothers have a unique role to fulfil in the progress of our country”.⁵¹ A comment inserted in the *RAUW Newsletter* below the contributions by Miss Whitmore and Mrs Cartwright reiterated their remarks:

It is essential that future generations reach maturity with a balanced view of women’s dual roles. Firstly of housewife cum mother, which allow her to fulfil the biological instincts so necessary for the survival of the homo sapiens. Secondly as career woman, which allows her self-fulfilment outside the family sphere.... True human progress can be said to be made when housewifery and child rearing receive equal treatment along with the rest of the training young women receive for their careers – and while we’re doing this it may be as well to see that young men receive some training in the art of being responsible husbands and fathers.⁵²

This position by RAUW, which viewed housewifery and the career path as equally important, was a departure from the traditional perceptions of women as only destined for housewifery.

⁴⁹ Chapter Three discusses this organisation in greater detail.

⁵⁰ *RAUW Newsletter*, No 10 (April 1973), p. 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* pp. 2-3.

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 8.

There were attempts to strike a balance on perceptions in women's place in society without making a blanket dismissal or acceptance of what should really constitute a woman's place. Below is Table 4 which is a tabulation of an assessment made by one member of NHR, Heather Uzzel, on when it was and when it was not acceptable to be a housewife. This was published by the *NHR Newsletter* of 1977.

Table 4: When to be and when not to be a housewife

YES TO HOUSEWIFERY	NO TO HOUSEWIFERY
If it gives you satisfaction and you have plenty of outlets to be yourself and not just "wife" or "mother"	If it is the Victorian concept of Submerging your entire Self in home and family.
If you accept the responsibility for children and they need you there, the emphasis being on <i>need</i>	If it means being always at everyone's back and call and having no independence of thought or action
	If you are treated merely as an appendage of your husband

Adapted from letter by Heather Uzzel to the *NHR Newsletter*, December 1977

As the table shows, being a housewife was not supposed to be an automatic destination for women. There were circumstances when housewifery could be taken up as an occupation. For example, if it brought satisfaction. However, housewifery was not an ideal occupation if, for example, this was mere conformity to the dictates of the dominant ideology and one lost their self-independence in the process. Echoing similar observations, Maia Chenux-Repond, who came to Rhodesia in 1957 noted, "it is much better to have a mother who was working and fulfilled than one who was staying at home grudgingly and so was resentful about the whole issue."⁵³ Uzzel concluded that, "the quality of being in the home is most important, not the mere fact of being there."⁵⁴

⁵³ Personal Interview with Maia Chenux-Repond, Harare, 24 June 2011.

⁵⁴ Heather Uzzel "A Woman's Place in the Home".

Notwithstanding the efforts to harmonise the different perspectives on women's roles and status vis-à-vis their employment, there was never an agreed position within Rhodesian society. However, at least two points can be made from these debates. First, these continued public debates on such crucial matters helped Rhodesian society to have a self-introspection of its domestic ideology, question as well as contest it. Secondly, it can be argued that the sentiments towards the confinement of women were so strong that, as will be shown, when women left for the professions, the 'home' was, in many ways, duplicated in the workplace.

Occupational Crowding

The chapter has so far attempted to provide factors that facilitated and, in some instances, speeded up white women's 'abandonment' of housewifery for the professions. However, women did not have as wide a choice as men in the careers they could pick because of a number of factors. The result was occupational crowding, a phenomenon where women dominated/crowded in certain occupations while they were restricted from entering other professions. This phenomenon was not peculiar to Southern Rhodesia as it was experienced in many parts of the industrialised societies the world over. What I now seek to explain is how this occupational crowding was appropriated and entrenched in Southern Rhodesia. It is noteworthy that women were crowded in occupations that extended their domesticity or bore identical characteristics to the home front. Such occupations included clerical work, teaching and nursing. Libby Garnet, a Rhodesian woman recollected, "So you taught or you did nursing or secretarial work because there were not many options available for women".⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Personal Interview with Libby Garnet, 2 April 2012.

Below is a tabulated assessment of the distribution of white women in the Public Service, done in 1952, which confirms the occupational crowding.⁵⁶

Table 5: Distribution of European women in the Public Service, 1951-1952

Divisions of the Public Service	Number of women
Administrative and clerical division	1,125
Professional and Technical division	
a) Professional Branch	16
b) Technical Branch	48
General division	57
Qualified Nurses, Masseuses, Dieticians...	460
Student Nurses	192
Teachers	765
Total	2,663

Source: T. S. Chegwidien, Survey of the Public Services of Rhodesia, 1951-1952

As the table above shows, about 42.2% of the women in the service were in the Administrative and clerical division followed by the teachers who were around 28.7%. The Nurses, Masseuses and Dieticians combined constituted about 17.3%. Clearly the domestic ideology of women as mothers, who were supposedly naturally gifted at nurturing and suited to settings that were confined (such as the home front), helped construct the “suitable” occupations for women in wage employment. This ideology which was working as part of the patriarchal hegemony, limited the options opened up to women. Writing in 1978, Heather Uzzel narrated her experience in which she had opportunities closed to her, “I wanted to do cartography but there were no openings in those days for women (Women Lib hadn’t been invented then). Instead, I became an architect’s assistant.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Also see table 6 on the various qualifications of members of the Women’s Voluntary Service.

⁵⁷ Profiles of Our Local organisers: Heather Uzzel, *NHR Newsletter* (June 1978).

The colonial government also contributed to the entrenchment of occupational crowding in various ways, to some extent under the influence of the dominant domestic ideology. For example, in 1917 the Committee on Lady Clerks made the following recommendations:

A great part of the work in the Junior Service may be described as 'routine', a considerable amount of which might, with perhaps some slight qualifications, be further described as 'mechanical', requiring for its efficiency very little *initiative* or *knowledge*. Work of this nature *can be done by ladies* with efficiency at least equal to that of male clerks and at a less cost. ... There are also other posts which do not constitute suitable avenues for male clerks but which could be suitably filled by ladies with special qualifications.⁵⁸

In light of such recommendations, the colonial government embarked on a conscious policy of separate spheres for men and women in the work place which led to occupational crowding. After the First World War, the state thus embarked on a deliberate policy to feminise clerical work.⁵⁹ The Secretary to the Department of the Colonial State, C. Duff, in 1927, expressed the fundamentals of this policy:

The policy of the government is that women clerks should be employed for stenography and typing, and the record work in the various offices, but that for other duties, male clerks should be employed who will, in time, become available to fill senior administrative posts.⁶⁰

In 1952, the Chegwiddden Commission which had been tasked to make a survey of the conditions of service in the Public Service underscored continued feminisation of the clerical jobs. The Commissioners wrote, "We think the Service should continue to offer opportunities

⁵⁸ NAZ, A3/7/23, Civil Service: Women Clerks and Typists, Report Submitted by the Committee on Lady Clerks and Typists, 11 April 1917. Emphasis added.

⁵⁹ The feminisation of the clerical jobs involved the gradual replacement of men by women in office work. This process was speeded up during the First and Second World Wars as women were given greater opportunities to demonstrate and prove their ability when men left for the war front.

⁶⁰ NAZ, S246/645, Conditions of Service Department Committee 1917-1931, Colin E. Duff, Secretary of Department of the Colonial State to the Secretary Department of Agriculture, 16 August 1927.

for women in clerical and manipulative occupations.”⁶¹ Thus on its part, the state promoted occupational crowding as recommended by different commissions of inquiry. This policy helped limit the options that were available for women who desired to take up careers. By the 1970s, however, it seems more opportunities had opened up for women which were reflected in the shifts in women’s domesticity. At the RUAW’s AGM in 1973, Miss Whitmore noted that, “Lack of opportunities for women [was now] something of the past as there [were] few fields in which they [were] barred.”⁶²

The impact of the separate spheres ideology was such that in many instances, women’s skills and abilities were underutilised or simply not tapped at all as women’s energies were sometimes channelled outside their areas of speciality. The separate spheres ideology stereotyped occupations along gender lines with women largely confined to domestic related occupations and men exposed to wider opportunities including managerial and executive posts. Sue Barker wrote, in 1977, “Upon leaving school I went to Business College to learn court reporting with a palantype machine. However, I never made it into the court room and have always done something I swore never to do, namely office work.”⁶³ My interviews and reading of source material suggests that such instances were fairly common in Southern Rhodesia. This helped to keep the ‘unemployment’ rate low as women’s labour was sidelined or channelled elsewhere outside formal employment.

As a result of the pressure of expectations to balance career with domestic responsibilities; white women adopted various strategies to negotiate the balance of these two worlds. In the age of contraceptives from the 1960’s, such strategies included child-spacing so that one

⁶¹ T. S. Chegwidien, *Survey of the Public Services of Rhodesia 1951-1952*.

⁶² Rhodesian Association of University Women, *Newsletter No 10* (April 1973), p. 1.

⁶³ Sue Barker, Local Organiser of the Hatfield Group, *NHR Newsletter* (December 1977).

would have an opportunity to work once the children were old enough.⁶⁴ Another included making arrangements with friends and families to look after the children. This can be seen in Maia Chenux-Repond's explanation of how she employed this strategy, "the ages of our daughters are far apart ... and we made arrangements for a day mother, the mother of her very best friend who was very near. She was prepared to look after our daughter during the day when she (the daughter) was not at school."⁶⁵ The adoption of part-time work must also be appreciated, in part, within this context of an attempt to negotiate the balance between home and work. Many white women adopted this option where they had to work only in the morning to be free in the afternoon so as to meet up with their children from school as well as take care of other domestic responsibilities.

As a way of concluding this section, I reiterate that women's taking up of formal employment did not necessarily relieve them of their domestic responsibilities. If anything, it meant double responsibilities and it put a heavier weight of responsibility on them. M.J.M., writing to *The Rhodesia Herald*, reflected on her experience:

I go to work Sundays, holidays, and every day as a hotel receptionist to make ends meet. I love my children's company. I like making their clothing. I like the cooking, housework, and everything else that goes to make a home really home. But these are enjoyed when my work is finished at my place of employment.

Another Rhodesian woman was pessimistic about woman's efforts and ability to balance the two worlds of home and work and doubted their ability to produce their best in any of these two worlds. She wrote:

With the best will in the world, I do not believe it to be possible to make a success of two jobs at once. Neither can possibly be get done properly and

⁶⁴ Abortion was illegal throughout the colonial Zimbabwe and has still remained as such in the post-colonial period. For a discussion debates on abortion in Southern Rhodesia see Law, "Writing White Women".

⁶⁵ Personal Interview with Maia Chenux – Repond, Harare, 24 June 2011.

unless she has the constitution of an ox – and how many women in this country have? – A woman must suffer from exhaustion and frayed nerves if she does force herself to try after home and children too.⁶⁶

The plight of the working wife can be summarised in the words of another woman employee who lamented, “Believe me, it is not a joke to run a home and a job successfully.”⁶⁷ Anderson and Zinsser’s study of women in Europe also confirm these trends in that region as they note that working women “remained primarily responsible for childcare and housework.”⁶⁸ The presence of domestic workers in some white Rhodesian families lightened the load of domestic drudgery for some white women.

Women in paid work: Southern Rhodesia’s Public Service

Once women got into formal employment, a set of forces contributed to the nature of their experiences in their workplaces. As noted, it is the contention of this study that among these forces was the domestic ideology that perceived women’s destiny as that of serving the home. Using the case of the Public Service, particularly the clerical branch, this thesis demonstrates how white women’s conditions of service were shaped by domesticity. It also indicates that the domestication of white women in the workplace was made through the importation of the home setting into the work setting. Thus in everyday work experiences, women were, for example, expected to serve tea during board meetings (even as equal members of the board) and other such activities not necessarily part of their job description. As the man was the head of the family in the home, so too was he at work as women were discouraged from occupying administrative and managerial posts. The conditions of service for married women even more clearly help illuminate the working of the domestic ideal and its importation into the

⁶⁶ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 26 October 1950.

⁶⁷ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 8 February 1955.

⁶⁸ Anderson and Zinsser, *A History of Their Own*.

workplace. The section also discusses the responses of white women to these conditions of service and evaluates the extent to which women could negotiate and contest them.

From the onset, when women flocked into the Public Service partly as a result of opportunities presented by the First World War, salaries were lower than their male counterparts. A letter from the Medical Department, making reference to this war, noted:

In many cases lady clerks who have taken positions that were previously occupied by men when they have gone for Active Service, (and in some cases are doing work of two men), are receiving salaries which are considerably lower and which are in no way commensurate with the duties performed.⁶⁹

The Bagshawe Committee on Lady Clerks and Typist and the Chegwiddden Report, in their separate assessments revealed the extent of salary discrepancies in the Public Service. In 1917, the Bagshawe Committee noted that a young man entering the service as a probationer received a commencing salary of £200 per annum, rising by £15 per annum to £260. This also had a further opportunity of increased salary by an enhanced increment after passing the law examination.⁷⁰ For women with “good qualifications and suitable previous experiences”, the initial salary was £180 per annum apparently without annual increments.⁷¹

T. Chegwiddden made a survey of the Public Service in 1952 indicating the salary discrepancies between men and women. Table 6 below captures the qualifications and rates of pay for men and women in the Administrative and clerical division of the Public Service. The report also buttressed existing justifications for salary discrepancies and noted that the substantial incremental jump between the sixth and the seventh steps in the General Scale for

⁶⁹ NAZ A3/7/23, Civil Service: Women Clerks and Typists (nd), Medical director's Office to V. Godbolt, Acting Secretary CSWA, 4 October 1918.

⁷⁰ NAZ, A3/7/23, Committee on Lady Clerks and Typists, 23 March 1917.

⁷¹ Ibid.

men were designed to “afford financial relief to young men or young men contemplating marriage”⁷² as this happened at a point when the male officer reached about twenty-three years of age which was deemed the average age at which men married.⁷³

Table 6: Extract of the Annual Salary scales in the Administrative and Clerical Branch

Salary Scales For Men	Salary Scales For Women
£340 (4 yr. Secondary Course)	£331(4 yr. Secondary Course or shorthand typing qualifications)
£374 (5 yr. Secondary Course)	£359 (5 yrs. Secondary Course)
£409 (6 yrs. Secondary Course of one year university)	£383 (6yrs Secondary Course of one yr. university)
£443 (2yrs university)	£409 (two years university)
£478 (Final G.T.S. & C.)	£443
£511 (5 yrs. degree)	£478 (3 years university)
£595	£511

Source: T. S. Chegwidden, Survey of the Public Services of Rhodesia 1951-1952

Even more fascinating was the tax system in Southern Rhodesia which, like the salary discrepancies was built upon the same prejudices. A married woman’s tax bracket was wider as her salary was added to her husband’s and in real terms, her net income significantly reduced as she was therefore taxed more. Adele Hamilton Ritchie retold her experience with this tax system:

In Rhodesian days we had this crazy taxation system, my salary was always added to my husband’s and taxed at a higher level, so the husband got the benefit of dependents and his tax started at the lowest level and the wife’s tax started were the husband’s left off. This was fine only if you were not earning much money or if he was not earning much you would still be left with reasonable take home pay.⁷⁴

In some instance, however, as Adele indicated some women were not so fortunate if their salaries were high and the implications could be so bad that a woman employee would

⁷² Chegwidden, Survey.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Personal interview with Adele Hamilton Ritchie, Harare, 7 February 2012.

“barely take home enough for her petrol”.⁷⁵ Adele made reference to one such individual who, she concluded, must have been working simply for the fun of it.⁷⁶

The unequal remuneration between women and men was justified on different grounds that betray the pervasive domestic ideal. Single women were seen as unreliable and most likely to marry and leave the labour market while for married women, it was argued that they were being supported by their working husbands. One Oliver Twist (pseudonym) wrote in *The Rhodesia Herald* of 2 February 1955:

The employer’s defence has always been that female staff have always been unstable because the young ones leave to marry, or if they remain after marriage are frequently absent for domestic reasons, or throw up their jobs altogether.⁷⁷

The employer’s observations of these trends with single women were not entirely incorrect but it must be noted that this was partly because of immense social pressure. The study has already noted how, for example, nursing and teaching were described by Ethel Tawse-Jollie as short-cuts to matrimony providing two thirds of Rhodesia’s wives.⁷⁸ *The New Rhodesia* also observed in 1948 that, “When women first started careers, they nearly always gave them up on marriage.”⁷⁹ In an interview, Adele stated, “we worked, got married, got pregnant, quit work and that was it.”⁸⁰ Twist also admitted that this observation may have been correct but argued that it was simply “an excuse, not a reason for paying all women so much less than men.”⁸¹

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 2 February 1955.

⁷⁸ Cited in Kirkwood, “Settler Wives in Southern Rhodesia”, p. 147.

⁷⁹ *The New Rhodesia*, 15 October 1948.

⁸⁰ Interview with Hamilton Ritchie 17 April 2007.

⁸¹ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 2 February 1955.

The study has already noted the rationalisation for salary discrepancies between men and women given by the Chegwidden report in 1952 which pointed to the assumption that married men had greater responsibility while women had little if any responsibility, especially if married. An article in *The Record* of 4 February 1957 also reiterated some of these rationalisations noting that, “domestic circumstances also played a part in the assessment of the wages since usually a woman had only herself to support whereas the men... looked forward to having a home and family.”⁸² Indeed, when the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was instituted in 1953, salary discrepancies were continued on similar grounds. In 1958, the Federal Information Department indicated that, “the additional one-sixth paid to the male teacher helps him to maintain the family.”⁸³ In its recommendations, the 1961 Paterson commission on the Southern Rhodesian Public Service also reiterated these justifications noting, “In the lowest grades in the salary scales, there is an external necessity for differential scales between men and women. In the cultural pattern that holds in Rhodesia, whether it be among Europeans or Africans, the commitments of, say a man, are greater than those of a woman.”⁸⁴ These justifications were premised on the assumption that these women were, in any case, supposed to be housewives being supported by their husbands. If a woman was single, it was assumed she did not have any responsibilities to warrant higher salaries. Thus when married women worked, this was just to bring an extra pound to the home, otherwise their welfare and that of the children were already covered by the husband’s salary. The justifications for salary discrepancies further reinforced women’s inferior status in the work place.

⁸² *The Record*, 4 February 1957.

⁸³ NAZ, S3279/11/109, Employment of Women in Southern Rhodesia Public Service 1955 to 1965, Press Statement by the Federal Information Department, Opportunities for women in Federal Public Service.

⁸⁴ T. T. Paterson, Commission of Inquiry into the Organisation and Development of Southern Rhodesia Public Service, 1st Report 1961.

Some women challenged the assumptions underlying women's lower salaries as fallacious. For example, it was argued that there were women who, like the men, had family responsibilities. The case of Margery Ganswick is quite revealing. She strongly believed that women clerks deserved to receive war allowances during the First World War and, in justification, she wrote, "I have six brothers at the [war] front ... I am thus filling the place of at least one brother by assisting in the support of my mother and younger sister."⁸⁵ Even outside the war, women also took up family responsibilities. Disgruntled by the justifications for unequal pay, one Rhodesian woman wrote to the editor of *The Rhodesia Herald* in 1955, "A man may have a wife and children, but many women too, have dependents of one kind and another."⁸⁶ Apart from these women; there were also other women without men to look after them such as divorcees and widows.

The workplace also witnessed continued efforts at the domestication of white women. The confined and menial work that women were channelled towards resonated with the confined home space that housewives were expected to occupy. Another form of domestication involved the expectations upon women to carry out domestic oriented duties in the workplace such as cleaning and serving tea when this was not even part of their job description. Maia Chenaux-Repond gives a typical example of this kind of domestication and how she responded to it:

It was in 1973 that I started to work in the Ministry and there were all male, all white workers there. The first surprise came to them because just when I started I was at the District Commissioner's Conference and I noticed that when the tea tray came in they all expected me to serve tea which I did not. At once I had established that it was not my job to serve tea because I am a woman. I was quite happy I did not serve tea.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ NAZ, A3/7/23, Civil Service: Women Clerks and Typists (nd), The Controller of Customs offices (Bulawayo) to the Acting Secretary Civil Service Women's Association, Salisbury, 1 October 1918.

⁸⁶ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 2 February 1955.

⁸⁷ Personal Interview with Maia Chenaux-Repond, Harare, 24 June 2011.

It is relatively difficult to get more examples of such detailed everyday experiences of white women partly because most said they did not remember the exact details of their work experiences. However, the existence of attempts to domesticate women in the workplace in this direction cannot be dismissed.

The attitude of the Rhodesian state and society towards married women offers interesting insights on the workings of the domestic ideology. A protest written in *The Rhodesia Herald* in 1950 by one white woman who called herself “one of the fools who married” captures some of the prejudices against married women:

As a newcomer to this delightful country way I call to your readers' attention to one peculiarity. A married woman may not operate an account at a bank without her husband's consent, nor is she considered capable of signing a transfer without her husband's assistance. Why? Her unmarried sister is not treated as an inferior animal. Does the government consider women must be fools or they would not marry? Is it a relic of the slave trade and reminiscent of the pits at Inyanga?⁸⁸

A number of observations can be made from this protest two of which I will mention. First, the new immigrants usually brought with them new and revolutionary ideas about society and how it should run. Second, the married woman was much more burdened by domesticity than her unmarried sister.

The prejudices against married women were clearly entrenched in their conditions of service.⁸⁹ Regulations that related to the welfare of married women were changed over time and they differed to those for single women. As already indicated, initially (before 1930)

⁸⁸ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 1 April 1950.

⁸⁹ Also see Kufakurinani, “Temporary Employment, Fixed Establishment and Married Women in the Public Service of Southern Rhodesia”, *International Journal of Sustainable development*, Volume 2, No. 2 (2009), pp. 14-16; “A Breach of the Psychological Contract, Conditions of Service for White Women in the Southern Rhodesia Public Service 1914-1960”, *African Journal of Social Policy and Administration*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2009), pp. 52 – 59.

married women were not eligible for employment, and then later they could not be employed on fixed establishment but as “temporary-full-time”. This marriage bar, which separated married from single women in terms of their conditions of service, was justified on the grounds that a married woman’s commitment was to her husband and children and, as such, she had to have a more flexible work regime which was only possible under the temporary-full-time arrangement. If she was a teacher, this meant she was not expected to go to her place of work during holidays for some extra-duties. A woman officer could also resign with immediate effect which would thus allow her to accommodate any sudden transfers of her husband. In 1952, the Chegwiddden committee thus reported:

There [was] no popular demand amongst married women Civil Servants for the abolition of the marriage bar, nor do they desire to assume the obligations which would be the necessary corollary of permanent and pensionable employment. They prefer, for example, to be free to take their holidays when their husbands are on leave, to transfer from one centre to another with their husbands, and to relinquish their employment at short notice for domestic reasons.”⁹⁰

As such, white women’s domesticity shaped their roles and status beyond the home front. It is probably true that when the Chegwiddden survey was made at the beginning of the 1950s, some women may have supported the marriage bar because of its perceived advantages.

Commenting on the marriage bar in colonial Nigeria, Callaway makes an observation that can be applied to the Rhodesian case. She notes that the marriage bar represented “one of the great legal barriers to women’s equality” adding that it also maintained a division between married and single professional women.⁹¹ In the 1960s, there were three categories of temporary employment in Southern Rhodesia. The first category involved temporary employees who occupied permanent posts but for short periods of time (while the incumbent

⁹⁰ Chegwiddden, Survey.

⁹¹ Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire*, p.47.

to the post was on leave). The second category was for temporary employees who filled temporary posts for a short period of time. Finally, there were temporary employees filling permanent posts for an indefinite period.⁹² It was in this last category that most married white women were employed as they were forbidden by regulation, at least before 1971, to take up permanent posts. Thus, it was not uncommon for some women deemed temporary employees to have “served the government for anything from 15-18 or more years ... and [would] receive no concessions in the way of holiday grant or pension funds, etc.”⁹³ As outlined below, women fought these conditions and it was only in 1971 that they won the fight for married women to be considered for permanent employment on equal terms as single women. The following section examines the responses of white women to their domestication in the workplace.

Negotiating and contesting domestication in the workplace

White women challenged their domestication in the workplace through various ways. For example, they contested the poor and unfair conditions of service which, in most cases, subordinated women. They challenged, for example, the salary disparities between men and women and dismissed the rationale behind these disparities. Women also contested the unfair grading systems as well as discrimination against married women based on their supposed commitment to husbands and children. Contestations over the domestication of women in the Public Service intensified after the Second World War possibly because of their increased visibility in formal employment and the spread of liberal ideas from the west from the late 1960s. Women made use of various media such as those of women’s organisations like

⁹² Paterson, Commission of Inquiry.

⁹³ Ibid.

RAUW and the FWISR to challenge their domestication.⁹⁴ Women's representative groups in the Public Service were also vocal in challenging the status quo while individual women also used the public print media to register their discontent. Probably even more widespread were passive forms of resistance that women adopted, which included resignations and transfers to perceived better work environments. This section seeks to document and evaluate mostly the active forms by which women contested their domestication.

Several factors help to explain the increased contestations of women to their inferior conditions of service which intensified in the post-Second World War era.⁹⁵ The obvious explanation has to do with the increased employment of women induced by the Second World War and post-War socio-economic developments which exposed the gender inequalities of the workplace to a wider group of women. However, also important were developments taking place elsewhere outside Southern Rhodesia. Britain, for example, adopted the principle of parity between men and women in its civil service in 1955, and hoped to have raised the pay for "most women Civil Servants by degrees until it equalled that of men by 1960."⁹⁶ Commenting on this development, Miss Eva Wilkins, Chairwoman of Civil Service Women's Association (CSWA), admitted that opinion in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was "quite strongly influenced" by events in Britain.⁹⁷ Within the Federation itself, Nyasaland was first to take up the principle of "equal pay for the same job" before Southern Rhodesia. This is probably because Nyasaland was directly under Britain where such practices had already been adopted. Such developments inspired white women in the Southern Rhodesia Public Service to also negotiate and contest their domestication.

⁹⁴ See Chapter Three for detailed discussion of the activities of women's organisations particularly within the settler society.

⁹⁵ There were isolated cases on women registering discontent with the existing conditions of service before the Second World War. See Kufakurinani, 'While a Career is Vital for a Man It is Optional for a Woman'.

⁹⁶ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 27 June 1955.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Women's clamour for equal treatment with men in the workplace can be dated to as far back as the immediate post-First World War period. One woman clerk, Miss Reynolds, wrote to CSWA in 1918, "So many of us are filling the position of men but the remunerations do not come to the same, and seeing that ladies are a very great commercial asset to the government we should be considered in this regard."⁹⁸ In the same year, another woman clerk writing to CSWA suggested that "a similar grant to that made to the men should be made to ladies, to enable them to meet their increased expenses".⁹⁹ In 1941, the issue of equal pay was raised by white women at a general conference of women's organisations in the country¹⁰⁰ and, later in 1949 was also brought forward by the National Federation of Business and Professional Women of Rhodesia (B & PW).¹⁰¹ The demand for equal treatment between men and women continued to intensify after the Second World War.

One woman contributor to *The Rhodesia Herald*, in February, 1955, expressed her disappointment at the salary discrepancies between men and women and suggested that, "if a woman must continue to receive only four-fifths of a man's pay, I suggest that she be required to work only four-fifths of the time he puts in and does the remaining fifth at overtime rates".¹⁰² However, later that year in June, Miss Wilkins, the Chairwoman of CSWA, had a different thing to say. For her, white women in Southern Rhodesia were not pre-occupied with issues to do with equal pay for equal work. "Southern Rhodesia's women Civil Servants", she wrote, "are now more concerned at present with getting the opportunity

⁹⁸ NAZ A3/7/23, L. Reynolds to V. Godbolt, Acting Secretary for Civil Service Women's Association (CSWA), 26 October 1918.

⁹⁹ NAZ A3/7/23, Civil Service: Women Clerks and Typists, D. E. Lawrence (Mines Office Gatooma) to the Acting Sec CSWA, 3 October 1918.

¹⁰⁰ NAZ, S824/198/1, Minutes of the Congress of women of Southern Rhodesia under the aegis of the Federation of Women's Institutes of Southern Rhodesia, Salisbury, 30 September to 1 October 1941.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² *The Rhodesia Herald*, 2 February 1955.

to do jobs now done by men, than with pressing for equal pay for men and women in the Service.”¹⁰³ It is not clear how she arrived at this conclusion but if this claim was true, then it was to change as soon as the cry for equal pay for equal work became louder.

A number of developments were important in triggering intensified demands for equal pay between men and women, two of which will be discussed. First was the proposal to extend equal pay to Africans with the same qualifications as whites, which would help bolster the image of the Federation as a vehicle for racial partnership. *The Record* of 4 February 1957 observed that “it is a natural consequence of the conference resolution of 1956 that Africans entering the civil service should be paid the same salary as a European that the women officers should also desire equal pay.”¹⁰⁴ The implications of an extension of salary parity between whites and Africans were that Africans would technically have a higher salary than that of white women doing the same job. As the Women’s Branch of the Administrative and Clerical Association of Southern Rhodesia (hereafter the Women’s Branch) indicated, “no normal woman would be prepared to compete with non-Europeans on a lower salary than the African is receiving.”¹⁰⁵ Thus the racial ideology of Southern Rhodesia also contributed in triggering clamours for equal pay. The second factor had to do with the fact that equal pay for equal work had already been introduced by the territorial government of Nyasaland which was a member of the Federation. This naturally inspired white women in Southern Rhodesia who, in their pleas for the adoption of this principle, made constant reference to the experience of Nyasaland.

¹⁰³ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 27 June 1955.

¹⁰⁴ *The Record*, 4 February 1957.

¹⁰⁵ NAZ, S3279/11/109, Secretary of Justice and Internal affairs to the Secretary to the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2 March 1961.

Partly as a result of growing pressure from white women in different sections of Rhodesian Society, the Public Service Association (PSA) executive council (apparently constituting male of members only) agreed in 1957 in principle that women be given opportunities for advancement and be awarded complete parity in all respects in the Service, whatever the department or type of work with the sole exception of the Native Department. They also agreed that parity should be given to the women on the existing men's salaries.¹⁰⁶ The principle was presented to the Public Service Board, which also subscribed to it.¹⁰⁷ The Southern Rhodesia Administrative and Clerical Branch of the PSA – most likely female dominated - also championed the cause for parity in the Public Service. In a memorandum to the Paterson Commission of 1961, this Branch wrote, "The rate for the job is the paramount point for consideration here. If a job is worth certain salary, then the person holding down that job should receive that salary, irrespective of the incumbent's sex or colour."¹⁰⁸

The Women's Section also heavily criticized salary disparities between men and women in the Public Service. Its recommendations submitted by the Association to the Paterson Commission are quite revealing. The Women Section wrote:

Women feel strongly more than ever that the qualified women should receive parity with her male counterpart in the Service, not only the same salary scales but the same conditions of service throughout the qualified scales.¹⁰⁹

In the same submission, the Women's Section also pointed out that "the women of the service as a whole are very concerned with the questions of parity and feel that it is perhaps one of

¹⁰⁶ *The Record*, October 1957. The Public Service Association was a representative body for the Civil Servants established in 1919 as a result of dissatisfaction with the Service. It is not clear why the Native Department was made an exception in this case.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ T. T. Paterson, Commission of Inquiry into the Organisation and Development of Southern Rhodesia.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

the most important issues that should be discussed.”¹¹⁰ If in 1952 the Chegwiddden Commission did not register, “any general desire on the part of the women staff generally that equality of pay should be introduced”¹¹¹ and in 1955 Mrs Wilkins, cited above, also saw disinterest by women in salary parity with men, by 1961 this desire/interest was clearly glaring.

RAUW was also pro-active in confronting the issue of equal pay for equal work. Apart from calling for reform in this area, RAUW went on to facilitate the establishment of the Liaison committee of the National Women’s Organisation to investigate discrimination in the workplace. RAUW’s 1971 Newsletter noted, “Following the introduction of the government’s new salary scales for teachers, they are considering two aspects – discrimination between equally qualified men and women, and discrimination between races.”¹¹² Indeed, RAUW made initiatives to investigate conditions of service for women in the workplace and made efforts to expose these to public scrutiny. In 1979, for example, requests were made to the public to bring to their attention their experiences of gender discrimination at the workplace for further forwarding to government.¹¹³

Unfortunately, there were influential men who, throughout the colonial era, were not prepared to make concessions to the principle of equal pay for equal work. *The Record* of 4 February 1957 indicated that at their meeting, the representatives of the Administrative and Clerical Association were not all completely behind the proposals of full equality for women regarding salaries.¹¹⁴ D. H. Spafford, for instance, considered that such a step would discourage marriage and stated that traditionally the salary of a male officer was greater than

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Chegwiddden, Survey.

¹¹² *RAUW Newsletter*, No. 6 (1971), p. 5.

¹¹³ *RAUW Newsletter*, No. 23 (September 1979), p. 7.

¹¹⁴ *The Record*, 4 February 1955.

that of a woman.¹¹⁵ It is possible that his assumption was that once women had equal salaries to men they would attain some modicum of economic independence and, therefore, not have an incentive to seek marriage which was supposed to offer that economic security. J. I. Money, another representative, “expressed concern that by obtaining equality possibly women officers would suffer since in the majority of cases the Head of Department would prefer to select a male rather than a female to fill a vacant post”.¹¹⁶ All these fears came back to issues of women’s domestication and, despite the adoption of the principle by the Public Service Board; this was never put into practice throughout the colonial period.

Apart from the issue of equal pay for equal work, white women also challenged the arrangements where the nature of women’s employment was defined by their prescribed domestic responsibilities. This particularly referred to married women whose conditions of service differed from those of single women because the former were believed to have their commitment primarily in the home. It was not thought possible for a woman to successfully be both a mother and a career woman. Married women, as noted, were thus employed under the temporary-full time category. As early as 1946, women’s organisations such as the FWISR were already calling for the removal of the marriage bar. At its 1946 Annual Congress, the FWISR proposed that, “the government should recognise the principle of permanent employment for married women with academic and specialised qualifications.”¹¹⁷

Temporary employment also implied loss of such benefits as pensions and allowances that were only enjoyed with permanent employment. In 1961, the Women’s Section, in its

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ NAZ, S824/198/2, Federation of Women’s Institutes of Southern Rhodesia, Annual Congress, 20 August to 21 August 1946.

submissions to the Paterson Commission, disputed the discrimination between single and married women:

The obligations of a married woman whose husband is supporting her and her family rest first and foremost with her husband and family, and should she seek employment with the government, then it follows that she must abide by the conditions of service as laid down for all government employees. There should be no special concession for this type of employee to receive unpaid leave (as at present) so that her leave may coincide with her husband- this is discriminatory and there is nothing to balance this up for the woman who has no husband.¹¹⁸

In its submission, the Women's Section protested against the employment of women for long periods as temporary full time indicating that, "not by any stretch of imagination can an employee be considered 'temporary' with 10, 15 or 20 years or more continuous service with the government."¹¹⁹ Such cases, the Women's Section noted, were to be "considered for permanent conditions of employment".¹²⁰

The occupational crowding in the Public Service which reflected the limited opportunities open to women for employment also did not escape the scrutiny of women's groups. The FWISR observed that opportunities for Rhodesian women were limited to nursing and shorthand typing and, in 1947, it passed a resolution that "a technical school for girls be opened to give girls a wider range of careers to choose from when they come to earn their living."¹²¹ This technical school, it was hoped, would expand the opportunities available to girls taking up careers. Unfortunately, this resolution was turned down by the government which argued that, "a population the size of Johannesburg would be needed to justify such a school."¹²² Later in 1961, the Women's Section in its submissions also registered

¹¹⁸ Paterson, Commission of Inquiry.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *The New Rhodesia*, 18 November 1948.

¹²² *Ibid.*

dissatisfaction with occupational crowding which relegated women to clerical work and excluded them from executive grades:

The Women's Section view with concern that no provision for women has been made on the executive grade in the latest Service's Board Regulations.... When this was under discussion, the Women's Section had been given to understand that provision would be made for women in this grade. It must be noted that there are numerous female accountant clerks in the Government Service.... We should submit that women should not be debarred from this grade [the executive grade] merely from the sex point of view, and in reverse the male should not be debarred from entering the Service with typing, shorthand or machine operating qualifications.¹²³

Thus for the Women's Section, the domestication of women in the workplace that entailed restricting women's options in employment was untenable and had to be repudiated.

Women's organisations became watchdogs on other broader issues relating to the plight of women employees. These organisations cast a light on challenges women faced with accommodation both in urban and remote areas of the country, forcing the government's hand to the plight of working women. At the 1938 FWISR Annual Congress, the Essexvale branch sent in a request, through the organisation's Education Standing Committee, for the improvement of accommodation for teachers in the districts. Referring to the accommodation in Essexvale, it was noted that accommodation there was "scarcely suitable for unmarried women and that this applied to many rural areas."¹²⁴ Government was pressed to "do all in its power to avoid teachers having to live in uncongenial surroundings."¹²⁵

In 1950, the Salisbury branch of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women of Rhodesia (B & PW) club also registered its support for the proposal by the Salisbury City Council, "to erect a block of flats, in or near the centre of town, for single

¹²³ Paterson, Commission of Inquiry.

¹²⁴ *Rhodesia, Home and Country*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (September 1938), p. 21.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23

working women.”¹²⁶ This Salisbury branch noted that the existing accommodation for single women was, “to say the least, disturbing. Large numbers [were] accommodated in rooms in private houses in the Avenues and further afield.”¹²⁷ Because meals were not provided in these rooms, oftentimes these single young women had to cycle, “anything up to two miles each way in order to obtain dinner at a restaurant in town.”¹²⁸ This setting was believed to contribute to undernourishment as “many go without dinner or subsist on an inadequate snack prepared in their own room.”¹²⁹ Thus women’s organisations exposed some of the ills that the women employee went through and this brought to the fore the plight of the latter for the attention of the responsible authorities.

Efforts by white women to successfully contest their domestication in the workplace met with mixed successes. By and large, the women remained domesticated but a number of concessions were made. For instance, the marriage bar was removed, at least on paper, in 1971 such that married women could also be employed permanently like single women. However, other issues such as equal pay for equal work remained unchanged. As for occupational crowding, this remained a feature of the Public Service though more and more opportunities opened up for women outside what was perceived as traditional feminine occupations. There are several factors that account for the continued domestication of women in the Public Service. First can be noted the dominant domestic ideology to which even women subscribed. Notions of subordination to men and appropriate occupations for women continued to be accepted, cultivated and entrenched by society.

¹²⁶ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 17 April 1950.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

The domination of men in the decision making positions also contributed to the failure of what could have been a more radical transformation of women's plight in the Public Service. Elizabeth Wormald summarized this as follows, "there were all men in the [higher] positions and there were no women. So if you were having problems you had to present them to a man and hopefully they would take your case through."¹³⁰ These men did more to safeguard patriarchal hegemony that sought to subordinate women and duplicate the home front in the workplace. It is thus not surprising that the Rhodesian government, which was male-dominated, was far less enthusiastic about radical reform on the roles and status of women in the workplace. It is also not surprising that the male-dominated commissions of inquiry, such as the Chegwiddden commission of 1951-52 and the Paterson commission of 1961, set to investigate women's plight in the Public Service also came up with recommendations that did not radicalise women's roles and status in terms of their domestication in the workplace.¹³¹

Conclusion

The chapter has examined the experiences of white women in the professions particularly those who took up careers in the Public Service. It has accounted for women's increased 'abandonment' of the home and analysed the growing debates over this phenomenon. The chapter discussed the debates that developed around women's proper place in Rhodesian society vis-à-vis their formal employment. The debates about women's proper place in society helped Rhodesian society to introspect on its domestic ideology and facilitated a process of continuous negotiation and re-configuration of, but not an end to, this ideology. The chapter has also shown that once women entered the professions, they faced a series of

¹³⁰ Interview with Elizabeth Wormald, Marlborough, 17 April 2007.

¹³¹ There were other Commissions of Inquiry concerned with the general conditions of service (for men and women) in the Public Service and these again were chaired and dominated by men for example the the Godlonton Commission of Enquiry into Promotions in the Civil Service of 1939.

discriminations and conditions of services that amounted to their domestication in the workplace. The chapter has argued that these conditions of service also duplicated the home front in many ways. It has also examined how white women responded to their domestication and evaluated these responses. By and large, the domestication of white women in the workplace remained entrenched despite concessions to some of their demands.

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CHAPTER THREE

ELASTICITY IN DOMESTICITY: WHITE WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS AND SETTLER SOCIETY, 1920s -1970s

Introduction

The previous chapter explored the nature of white women's experiences in the professions and demonstrated the extent of the impact that the domestic ideology had in shaping these experiences. This chapter narrows the discussion to white women's organisations and their roles within settler society. The majority of women's organisations were voluntary, that is, their service to the community was not paid for. Closely analysed, this echoed a similar setting in the home front where women's work was unpaid. Thus, women's participation in voluntary work was a larger public representation of the private domestic setting and as such, voluntary work was to colonial society what housewifery was to the home front. A reference made by the National Council of Women of Southern Rhodesia (NCWSR) in 1956 in their submissions to the Commission of Inquiry into the Inequalities and Disabilities between Men and Women buttresses the argument I make in this chapter. Part of this reference read, "A well-known French woman, Madam Lefauchaux, on being reminded that woman's place is in the home, has said that perhaps her emergence into public life may 'make the world a better home to live in.'"¹ It is from such perspectives, that the image of domesticity as elastic has been drawn. The image also captures the nature of activities that women's organisations embarked on which, by and large, were an extension of domesticity. Women's activities also fitted into their perceived roles and status as 'mothers of empire'.

¹ The Commission of Inquiry into the Inequalities and Disabilities as between Men and Women, 1956 [Beadle T. H.] (CSR 22 – 1956).

The chapter has six sections. The first is an overview which examines selected women's organisations and their mandates which confirm the elasticity of domesticity. The sections that follow narrow into more specific activities of these organisations. The second section discusses women's war-time efforts, particularly during the Second World War. The third examines white women's organisations and their involvement in social amenities for the European population in Southern Rhodesia. The fourth section discusses women's organisations and their involvement with the vulnerable groups of settler society, namely, the children, the plight of other women and the aged. The fifth section looks at women's organisations as moral watchdogs of Rhodesian society. In the final section, the chapter examines how women's organisations publicised the 'private' by bringing domestic-oriented subject matter to public scrutiny.

Mothering the empire: An overview of white women's organisations

The machinery by which most white women executed their activities and made an impact on the Rhodesian society was through women's organisations. Every woman was encouraged to participate in these organisations because "it gave her the opportunity to look beyond the four walls of her home and be of service to the community."² There were several women's organisations in Rhodesia and the oldest can be dated as far back as 1907.³ These organisations, however, have not received as much attention from scholars as those for

² *RAUW Newsletter*, No. 22 (March 1979), p. 8. The statement was made by Rene Quinton who was a vibrant member and leader of different women's organisation since 1949 as the founder member of the Umvukwes Women's Institute.

³ One of the first women's organisations was the Loyal Women Guild established in Rhodesia in 1907 and founded in the Cape Colony in 1900. See brief history of the Loyal Women's Guild by Mrs. Wilkins (Hon. Secretary), "Loyal Women's Guild Council: Southern Rhodesia", in O. Gumprich and E. Yates (compilers), *Women in Central Africa*, p. 75.

African women.⁴ This is not surprising because the scholarly interest in white women in colonial Africa in general and Southern Rhodesia in particular is very recent. In the Southern Rhodesian case, one work that has attempted to document white women's organisations was written by Edone Logan, on the FWISR.⁵ Logan was herself an active member of the organisation during the colonial period. Her discussion of FWISR chronicles its origins and nature of activities. Her paper is not concerned with a nuanced academic analysis of the organisation and its activities. Olivia Muchena also looks at different women's organisations (black and/or white) during the colonial period.⁶ In her study, she chronicles the origins, objectives and nature of activities conducted by several women's organisations, albeit briefly. For both authors, issues like the role of ideology, the colonial state and the response of colonial society are not the primary concerns. This section seeks to fill this gap by giving a broader overview of the women's organisations and examining how they interacted with the domestic ideology. A brief examination of the responses and attitudes of the colonial state and society towards women's organisations will also be made.

From the outset, white women's organisations usually duplicated those from the western world or South Africa and some were also affiliated to international women's organisations. This was significant for the following reasons. First, it meant that the ideology shaping women's organisations was, to a certain degree, imported. Thus the objectives and goals of these organisations were usually borrowed from sister organisations in Europe, Canada or South Africa as the case might be. Secondly, while most organisations soon got on their own feet and operated within the parameters presented by the local environment, there was

⁴ Some of the works written on organisations for African women in colonial Zimbabwe include; Law, "Even a labourer is worthy of his hire"; Amy Kaler, "Visions of Domesticity"; Shaw, "Sticks and Scones"; Ranchod-Nilsson, "Educating Eve".

⁵ Logan, "An outline of the History".

⁶ Olivia Muchena, "Women's Organisations in Zimbabwe: An Assessment of their needs and Potential" (Centre for Applied Social Studies, University of Zimbabwe, 1980).

continued reference to what was happening or being done by sister or affiliated organisations elsewhere. This meant that ideas continued to flow and be exchanged on how women's situation could be improved. Women's organisations in Rhodesia, for example, sent delegates to attend international women's conferences and these women came back imbued with ideas of gender justice and equality which they tried to introduce back home. The methods applied in confronting these issues were not always duplicated. For instance, women organisations in Southern Rhodesia were less confrontational and radical in their fight for women's liberties when compared to some of their western counterparts clamouring for women's liberation. Indeed, where matters of gender parity were concerned white society in Southern Rhodesia was largely conservative and intransigent.

Differences in the women's organisations could be found in their religious orientations, their compositions and central mandates. As hinted, these organisations rarely sought to radically re-orient the gender terrain and, in most instances, extended and entrenched the domestic ideal. Some organisations concentrated on the white settler community only, whilst others were involved with other races. Other organisations were composed of particular national, religious or denominational groups e.g. the Union of Jewish Women or the Methodist Women's Association. Information on most women's organisations is difficult to find probably because they did not always deposit their documents with the National Archives. In some instances, the documentation is inconsistent and/or incomplete making it difficult to track important information on these organisations. Notwithstanding these limitations, there is a lot of information on some of the bigger and more 'national' organisations such as NCWSR, FWISR, NHR, WNSL and the WVS.⁷ The study, therefore, makes constant

⁷ WVS is probably the only surviving active pre-independent Women's group and has a membership of both white and black women. The only place of activity in the country is at its headquarters in Avondale west, Harare. There are currently involved in activities such as clothing sales which are quite different from its activities in the colonial era. Interview with Jane Hoet (Chairperson of WVS), Harare, 13 February 2013.

reference to these organisations in its attempt to re-construct the story of white women's organisations in Southern Rhodesia. Appendix B shows a list of some of the women's organisations in Rhodesia.

Whilst the composition of these organisations as well as their visions and main goals differed, ultimately their concerns converged on improving the social and economic welfare of primarily, white Rhodesians in general, as well as of white women and children in particular. For example, the Loyal Women's Guild Council (LWGC) which was one of the well-known women's organisations, especially before the Second World War, concentrated their energies on social amenities for the settler society and later extended to Africans. The LWGC was one of the oldest organisations in the country, originally founded in South Africa in 1900.⁸ The Rhodesian section was inaugurated in 1907 by Lord Milton at Government House. From the outset, the organisation thus had the support of the government and this would, at times, take the form of financial assistance or rent-free offices for LWGC's activities. The LWGC had as its activities moulded around "benevolent work, social work, the welfare of women and children."⁹ Benevolent work, which was the primary purpose of the guild, covered "many forms of help from the distribution of food and clothing and grants for various purposes to street and other collections".¹⁰ Thus LWGC was largely an expression of domesticity re-enacted on the national stage.

The activities of FWISR also demonstrate its domestic orientation and clearly illustrate how domesticity had its boundaries shifted from 'home' to coincide with those of the nation state.

In 1964, the FWISR summarised some of its activities as follows:

⁸ Mrs. Wilkins (Hon. Secretary), "Loyal Women's Guild Council: Southern Rhodesia", p. 75.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Since 1927 we have been working together on a national level and today most legislation affecting the *social welfare of the country* bears the imprint of the Women's Institutes' efforts. The most notable feature of the organisation has been its ability to bring together women of every walk of life, with varied interests and outlook, and enable them to work together and so take an effective part in the life and development of the country.¹¹

The FWISR grew so influential that in the 1950s it began to see itself as the “the Parliament of Women”.¹² Despite reference to itself as a parliament, FWISR stressed that it was “non-partisan and non-sectarian and [took] an interest in all matters pertaining to the welfare of women and children.”¹³ In this way, the organisation precluded itself from direct participation in the public political terrain. The Organisation spread its domestic ideology through its Magazine, the *Home and Country*, where images of the ideal home and ideal roles and status of women were highlighted. After the Second World War, FWISR also extended its activities to non-white communities and became active with the Homecraft movement.¹⁴ The Homecraft movement, as will be shown in Chapter Four, involved the extension of western domesticity to African women and was premised on the thinking that white women had a mandate to improve the situation of African women who were perceived as backward.

Another women's organisation, the Woman's Voluntary Service (WVS) was fairly unique in its thrust. It was made up of women with expertise in different professions who could be a reserve force prepared to offer their services voluntarily to the state, especially in times of crisis.¹⁵ The nature of these professions also demonstrate the working of the domestic ideal as

¹¹ NAZ, S3331/55, Women's Institutes and Councils - General 1964, The Hon. Secretary FWRS, Mrs. V. Tomlinson, to the Secretary, Ministry of Law and Order, Salisbury, 22 June 1964. Emphasis added.

¹² NAZ, S824/198/1, Federation of Women's Institutes: Miscellaneous Subjects, 1943 – 1950, Jane Needham (the Hon Secretary of FWISR) to the Chief Education Officer, 27 August 1942. For a detailed narration on the activities of FWISR, also see E. A. Logan, “An outline”.

¹³ NAZ, S3331/55, The Hon. Secretary FWRS (Mrs. V. Tomlinson) to the Secretary, Ministry of Law and Order, Salisbury, 22 June 1964.

¹⁴ See Chapter Four.

¹⁵ This is one of the few organisations that have survived up to this day with its headquarters in Avondale West, Harare.

women were concentrated in traditional “feminine occupations” such as cooking, which had the highest number, followed by shorthand typists and then clerical work (See table 7 below).

Table 7: Qualifications for Members of the WVS

Profession/Qualification	No. of women	Profession/Qualification	No. of women
Physiotherapists	1	Knitting	5
Pharmacists	3	Librarians	4
Parachutists	2	Meteorologists	1
Pay Corps	1	Morse	1
Recruiting officer	1	Munitions	5
Radar Operators	7	Nanny	7
Secretaries	17	Theatrical producers	7
Social Science	2	Photographers	3
Statistician	1	Physical trainers	1
Shorthand typist	117	Public Welfare	4
Transport drivers	29	Receptionist	2
Therapists	1	Sales Ladies	20
Window dressers	1	Supply Corps	1
Welders	1	Spastic School	1
Care of children	19	Teachers	55
Car Maintenance	26	Telephony	13
Cypher Clerks	26	V.A.D	117
Cooks	144	Wireless Operators	2
Clerical	102	Welfare officers	4
Clothing exchange	2	Dressmakers	5
Driving Instructors	2	Dieticians	1
Domestic science	3	Drivers	12
Draughtswomen	2	Entertainment	8
Hostel organisers	3	First Aid	54
Home nursing	9	Farmers	6

Source: NAZ, F119/D52, Women's Voluntary Service, 1954 -1963, Prime Minister's Office to the Secretary of Home Affairs, Salisbury, 27 September 1954

The organisation also extended its activities to include the improvement of the health of the white population, financing institutions for the mentally handicapped as well as helping rehabilitate ‘chronic’ debtors. The organisation, like several others, did not seek to radically change white women’s domesticity and it emphasised voluntary participation. Some of the occupations by members broke traditional boundaries of women’s work and WVS showed

determination to have government's assistance in training its members in more of such occupations including mechanics for aircrafts and vehicles.¹⁶ Unfortunately, such requests were not granted.¹⁷

The Women's National Service League (WNSL) makes interesting reading because its activities were concentrated during the crisis period of the Second World War. The voluntary organisation was established some 6 months before the outbreak of the Second World War (in anticipation of such a crisis) and when the war came, WNSL immediately channelled and centred its energies towards the war effort. It was involved with the collection of clothing material for the troops, medical comforts as well as providing hospitality to "Friends in Uniform" by giving them "a taste of home life."¹⁸ The organisation also participated in collecting financial donations to sponsor different war related activities. Because of the nature of its contributions, the organisation received the financial support of the state which was very crucial. For example, in 1942, the Bulletin for the WNSL reported that between July 1941 and June 1942, the National War Fund had "given the League Branches through its various Area Committees the sum of £5,694 for the purchase of wool and materials for making comforts."¹⁹ Thus the war saw white women's domesticity being expanded beyond the home frontiers and more emphasis being given to their status as 'mothers of empire'. For a moment private domesticity was sacrificed at the altar of what one could term "national domesticity".

¹⁶ NAZ, F119/D52, Women's Voluntary Service, 1954 -1963, Prime Minister's Office to the Secretary of Home Affairs, Salisbury, 27 September 1954.

¹⁷ NAZ, F119/D52, Federal treasury to the Secretary for Home Affairs, 4 April 1957. The state said that it did not have the facilities and manpower to train these women.

¹⁸ NAZ, 482/456/39, Women's National Service League 1939 - 1943, Women National Service League, Bulletin No. V, 1st July 1941 - 30 June 1942, p. 4.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The National Council of Women of Southern Rhodesia (NCWSR) established in 1945, was in many ways the face of voluntary women's organisations in the country as it was a national body to which most of the women's organisations became affiliated. It was affiliated to the International Council of Women (ICW) and its mandate went beyond white society to include the improvement of the welfare of the non-white communities. NCWSR summarised their focus as follows, "but it is not only the physical health and growth of our people that we would stress. We underline heavily education and culture. We are not only concerned with the education of the normal child, but also that of his handicapped brother and sister."²⁰ The mandate of the organisation was carried out by Conveners of Health, African Affairs, Home Economics and Education. The nature of its mandate and activities made NCWSR not very different from the activities of many of its affiliate organisations as it channelled most of its energies towards traditional feminine domains.²¹ The organisation, like several other women's organisations, was proactive in presenting its cases to the state and would, at times, go out of its way to make its own investigations so as to present informed resolutions to the state.

The National Housewives Register, established in 1971, is another organisation that presents fascinating insights on white women's organisations in Rhodesia. In its initial phase, the organisation drew its membership, as the name suggests, from housewives in Rhodesia. Its founder member, Ivy Hartmann, had moved to Rhodesia with her husband and she had been a member of the NHR of South Africa. NHR Rhodesia became a platform for discussion and debate on various issues affecting Rhodesian women, especially as wives and mothers, and it put under public scrutiny and debate topical issues such as the role and status of white woman in society. Unlike other women's organisations, NHR was officially not committed to

²⁰ Gordon Blanche, "The National Council of Women of Southern Rhodesia", in O. Gumprich and E. Yates (compilers), *Women in Central Africa*.

²¹ *Ibid*, pp. 71-73.

organising charity/voluntary activities. However, it did not discourage members from doing voluntary work in their communities or beyond. This policy was underscored in one editorial response in the *NHR Newsletter's* response to the Gwelo NHR group's report on its voluntary involvement with the Air Force's canteen, which read:

Glad to hear of Gwelo's work for the Forces canteen. I am sure many of us are similarly involved. The only reason we say that NHR is not a charitable or action organisation is that we don't want women who would wish to join us to feel committed willy-nilly to such efforts when they already have quite enough to handle at home. Any group of friends meeting regularly is bound to see needs in the community which they may have the time and interest to satisfy – this is one of the many good things that flow from membership of NHR – but it is not a function of NHR itself.²²

NHR's exclusion of voluntary work as part of its mandate, as well as its encouragement of women to be more open-minded, openly discuss their plight amongst themselves and to explore opportunities beyond the home confinements, made it quite different from other women's organisations.

The establishment of the NHR must be understood within the context of the ever changing socio-economic and political environment in Rhodesia in which housewifery and perceptions of this institution were being remodelled, queried and continuously negotiated. Housewifery was increasingly losing favour and generally being looked down upon.²³ With housewifery under threat, NHR was constituted with its mandate being "to encourage the formation of groups wanting to participate in stimulating and wide ranging discussion, creating the

²² The Editor, "Responding to report by Bep Folkertsen, Local Organiser of Gwelo Group", *NHR Newsletter* (June 1978).

²³ Sue Johnsen in her contribution to the *NHR Newsletter* indicated in 1977 that most housewives were being embarrassed by this occupation. See full quote is in Chapter One, Sue Johnsen, "A Woman's Place is in the Home", *NHR Newsletter* (December 1977). Chapter Two has also documented some of the arguments that were presented to justify white women's adoption of formal employment.

opportunity for friendship and other activities.”²⁴ It was hoped that this would keep Rhodesian women abreast with developments the world over and make housewifery a less embarrassing but more desirable destination for women. In the same vein, married women were enlightened on their life choices and occupations and were helped to make the best decisions that would bring fulfilment to them be it as career women or housewives. Paradoxically, NHR had the effect of encouraging women to look for occupations outside the home such that, over time, its membership was no longer restricted to housewives but included professional/career women.

Women’s organisations also participated in the entrenchment of the domestic ideal but, in some instances, they questioned domesticity and sought its reformulation. Active involvement in voluntary work, for example, was itself compromising private domesticity as women spent time outside the home. However, the activities carried out by the organisations fell within the frame of domesticity. The majority of women’s organisations sought to contest and negotiate domesticity in a less confrontational manner. A summary on the activities of women’s organisations in Rhodesia made by RAUW’s (Rhodesian Association of University Women) Newsletter captured this approach:

The women of this country have suffered many disabilities due to the legislative, traditional and social attitude to their sex. Despite this, there have been few women who have embraced ‘Women’s Lib’, in any of its extreme forms, rather a gradual working within the various organisations towards a more equitable position for women, particularly within the context of their families. Many organisations and individuals have worked towards this goal.²⁵

²⁴ This statement was on the front page of several *NHR Newsletters* though the mandate was also clearly spelt out in the *NHR Newsletter* (December 1981).

²⁵ *RAUW Newsletter* No. 22, March 1979, p. 1. Women’s Lib referred to the Women’s Liberation Movement which demanded liberal laws on abortion, divorce and access to family planning as well as equalities between the sexes, among other things. The movement was known to be radical at least by contemporary standards having as one of their early slogans and conviction that the personal was political as women’s personal experiences had significant political implications. See Anderson and Zinsser, *A History of Their Own*, p. 409.

There were, however, some instances where women's organizations sought to directly contest and even do away with domesticity, or some of its extreme forms. Two examples can be noted, namely the League of Professional and Business Women (later known as National Federation of Business and Professional Women of Rhodesia – to be referred to as B &PW) formed in 1940 in Bulawayo and the Rhodesia Association of University Women (RAUW) established in 1956 during the Federal period.²⁶

It is no coincidence that the B & PW was formed in 1940. As already noted the Second World War had seen an increase in the employment of white women in the professions as they replaced men in the war front or took up new employment opportunities presented by the war situation. B &PW derived its membership from “women in business or professions, and 75 per cent of them [had] to be gainfully employed.”²⁷ It had the following as its aims and objectives:

1. To encourage in business and professional women a realisation of their responsibilities in their own country and consequently in world affairs.
2. To facilitate co-operation and coordinated action where necessary between business and professional women.
3. To study world problems and to assist the work of the United Nations, with particular reference to the removal of social, legal and economic disabilities of women.

The first objective echoed the expectations of women to be mothers of the nation while the third, if pursued, would confront Rhodesian patriarchy and seek to radically transform the gender terrain. True to their objectives, B &PW “made several approaches to government

²⁶ Between 1953 and 1963, Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland had come together to form the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and the capital was in Southern Rhodesia.

²⁷ M. Oliver, “The National Federation of business and Professional Women of Rhodesia”, in O. Gumprich and E. Yates (compilers), *Women in Central Africa*, p. 101.

requesting that women be part of certain statutory bodies; and ... at every possible opportunity pressed for services for and protection of women and their children.”²⁸

RAUW derived its membership from professional women particularly those that had degrees or were working in universities. The constitution of RAUW postulated “the standards requirement for membership to ‘be at least two years’ work at a university, followed by the award of a degree of recognised cultural or scientific content.”²⁹ The Association took interest in the conditions of service of women, especially in the civil service and, among other things, was critical of the discrimination between men and women within Rhodesian society. It also took interest in the social and academic welfare of women university lecturers as well as female university graduates. Like other women’s organisations, it was interested in the general welfare of Rhodesians and participated in different charity/voluntary activities.

Similar to B &PW, RAUW worked towards shifting the gender terrain in Rhodesia and by extension challenged private domesticity, believing strongly that much could be done by women themselves to bring about change. It also believed that it was important for the “men-folk to accept the capabilities and sense of responsibility of women and grant them adequate scope for their energies.”³⁰ In 1960, RAUW inaugurated a Study Group “for the investigation of social problems such as discriminatory practices against women in the professions, commerce etc., and for encouraging University women to take greater part in public affairs.”³¹ Despite this proactive outlook, RAUW (or at least the then president) did not seek to disregard the importance of private domesticity for mothers. Mrs Annie Elizabeth Thompson, the then president, made the following claim in 1969, “I am very old fashioned

²⁸ *RAUW Newsletter*, No. 22 (March 1979), p. 2.

²⁹ *RAUW Newsletter* No. 1, 1961.

³⁰ *RAUW Newsletter*, No. 2 (1958), p. 1.

³¹ *RAUW Newsletter*, No. 2 (August 1960), p. 3.

and believe in self-discipline. It is the mother's first duty to look after her children, especially when they are very young. Most of our problems arise through neglect of sound moral upbringing in the home."³² Thus, despite its unequivocal fight for equality between sexes, RAUW did not seem directly targeted at out-rightly overthrowing domesticity for women.

There were mixed reactions to women's organisations within Rhodesian white society. From the outset, the existence of voluntary women's organisations was generally accepted within society because they did not radically depart from women's domestic orientation or threaten white patriarchy. However, women's voluntary work compromised private domesticity as women now 'neglected' their expected home bound duties. It is within this context that as early as 1939 the chairperson of the FWISR warned against women dashing about "helping on this committee and in that charitable cause"³³ whilst they left their homes and families to the care of Africans. Such women, she noted were "**not** good citizens".³⁴ In 1944, the FWISR chairperson reminded its members that, "it is in the home that our primary responsibility as women begins and if we fail here all the social welfare work in the world is only patching up."³⁵ The establishment of the NHR in 1971 which, as already noted, did not commit itself to voluntary work, was partly in protest to the voluntary work-concept of women's organisations which was believed to put an extra burden on women-wives or cause them to 'neglect' their homes.

The state also had mixed responses depending on the nature of activities of the women's organisations. Some organisations received financial support while others were denied such. The WNSL, for example, received some financial assistance from the state because of its

³² *RAUW Newsletter*, No. 2 (April 1969), p. 2.

³³ Chairperson's Address, "Thirteenth Annual Congress of the Federation of Women's Institutes of Southern Rhodesia, Salisbury, July 5th-6th, 1939", *Rhodesia, Home and Country*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1939), p. 17.

³⁴ *Ibid.* Bold is in the original.

³⁵ "WI Notes: Social Services versus the Federation", *VUKA*, Vol. 2, No.2 (October 1944), p. 67.

contributions to the war effort. But even then, some branches felt they did not get enough support. During the Federal period, efforts by a different organisation, the WVS, to get financial assistance from both the Rhodesian government and the Federal state were fruitless as the Treasury found it “difficult to support the proposal ... particularly at the present time.”³⁶ This was despite the fact that the Secretary for Home Affairs of the Rhodesian government considered the organisation as one that had to be “encouraged in its community and Public Service and that some financial assistance [was] warranted.”³⁷ Thus there was no consistency on the part of the government in terms of direct financial assistance for women’s organisations. However, at times free railway travel concessions were made to women’s organisations holding and attending their conferences. On the whole, the colonial government could not totally ignore these organisations because of their large following that could influence the electorate. In 1964, FWISR claimed to represent women in most towns and districts in Southern Rhodesia with some 47 women’s institutes throughout the country. Its total membership then was 2000. The NCWSR, too, by its very nature, had a potential to open up the state to a wider electorate. This organisation was a conglomerate body of most of the women’s organisations in the country.

Women’s organisations placed importance on increasing their membership or demonstrating that they had a wide membership so that this could give them a stronger voice that would receive the attention of the state. For example, the WVS wrote, in 1954, to the Secretary to the Prime Minister of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland asking for financial assistance from the Federal state and, in that letter, the organisation tried to demonstrate the extent of its existing and potential influence. The letter read:

³⁶ NAZ, F119/D52, From the treasury to the Secretary for home Affairs, 4 April 1967.

³⁷ NAZ, F119/D52, From the Secretary for Home Affairs to the Secretary to the Federal Treasury, 12 February 1957.

In conclusion may it be mentioned to you that our branches are as follows: Salisbury; Umtali; Fort Victoria; Rusape; Lusaka, developing the whole of the Copper Belt; and Branches are being formed at the following: - Kaleme Hill; Mwinilunga; Kaseba; Mumbwa; Namwala; Mulobezi; Sesheke; Senanga; Kalabo; Kazungula; Livingstone; Kafui; Mafulira, Bancroft; Chingola; Kitwe; Feira; Zumbo; Mbika,; Kasama ... where in these places there are European women in any number.³⁸

This deliberate detailed attention to the different existing and potential branches was as a result of being conscious of the fact that WVS stood a greater chance of receiving recognition and support from the state if they demonstrated that the organisation was sufficiently influential. Still, the request for financial assistance was not approved.

The extent to which the women's organisations may have effected change on the socio-economic and political terrain of colonial Zimbabwe may not be easy to establish. However, one would agree with an observation made of the FWISR in 1946, which applies to other women's organisations:

Just how far the Federation's (FWISR) prodding has been responsible for authority's action it is not possible to determine, but that the Federation has done good service in keeping interest alive in many important social questions and in not allowing authority to pigeonhole these questions after giving promises cannot be the subject of any doubt whatever.³⁹

Despite the difficulty in making a concrete evaluation of the full extent of the impact of the women's organisations on government policy, the nature of their concerns is enough to determine the kind of ideology that was influencing these organisations.

The challenge in establishing the effectiveness of women's organisations has also been complicated by the difficulties in tracing the outcome of some resolutions that were passed.

³⁸ NAZ, F119/D52, From the National President, Central African Women's Voluntary Services, Mrs. H. Shearer, to the Secretary to the Prime Minister, Federation of Central Africa, Salisbury, 22 September 1954.

³⁹ *The Bulawayo Chronicle*, 22 August 1946.

However, just having the resolutions passed was important. In the words of the 1979 *RAUW Newsletter*, “It is worth to remember that resolutions need not always be accepted to have their desired effect. If rationally and well-presented they always served to inform the relevant authorities of unsatisfactory conditions and the needs of various sectors of the community.”⁴⁰ Undoubtedly, the women’s organisations managed to get the recognition and respect from the colonial state. One sign of this recognition could be the fact that on many occasions women’s organisations were invited to give their input to several commissions of inquiries on various subject matters.⁴¹ On the whole, however, the attitude of Rhodesia’s patriarchal state and society always limited the extent to which domesticity could be re-configured or done away with. The next section narrows the discussion to a detailed examination of the contributions of white women’s organisations, particularly to the welfare of settler society.

White women’s organisations and the Second World War

To reiterate, the Second World War had far reaching effects on the roles and status of white women in Southern Rhodesia. As ‘mothers of the nation’ white women actively participated in activities outside the home to defend the homeland. Using the case of Britain, Margaret Allen concludes that this increased participation of women outside the home constituted “an attack on the domestic ideal” despite acknowledging the involvement of these women in voluntary and domestic-oriented responsibilities.⁴² Using the Rhodesian case this section argues that women’s participation was a reformulation of, rather than an assault on, domesticity. In fact, this participation was in essence an extension of the boundaries of home

⁴⁰ *RAUW Newsletter* No. 22, March 1979, p. 2.

⁴¹ Some of these Commissions of Inquiry include The Commission of Inquiry into the Inequalities and Disabilities as between Men and Women, 1956 [Beadle T. H.] (CSR 22 – 1956); Commission of Inquiry into the Termination of Pregnancy, 1976, [W. A. Pittman] (CMD R.R. 2 – 1976) and The Commission of Inquiry into Divorce Laws, 1977 [Lang A. J. G] (CMD. R. R. 16 – 1977.

⁴² Allen, “The Domestic Ideal”, p. 402.

to coincide with those of empire and women still played domestic roles in this “enlarged home”. Commenting on the impact of the two world wars on women’s roles, Stevi Jackson notes that “the boundaries between the private haven of the home and the outside world were symbolically re-drawn so that the home became equated with nation.”⁴³ Similarly, in an unprecedented way, white women in Southern Rhodesia and their organisations also brought their domesticity to the service of the wider boundaries of home during the Second World War.

White women’s contributions to the war effort included replacing men who left professions for the war front, raising resources for the soldiers as well as domestic responsibilities such as cooking, washing for the uniformed forces and establishing child care facilities to help release more women towards the war effort. Women’s organisations also actively participated in the welfare of refugees, internees and prisoners of war in the colony. During the Second World War, two white women’s organisation (namely the WNSL and the FWISR) stood out because of the nature and extent of their contributions. The discussion will, therefore, be biased towards these two.

The WNSL was formed in anticipation of a war crisis which would require the mobilisation of women’s labour power to maintain stability in the workplace and the economy at large. One of the original objectives, which fell off with the passage of time, was to undertake a national registration exercise that would document the available women and their qualifications. The regulations of the organisation indicate that the government had “given official recognition to the League as being Auxiliary to their Defence schemes.”⁴⁴ Just after the outbreak of the war, the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Defence wrote to

⁴³ Jackson, “Towards a Historical Sociology of Housework”, p. 160.

⁴⁴ NAZ, S750/W2/18, Regulations: Women’s National Service League (nd).

Lady Russell, the president of WNSL, requesting her to form “a unit on a voluntary basis to supply women for clerical duties to replace men at Defence Head Quarters and other officers in the event of a national emergency.”⁴⁵ As the war progressed, WNSL extended to assume the role of securing material comforts such as blankets, pyjamas and shoes, among others (see table 8 below).

Table 8: Total “comforts” received at WNSL Head Quarters collected for the period 1 July 1941 to 30 June 1942

General Items	Quantity	Hospital Items	Quantity
Socks	4,766	Pyjamas	797
Stockings	1,570	Hospital Shirts	100
Sea-boot Stockings	100	Pneumonia Jackets	2
Kneecaps	6	Hospital Stockings	102
Hose tops	1	Bed socks	10
Pullovers	2,354	Dressing gowns	5
Seamen’s Jerseys	191	Surgeons’ gowns	5
Airmen’s Jerseys	216	Orderlies’ gowns	43
Scarves	3,370	Overalls	4
Helmets	883	Gauze masks	48
Cap Mufflers	142	Chest blankets	29
Caps	12	Towels	106
Cuffs	53	Face cloths	4
Mittens	297	Hot Water Bottle covers	158
Gloves	66	Bed pan Covers	30
Dressing gowns	5	Jug covers	8
Holdalls	1,157	Pillow slips	123
Hussifs	1,939	Eye-shields	20
Glory bags	629	Large number of bandages and swabs	
Ration bags	1,542		
Fly nets	779	TOTAL	1656
Spine Protectors	120		
Neck Protectors	948		
Cup Covers	628		
Handkerchiefs	96		
Cushions	90		
Total	21,953		

Source: Adapted from NAZ 482/456/39 Women’s National Service League, 1939 – 1943, Women’s National Service Bulletin, 1942

⁴⁵ NAZ, S750/W2/18, From the Secretary, Department of Justice and Defence to Lady Russell, 4 August 1939.

WNSL's efforts in the supply of comforts for the military were acknowledged from as far away as the Middle East. The Liaison Officer from the Office of the Rhodesian Military in the Middle East wrote, "without exception, both Rhodesian officers and women consulted affirm that these comforts have proved most valuable and welcome and substantiate my view that the only complaints are that these parcels of comfort have come too irregularly and in quantities too small to meet the demand."⁴⁶ Comforts were also sent to "Rhodesian troops and other members of His Majesty's forces, including the Royal Navy at Simonstown and troops in France."⁴⁷ Clearly women's domesticity had been expanded beyond the home and the national frontiers to include empire.

Further evidence of women's war effort going beyond the boundaries of Southern Rhodesia is seen when WNSL also assisted with the recruitment of white women to send to Kenya where women's labour power was also in huge demand as a result of the war. WNSL took responsibility for the screening of the women to prevent recruiting "an undesirable type" "who might give our colony a bad name."⁴⁸ Thus WNSL also acted to safeguard the moral reputation of the colony. The government, however, made it clear that it would only allow this recruitment if the women recruits were not being taken from the civil service. One result of this recruitment was that women resigned and opted for recruitment. Lady Russell had to take an extra-caution of insisting on a letter of approval from the former employer as a measure to keep in check resignations from the civil service. She reported success for the majority who were recruited to Kenya. "The majority of our girls", she wrote, "are working

⁴⁶ NAZ, S750/W2/18, From the Liaison Officer, Office of the Rhodesia Military, Middle East, to Defence Head Quarters, Rhodesia, 11 February 1942.

⁴⁷ NAZ, S750/W2/18, From Prime Minister, Southern Rhodesia to Minister of External Affairs, Cape Town, 16 March 1940.

⁴⁸ NAZ 482/456/39, From Lady Russell, Vice-President of the WNSL to Prime Minister, Mr Huggins, 2 October 1940.

happily. A few are disappointed because they are clerks and not drivers; others because they are not nearer the frontline.”⁴⁹

It would, however, be wrong to assume that the work of the WNSL was smooth and without problems. The recruitment of women to Kenya was itself a controversial issue as the Rhodesian government also wanted to capitalise on the same labour. The WNSL also accused the Rhodesian government of failing to acknowledge and recognise the efforts and value of the organisation the same way that similar organisations were being recognised in the empire. For example, the WNSL argued that elsewhere an organisation such as theirs would have been auxiliary to the army with a uniform and ranks. Requests for such uniforms and ranks fell on deaf ears with a letter from the Head Quarters of the Rhodesia Air Training Group advising the government not to take heed of the demands:

If there should be any wish that it [WNSL] should be reconstructed and divided into sections or units, put into uniform, ranks given to the officer, etc., they might be allowed to follow their fickle fancy, but for heaven's sake leave it as it is, a purely voluntary organisation in which the government shows a benevolent interest, but in which it does not wish to interfere.⁵⁰

It is this somewhat disinterested (perhaps exploitative) attitude of the government towards the WNSL that partly explains one complaint raised by a member of the Bulawayo branch who protested, “Candidly, I feel it is a gross injustice for the government to ask for the women of the country to do this work (war work) and to withhold the essential and expect them to find the ways and means with which to run an office efficiently.”⁵¹ In this instance, Made

⁴⁹ NAZ, 482/456/39, W. Russell (Women's National Service League) to Mr Beadle, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, 23 January 1941.

⁵⁰ NAZ, 482/456/39, From the Rhodesian Air Training Group, Head Quarters, to the Prime Minister, G. M. Huggins, 2 October 1940.

⁵¹ NAZ, 482/456/39, Made Holdengarde to Chairperson of WNSL, 14 September 1939.

Holdengarde was complaining against their having to operate without provision of an office and adequate office material to run its activities despite playing a vital role during the war.

The FWISR also played an active role in supporting the war effort. In the first instance, it accepted WNSL using its branch offices in the country for its activities. The FWISR also made financial contributions to the National War Fund through domestic oriented activities such as the selling of tea, flowers and other products associated with the home.⁵² It was this Fund that was also used by the state to assist organisations such as the WNSL that were making contributions towards the war effort. Another activity conducted by the FWISR was the collection of Stramonium. In 1943, the chairperson of the FWISR reported:

This will be the last month of the collection of Stramonium. It is sad to think of the amount spoilt through the difficulty of drying it. The Selukwe Institute arranged for a drying room for the town members - a practical idea. Mazoe Central has sent 3761 lbs. (dried) and offered natives in the reserve 2d. per lb. dried, or 9d. for 20lbs. of undried Stramonium.⁵³

Stramonium would eventually be shipped to the metropole where it was valued for its medicinal properties. FWISR branches also played a very important role in overseeing the welfare of Polish refugees⁵⁴ and prisoners of war.⁵⁵

It may suffice to conclude this section with a summary made by Kathleen McClintock, in 1943, on the activities of the FWISR during the war:

⁵² "K. McClintock, "Women's Institutes Notes: Chairman's Comments on Many Matters of Great Interest", *Vuka*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1943), p. 37.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ McClintock, "Women's Institutes Notes: Preparing for the Gwelo Congress and Other Matters", *VUKA*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1943), p. 33. For fuller details on Polish refugees in Southern Rhodesia see Tasara Muguti, "An Economic and Social History of Polish Refugees in Zimbabwe During and After World War Two" (MA Dissertation, University of Zimbabwe, Economic History Department, 2001).

⁵⁵ McClintock, "Women's Institutes Notes: Summary of Year's Work by Officers and Conveners", *VUKA*, Vol. 1, No.2 (1943), p. 43.

Social Services: (Convener, Mrs J. P. Mackenzie) : - Has taken active part in agitation for increased hospital accommodation, and dealt with questions concerning control of prices, the grading of meat, better conditions of VAD's ... convalescent homes for service and civilian invalids, priority ratings for essential goods eviction of natives from model village at Marandellas, installation of Polish women in village from which natives had been evicted, and the care of children whose mothers are in full-time employment.⁵⁶

Clearly, these activities confirm the influence of the domestic ideology as women channelled their energies towards the war effort.

Women's organisations and settler social amenities

a) Education

Women's organisations contributed significantly to the education of white society in a number of ways including encouraging the educational advancement of women. Their concerns for education ranged from pre-school children to that of adults, especially married women. The organisations, at times, worked with the state in effecting change while in another instances, they provided platforms that would promote educational advancement for fellow women. The realm of education was generally seen as a feminine avenue as it was perceived as an extension of parenting. This partly explains why there was a relatively large concentration of women in the teaching profession.⁵⁷

It has already been shown that women's organisations took a special interest in the establishment of crèches for mothers who could not spend time with their children. This intensified during the Second World War. References to crèches for white children can be dated to as early as 1936 before the war and these were run privately. In this year, the FWISR

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ See, for example, Table 5 on the distribution of European women in the Public Service, 1951-1952.

impressed on the government, "to introduce Nursery Schools in their general educational scheme".⁵⁸ This would see the establishment of public crèches which would be relatively cheaper. The need for crèches was justified on the grounds that there was "a great desirability of providing occupations and pre-school training for the younger children and eliminating or reducing the native nurse influence."⁵⁹ Despite heavy dependence on African domestic labour, there still remained fears of what was perceived as potential negative influences of these Africans on white children and these fears emanated from the fact that the former were generally perceived as uncivilised and, therefore, their contact with white children was expected to be as minimal as possible. As I have already shown, the fears of the African influence on white children partly explain society's discouragement of white women from taking up formal employment upon marriage.

The FWISR played an important role towards the development of nursery schools at two levels. First, it made direct intervention by providing the service. For example, the Salisbury Branch of the FWISR, as early as 1936, had established a crèche "at which some eight children between ages of four and six are more or less in permanent residence."⁶⁰ The second level involved persuading the government to intervene and assist with the establishment or running of new and existing crèches. When the request was made in 1936, the Inspector of Education, who usually attended closely the annual FWISR conferences, did not think that the time was ripe for government's direct intervention with nursery schools because of the demand which, for him, was uncertain.⁶¹ He, however, recommended that "government assistance be given towards the provision of Kindergarten material for the crèches which

⁵⁸ NAZ, S824/198/1, From Office of the Inspector of Schools to Director of Education, 10 July 1936.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ NAZ, S824/198/1, From Office of the Inspector of Schools to Director of Education, 2 June 1936.

could be regarded as an experiment towards this direction.”⁶² This marked the beginning of subsidisations for crèches which eventually culminated in the establishment of public crèches for white children by the end of the Second World War.

During the Second World War, the demand for crèches expanded as women increasingly took up formal employment as part of their contributions to the war effort or simply as a result of increasing opportunities presented by the war situation. In 1941, the FWISR made a plea to the government to establish nursery schools in various centres to accommodate the demand for crèches.⁶³ The government indicated that it did not have the capacity, “Buildings were not available and there was considerable difficulty in securing sufficient staff to deal with even those children within the normal school range.”⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the demand for crèches continued to rise as a result of the war. In 1942, the Report of the FWISR Education Standing Committee noted, “One crèche – ‘Greenwood’ – has been started at Salisbury and one at Bulawayo – ‘The Children’s Home’ – but owing to war conditions when so many women are employed on war work we consider that more such establishments are urgently needed.”⁶⁵ The government did succumb to pressure for increased assistance to the crèches and the Inspector of Education had to fulfil his promise in 1941 that “the government would be sympathetic towards giving assistance to those who had made an effort of this kind [establishing crèches], but stressed that we [government] could not subsidise small private schools whose teachers were not properly qualified for nursery school”.⁶⁶ In 1946 A.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ NAZ, S824/198/1, Office note on the Conference of Women’s Institutes, 1 October 1941.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ NAZ, S824/198/2, Report of the Standing Committee for Education of the FWISR, 1942.

⁶⁶ NAZ, S824/198/1, Office note on the Conference of Women’s Institutes, 1 October 1941.

Cowling, the Director of Education, was reporting that the government had “decided as a policy to provide nursery schools in urban areas”.⁶⁷

Indeed women’s organisations were realising different levels of success regarding child care. In Umtali, the colony’s first government sponsored child centre was established in 1950. This rose out of a meeting of the Umtali branch of the Business and Professional Women’s Clubs of Southern Rhodesia where concern had been expressed “at the lack of European care for Umtali children”.⁶⁸ As a result of the pressure from organisations such as the FWISR, by 1955, direct grants to crèches were also being made by the Southern Rhodesia territorial government. However, during this year, these grants were under threat of being scrapped. The FWISR again tried to intervene and made a resolution presented to the territorial government that “this congress deplores the suggested withdrawal of government grants to nursery schools, which are regarded as an integral and important part of the educational system and urge that the Territorial Minister of Finance meet his responsibility in this connection.”⁶⁹ The outcome of these protests has been difficult to trace. However, it has been shown that the FWISR was very active in pursuing a favourable policy towards the establishment of crèches and these were important in that they allowed women to spend their energies outside the home and probably take up a career earlier in their marriage life.

When the FWISR originally advocated expansion and state involvement with the crèches during the war, this did not necessarily imply the organisation’s support for working mothers. During the war, it was considered necessary for women to work as they were serving a higher

⁶⁷ NAZ, S824/198/2, From the Secretary, A Cowling, Department of Internal Affairs to the Secretary, FWISR, 22 January 1946.

⁶⁸ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 13 January 1950.

⁶⁹ NAZ, 3287/69/23, Federation of Women’s Institutes: Correspondence, 1948-1969, Resolutions passed by the 28th Annual Congress, 28th -29th September 1955.

kind of domesticity embedded in the Empire and these women needed assistance with the welfare of their children. In its contribution to *VUKA*, the FWISR noted:

The first permanent crèche in Salisbury is to be opened next month. This crèche will fill a real need for many mothers. During the war preference will be given to children of mothers who are working all day. After the war, when it is hoped that the number of these mothers will be few, the aim of the crèche is to cater for those mothers who want to be relieved of the responsibility of their children for a few hours. Such a purpose is ideal, but it is hoped that the existence of the crèche will not encourage mothers to get jobs when they do not require so.⁷⁰

Thus the FWISR believed in the traditional family setting where the husband worked while the wife was at home and it lamented the gradual breaking down of the traditional family setting which was said to have been “greatly accelerated by war conditions”.⁷¹

Women’s organisations also campaigned for the inclusion of Domestic Science as a compulsory subject for girls in schools. For instance, in her 1939 Annual Congress address, the chairperson of the FWISR indicated that housekeeping deserved to be recognised as a science as well as an art and was worthy of the best brains and highest endeavours, adding that “the management of the home is worthy of considerable study”.⁷² In its 1944 conference, the FWISR submitted a resolution to the Education Department stating that it “is essential that all girls, whether taking academic courses or not should be educated in the care of children, cookery and housecraft”.⁷³ In 1959, a different women’s organisation, the Rhodesian Council of Women, passed a resolution presented to the Legislative Assembly demanding that domestic science “be made a career for our girls”.⁷⁴ This illustrates the

⁷⁰ “WI. Notes: Social Services Versus the federation”, *VUKA*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (October 1944), p. 67.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Rhodesia Home and Country*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1939), 17.

⁷³ NAZ, S824/198/2, Report on the interview with the Director of Education, 14 July 1944.

⁷⁴ NAZ, S246/59, Resolutions Passed by the Rhodesian Council of Women to be brought before the Legislative Assembly, The Rhodesian Council of Women (Bulawayo) to the Hon. Minister of Internal Affairs, 19 February 1934.

determination of women's organisations to entrench domesticity from early childhood development.

There were continuous calls, even by individual white women, for the exposure of white girls to domestic sciences. One Dorothy Stebbing, in a contribution to *You* magazine in 1964, suggested that education should go deeper in the domestic sciences by introducing programmes and courses that prepared women for housewifery in the same way there were courses that prepared women for other professions.⁷⁵ She wrote:

One period a day throughout her school years, should be sufficient to give her a thorough grounding in Cooking and Planning Meals, Household Budgets and Marketing, Child and Husband Care and Psychology, Home Nursing, Dressmaking and all the hundred and one jobs that fall into a conscientious home-maker.⁷⁶

In this way, housewifery would be seen as a profession like any other (e.g. nursing) and would see women 'enjoying' taking up this occupation as opposed to other careers.

Efforts by the state to implement compulsory domestic science for girls, however, had their own problems and it seems the state, as early as the 1940s, was reluctant or unable to enforce its implementation. In 1944, the Director of education noted that "it was difficult to force girls to learn (Domestic Science) in the face of parental preference for them to learn other sciences."⁷⁷ He also added that the equipment for Domestic Science was expensive and that "the department felt that it had gone as far as was necessary for the present".⁷⁸ Despite this challenge, pressure was mounted upon girls to take Domestic Science, especially in public schools. The idea of making domesticity a scientific undertaking to be studied in schools was

⁷⁵ Dorothy Stebbing, "The Way I see it", *You: Rhodesian Woman and Home* (December issue, 1964), p. 5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*

⁷⁷ NAZ, S824/198/2, Report on the interview with the Director of Education, 14 July 1944.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*.

intended at making housewifery relevant to, and efficient for, the rapidly modernising Rhodesian society. Jackson's observation of Domestic Science in Britain also applies to Rhodesia. She notes that domestic science advanced the "further development of ideals of domesticity and the application of new ideas about science and rationality to housework".⁷⁹ Domestic science was thus "elevating housework to a skill that any woman could be proud of".⁸⁰ In many ways, the exposure of Rhodesian girls to domestic science only served to naturalise domesticity as their destination, especially considering that this option was open only to them and not to boys.

The FWISR had a good relationship with the state in which the latter was willing to cooperate where possible by taking up resolutions made by the former. In its 1942 report, the FWISR expressed this cordial relationship, "Before concluding this report this committee would like to express their deep appreciation to the government officials for their kindness and willing co-operation on matters educational and we hope that friendly understanding may always continue between us."⁸¹ That same year, the Chief Education officer, A. Cowling, also had good things to say about his relationship with the FWISR. He wrote,

But as one who has attended almost every one of your Conferences I would take this opportunity of saying that the criticism and suggestion put forward by your Federation in regard to education have become not only more moderate but more valuable with each succeeding year, and I look forward with sincerely hopeful anticipation to the helpful collaboration of your Institutes in the many and difficult post-war problems which will face this Department.⁸²

⁷⁹ Jackson, "Towards a Historical Sociology of Housework", p. 165.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁸¹ NAZ, S824/198/2, Report of the Standing Committee for Education of the FWISR, 1942.

⁸² NAZ, S824/198/1, From A. G. Cowling, Chief Education Officer to Mrs. T. J. Needham Hon Sec FWISR, 18 September 1942.

There is nothing to suggest that such relations did not continue for the rest of the colonial period and it was through such media that women's organisations like the FWISR were able to register some influence on the socio-economic terrain of the country.

RAUW also took interest in the education system and had a committee on education which, in 1968, was headed by one experienced Mrs Pat Cooper.⁸³ This committee made "representations on many matters, such as the examination system, teacher training, multi-racial sport and conditions for residential teachers."⁸⁴ RAUW was also involved with biennial symposiums for career guidance to audiences of largely white girls. Efforts were made to include African schools but the response was disappointing. Commenting on the 1977 career guidance attended by some 1554 girls in Bulawayo, RAUW expressed disappointment at the poor response of African schools. The Newsletter reported, "It was a pity that representatives from only three of the nine African schools invited could attend."⁸⁵ Career guidance was an important exercise that helped guide the girls to make informed life decisions and was one way that would help confront the traditional notions of women's place in society. RAUW was also active in securing secondary school scholarships for girls of all races. By 1978, these scholarships were, however, largely dominated by African girls. For example, in that year the *RAUW Newsletter* reported that 54 scholarships had been given and 51 of these were handed to African girls, one to a coloured girl and the remaining two to European girls.⁸⁶

The interest of women's organisations did not end with the education of children of school-going age. Some organisations, such as the NHR, encouraged adult women to further their education sometimes through correspondence or/and through study groups made up of

⁸³ *RAUW Newsletter*, No. 2 (April 1969), p. 3.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 3.

⁸⁵ *RAUW Newsletter*, No. 20 (September 1978), p. 3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

members of the organisation. In her contribution to the June issue of the *NHR Newsletter* of 1978, Audrey Balfour described some of the activities of their NHR branch:

We have decided that we would now like to study subjects in more depth and with an end result in view in addition to our NHR activities. So far the idea is to study for an 'A' level exam subject as a group. We have obtained an Exam Syllabus, one of our member fancies studying English Literature, others are keen on Sociology and three or four of us have decided to go in for the general Studies.⁸⁷

Several members earned qualifications by this means and would sometimes take up professions. The rate at which this was happening, at times, was so great that some NHR groups had to adjust their meeting times to accommodate the women who had now taken up employment. Val Allot's short history of the NHR group at Empress Mine captures this scenario:

One member has completed a degree course, another is working on one, and several are at different stages in correspondence courses. I am about to go back to full-time teaching and for this reason am pleased that some time ago we switched to evening meetings. We now hold them fortnightly [instead of weekly], not because of lack of interest but because NHR has done us so much good we have become super-active ladies with less time available.⁸⁸

In some instances, the mandate of NHR was self-defeating. This is because the more women became involved with activities outside the home, partly as a result of the encouragement and enlightenment from their membership of NHR, the weaker the NHR group became as women became too committed elsewhere to attend group meetings. In 1978, Sheila Jones, the Local Organiser of Bulawayo, reported:

The Bulawayo NHR has experienced a complete reversal from this time last year. At the beginning of 1977 we had a flourishing morning group but were having very poor attendance at the evening meetings. Towards the

⁸⁷ Audrey Balfour, "NHR Study Groups", *NHR Newsletter* (June 1978).

⁸⁸ Val Allot, "A Short History of Empress Mine NHR", *NHR Newsletter* (December 1979).

end of the year a number of our morning members started to work (including myself) and unfortunately our number grew smaller and smaller. We haven't held a morning meeting this year but if interest is shown I would like to start it up again – hopefully with someone else taking over as L. O. [Local Organiser]. The evening group is still continuing with 15 names registered.⁸⁹

Notwithstanding these challenges, the positive impact of NHR in helping out women realise their goals through education and other means was generally acknowledged. Commenting on the impact of NHR on Rhodesian women, the Local Organiser of the Acturus/Enterprise group remarked, “NHR has provided an excellent opportunity for us to stimulate our mental resources beyond the usual housebound.”⁹⁰ Clearly, NHR was renegotiating and redefining private domesticity as a destination for women and this it did in a less confrontational but certainly transformative way.

There are several other aspects of white education that women's organisations dealt with or presented to the government. These were not always successfully taken up by the state and, in some instances; it was difficult to track down the correspondence to help build complete impressions on their outcome. However, a summary can be made of the nature of correspondence on education. These carried resolutions on issues such as the reduction of fees for boarders,⁹¹ permission to relax the 9-mile restriction in school admissions for children whose parents were transferred by work⁹² as well as resolutions on the increase of the school-leaving age from 15 to 16 years on grounds that a child at their 15th birthday “is not really emotionally, mentally or physically ready to go out into the world of adults.”⁹³ As

⁸⁹ Sheila Jones, “Profiles of Our Local Organisers”, *NHR Newsletter* (June 1978).

⁹⁰ Pamela Evans, “Acturus/Enterprise Group”, *NHR Newsletter* (December 1977).

⁹¹ NAZ, 3287/69/23, From the FWISR to the Private Secretary of the Federal Prime Minister 19 November 1961.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

shown, women's organisations' involvement in the education system of the settler society epitomised elasticity in domesticity.

b) Health

White women's organisations took special interest in the health of the white community and pressured the government to improve various aspects of this community. Even their increased interest in African health was itself born out of white women's interest in safe-guarding the health of the white community. As will be shown in chapter 4, Africans were believed to be harbours of disease and it was, therefore, believed that the best way of protecting the white community was to deal with the perceived source of disease.⁹⁴ Women's organisations also lobbied the government on the improvement of health standards for white children in schools and, at times, would take initiatives to investigate health conditions and made necessary interventions.

The health of children in the schools was one area that white women's organisations closely followed. Unfortunately because of the nature of the available documents, relatively little could be found from other organisations except the FWISR. It is possible that this organisation developed its interest in health for school children as early as its inception in 1927 or around that time. In my research, the earliest reference to this aspect was in 1936 when the Convener for Public Health, O. Gumprich, wrote (under the instruction of the FWISR) to different boarding schools, boarding houses and institutions where the young were housed. Gumprich wrote making enquiries on the health standards and practices in these institutions. This arose "out of the apprehension of a large number of mothers who have been

⁹⁴ See also Glen Ncube, "The Making of Rural Healthcare in Colonial Zimbabwe: A History of the Ndanga Medical Unit, Fort Victoria, 1930-1960s" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cape Town, 2012).

very alarmed by the Medical Directors Report on the Health of the Colony".⁹⁵ The inquiry was "purely unofficial and confidential".⁹⁶

Most institutions responded to the inquiry by the FWISR with discomfort and reluctance to divulge any information. The headmistress of Evelyn High, for example, wrote to the Director of Education, "While not having any desire to withhold the facts from the department or anyone entitled to know, I do not feel that outside organisations have any right to approach us directly for this information."⁹⁷ The headmaster of Umtali High also displayed similar reservations noting that he did not think the matter "should be discussed at a general meeting of Women's Institutes where the large majority of those present will have no experience of running a Hostel".⁹⁸ Thus sometimes the lack of cooperation from members of the white society compromised the effectiveness of women's organisations.

It is not clear if the information required by the Convener of Public Health was eventually given but the Education Director clearly indicated to the schools that he had no objections to the requests. The resistance by the institutions to have their 'dirty linen' exposed did not dissuade the FWISR. In 1946, it passed a resolution presented to the Education Director asking the government "to appoint full-time schools Medical officers in Bulawayo and Salisbury or wherever the number of school children warrants an appointment."⁹⁹ In the same year, the FWISR also passed a resolution that in the interest of stamping out "the prevalence of Bilharzia in the colony all school children should be periodically examined for

⁹⁵ NAZ, S824/198/1, From O. Gumprich, Convener of the Public Health Committee, FWISR to Gwelo, 22 July 1936.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ NAZ, S824/198/1, The Headmistress (S.L.T. Blackway) to the Director of Education, July 1936.

⁹⁸ NAZ, S824/198/1, From the High School Umtali to Assistant Director of Education, 23 September 1937.

⁹⁹ NAZ, S824/198/2, Resolutions passed at the 1946 Congress of the Federation of Women's institutes of Southern Rhodesia, 4 September 1946.

Bilharzia.”¹⁰⁰ The state, however, was not prepared for the extra cost that would be incurred by implementing these resolutions, given the unstable post-war economic environment. The FWISR and other women’s organisations continued to be watchdogs of the health of children throughout the colonial period, offering alternatives and challenging poor health standards. Their show of interest and persistent inquiry was bound to keep concerned service providers in the education sector on their toes knowing there were people keeping a close eye.

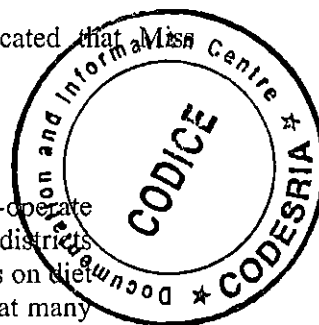
The FWISR also played an important role in educating members and non-members on issues of good health. Their significance in playing this role was recognised by the Department of Education which requested the Women’s Institutes to cooperate with them in that respect. A report by the FWISR Standing Committee of Education in 1942 indicated that Miss Williamson, the Woman Inspector of school hostels, was:

Most anxious that the Federation through its Institutes should co-operate with the Educational Department in contacting women in outlying districts and especially Afrikaner women, so that any information or lectures on diet, sanitation, child welfare etc. may be available to them. She feels that many women come to the colony and settle into groups living in isolated parts and are thus cut off from helpful information.¹⁰¹

Owing to the war, the government through its Social Hygiene Council was being overwhelmed and hence its request for assistance from the FWISR. Throughout the colonial period, the FWISR continued to take an interest in health and education matters. Vital information on diseases and healthy nutrition, among other related subjects, was disseminated to members and other women in the colony through its *Home and Country* magazine.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ NAZ, S824/198/2, Report of the Standing Committee for Education of the FWISR, 1942.



The vulnerable/disadvantaged groups

White women's organisations also took special interest in the welfare of those who were vulnerable and/or disadvantaged in white society. These included the impaired both physically and mentally, children in general, the old aged as well as women themselves. Women's organisations made resolutions on the improvement of the welfare of these classes of people as well as their protection. Again, like other issues of concern discussed, the nature of material evidence sometimes makes it difficult to trace the outcomes of resolutions on these subjects but the mere voicing of concern over these issues helps illustrate the wide range of interests that women's organisations had and, to a certain extent, demonstrate the working of the domestic ideology.

Documents from different women's organisations show the concern of white women in the welfare of the impaired/challenged (physically or mentally) within settler society. Depending on the nature of impairment, organisations made references to those they termed 'ineducable', the 'mentally retarded', 'physically handicapped', among others. The major concerns of these organisations revolved around the provision of suitable accommodation, facilities and general welfare. For example, in 1954, the WVS helped establish the St. Francis Home for the Ineducable Mentally Deficient Children, and also helped raise £1,300 from the public towards the construction of the Home.¹⁰² In the same year, the FWISR made a resolution to impress upon the Federal government on "the urgent necessity for [it] to be responsible for the further finance required for the immediate establishment for the severely retarded child who is deemed ineducable."¹⁰³ In 1956, another organisation, the NCWSR

¹⁰² NAZ, F119/D52, From the National President, Central African Women's Voluntary Services, Mrs. H. Shearer, to the Secretary to the Prime Minister, Federation of Central Africa, Salisbury, 22 September 1954.

¹⁰³ NAZ, 3287/69/23, Federation of Women's Institute of Southern Rhodesia: Resolutions passed by the 27th Annual Congress -- Umtali, 21 and 22 September, 1954.

contributed to investigations on the provision of facilities for the physically handicapped.¹⁰⁴ The establishment of homes such as Hopelands, in 1959, for the mentally-challenged owed much to pressure from different women's organisations. In 1976, RAUW passed a resolution that "the Ministry of Local Government and Housing be requested to investigate architectural barriers to the handicapped in Municipal and public buildings."¹⁰⁵ A number of concessions were made, like the establishment of disability centers for specific needs as a result of the concerted efforts from women's organisations and other pressure groups. Like elsewhere where women's organisations expressed interest, their involvement in the welfare of the handicapped was driven in part by their conviction in their roles as mothers of the colony.

White women's organisations were also instrumental in improving the welfare of the aged or at least presenting cases for improvement in the welfare of the elderly in society. Women's organisations helped establish old people's homes in the colony. The LWGC, for example, was responsible for the establishment of the Aged Women's Home (Queen Mary House), started in Bulawayo in 1922 and rebuilt in 1928 on land granted by the Bulawayo Municipality and with the help of a grant from the government.¹⁰⁶ In 1954, the FWISR passed a resolution, that "the government be approached to provide accommodation for the aged requiring nursing and medical care".¹⁰⁷ It seems nothing positive came out of the 1954 resolution and, in 1959, FWISR again pressed upon the government to look into the provision of a section, within the hospital, which was reserved for the aged, chronic and bedridden to be nursed.¹⁰⁸ The rationale for this proposal was based on the grounds that home nursing

¹⁰⁴ NAZ, F122/400/30/2, National Council of Women of Southern Rhodesia, August 1955, Report on the Resolution Concerning Sheltered Employment and Rehabilitation adopted at Conference, September 1956.

¹⁰⁵ *RAUW Newsletter*, No. 18 (July 1976), p. 10.

¹⁰⁶ Mrs. Wilkins (Hon. Secretary), "Loyal Women's Guild Council: Southern Rhodesia", p. 75.

¹⁰⁷ NAZ, 3287/69/23, Federation of Women's Institute of Southern Rhodesia: Resolutions passed by the 27th Annual Congress – Umtali, September 21, 22, 1954.

¹⁰⁸ NAZ, 3287/69/23, The FWISR to the Minister of Health 30 October 1959.

meant “extremely heavy expenditure” and also that some of the old did not have children or family to look after them.¹⁰⁹

If the government did not give satisfactory response, as they did in the case immediately above, the matter would continuously be brought to their attention. Women’s organisations were also instrumental in the establishment and improvement of the pension systems. The FWISR, in particular, was vocal on this subject. At its 1954 Annual Congress it resolved that “representation be made to government on the extreme desirability of inaugurating a contributory Old-Age pension scheme”.¹¹⁰ The government noted that it was “investigating whether any scheme for contributory pensions is practicable and in this connection the resolution of the Federation [had] been noted.”¹¹¹ The state might have been contemplating introducing the scheme anyhow, but the contribution of women’s organisations demonstrated the urgency of the matter and gave it more weight for the attention of the government. Unfortunately, I have not managed to establish how far the government became involved with the existing and new Old people’s homes or the pension schemes as a result of pressure from women’s organisations.

Women’s organisations were also involved with children’s welfare as well as statutory instruments that affected children. As early as 1908, the Loyal Women’s Guild (Later the Loyal Women’s Guild Council – LWGC) advocated the establishment of a Children’s Protection Ordinance which was adopted by the Legislative Council.¹¹² At the 1941 Congress of women’s organisations in the colony, the LWGC presented a case for the establishment of

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ NAZ, 3287/69/23, Federation of Women’s Institute of Southern Rhodesia: Resolutions passed by the 27th Annual Congress – Umtali, 21- 22 September, 1954.

¹¹¹ NAZ, 3287/69/23, The Federal Treasury to the Department of the Prime Minister and cabinet 30 October 1954.

¹¹² Legislative Council Debates, Fifth Session, Sixth Council, 1908.

a National Child Adoption Society and, after some deliberations, the congress adopted the proposal. Later such a society was established though it is not clear if it was a direct outcome of this congress.¹¹³ In 1966, the FWISR passed a resolution that the Children's Protection and Adoption Act be amended, "by reducing the age of young persons to 18 in place of 19".¹¹⁴ The rationale behind this was that other parts of the law allowed the Child to be part of the adult world, for example, driving was allowed at 16, military service at 17 and marriage for the men at 18 and for women at 16. It was noted that these stipulations assumed that an 18 year old youth was responsible and yet by law, the 19 year old youth "is protected from the results of their responsibility".¹¹⁵ In the event of committing a crime, the 19 year would not receive a heavy sentence being legally considered a child. These and several other concerns may have been part of FWISR's submissions of comments and suggestions to the proposed amendments to the Child Protection and Adoption Act in 1971.¹¹⁶

Another group that was disadvantaged was the white women themselves. Within settler society, women were secondary citizens and were discriminated against on the grounds of their sex. For example, it was only in 1919 that enfranchisement was extended to white women. Married women in particular could also not easily get access to land, mortgages, properties and different kinds of loans without the permission of their husbands. Women's organisations sought to challenge some of the inequalities as well as improve the situation of fellow white women, in part, through contesting and negotiating domesticity. Closely analysed, these endeavours expose some of the paradoxes of the domestic ideology in that sometimes the same *voluntary* organisations also helped entrench the ideology at different

¹¹³ NAZ, S824/198/1, Minutes of the Congress of Women of Southern Rhodesia under the aegis of the Federation of Women's Institutes of Southern Rhodesia, Salisbury, 30 September to 1 October 1941.

¹¹⁴ NAZ, 3287/69/23, From FWISR to the Secretary for Justice, Law and Order on Resolution on the Children Protection Act on letter, 10 October 1966.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ *RAUW Newsletter*, No. 22 (March 1979), p. 2.

levels. Most organisations were moderate/liberal in their fight to improve the women's position and status while few could be considered relatively intolerant and confrontational where matters of sexual inequalities were concerned. The internationalisation of women's organisations helped in the flow of ideas about women and their emancipation, especially from the industrialised nations, and partly explains the nature of interest that the organisations had in the plight of women. Delegates from women's organisations in Rhodesia attended several international conferences and some, like the NCWSR and FWISR, were affiliated to international organisations. From such conferences, ideas spread about women and their roles and status in society. Some of these ideas served to buttress women's domestication. The pressure presented by women's organisations plus several factors in their favour helped shape the roles and status of white women in settler society but without radically transforming the domestic ideology.

Women's organisations took interest in improving the situation of the housewife and made efforts to help make housewifery a less straining and stressful occupation. When, in the early 1950s, the government was contemplating privatising its radio broadcasting services,¹¹⁷ the FWISR joined with other stakeholders to challenge this position. FWISR was worried about the possible increase in expenses which could result in the radio services being inaccessible to the housewife. It wrote to parliament as follows, "The entertainment value of the radio – especially to many women whose work is in the home – is an important factor in promoting happiness and content with their lot."¹¹⁸ Partly, as a result of such pressures, radio broadcasting was never privatised. The NHR was originally targeted at housewives in Rhodesia and had as one of its mandates making housewifery a lively and stimulating

¹¹⁷ For a discussion of the history of broadcasting in Southern Rhodesia see Edmore Maisvoveva, "The Formative Years of Radio Broadcasting in Southern Rhodesia 1932-1957" (B. A. Honours Diss., University of Zimbabwe, Economic History Department, 2011).

¹¹⁸ NAZ, 3287/69/23, The FWISR to the Members of Parliament 17 May 1951 – Resolution on Broadcasting.

occupation. This was done by bringing together housewives in the same community to discuss matters of common interest and expose them to various interesting subjects that included science, geography, histories of the world, religion and culture, among others.

As noted in chapter one, child birth was a nightmare in colonial Zimbabwe, especially in the earlier period, when access to clinics and medical staff was limited, particularly for the more remotely stationed white women. A contributor at the FWISR 1938 congress pointed out that there was “yet a big part of the problem of rural maternity still untouched”.¹¹⁹ At this congress various suggestions were thrown into discussion including the establishment of a comprehensive maternity scheme, government making direct involvement with providing the service as well as converting sections of hospitals in outlying areas into maternity homes.¹²⁰ Some of the suggestions like the first were already underway with the assistance of private capital, particularly from the Beit Trust.¹²¹ In the 1950s the problems of maternity accommodation remained unsolved. “Expectant” mother wrote to *The Rhodesia Herald* in 1950 decriing the crisis of maternity accommodation in Salisbury, “I am Rhodesian by birth and in all my life I can only remember there being two government maternity homes, in Salisbury and Bulawayo. They are both upwards of 30 years old and crowded out all the year round; there is no accommodation at all for expectant and waiting mothers from farm and country.”¹²²

In light of these challenges for expectant mothers, women’s organisations made significant contributions beyond just lobbying government; they established their own maternity homes.

¹¹⁹ NAZ, S824/198/1, Minutes of twelfth annual congress of the Federation of Women’s Institutes of Southern Rhodesia Held at Gwelo, 5 – 6 July, 1938.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ For further details on the activities of the Beit Trust see Jasmine Magunde, “A History of the Beit Trust: 1906 – 1964”, (BA Hons. Diss. University of Zimbabwe, Economic History Department, 2013).

¹²² *The Rhodesia Herald*, 25 April 1950.

Reporting on the activities of the LWGC, Mrs Wilkins noted that its branches had “been instrumental in establishing or taking over maternity nursing homes, either in conjunction with other societies or operating on their own”.¹²³ In 1950, for example, the FWISR and the LWGC organised a public meeting to discuss a project of having a maternity home in Bulawayo.¹²⁴ Mrs. L. M. Simmons, the chairperson of the Salisbury Women’s Institute, responded to “Expectant” informing her that “a very comfortable double room” was available at the Women’s Institute branch but added that the facility was in frequent demand and “therefore bookings must be made well in advance”.¹²⁵ The fact that bookings had to be done *well in advance* demonstrates that the problem of maternity accommodation had not been solved by this facility.

The wave of family planning discourse that had been part of nineteenth century industrialised world also caught up with Southern Rhodesia in the twentieth century. Family planning helped women have control over their reproductive capacity and channel their energy outside the home, especially if they had smaller families. Thus, in a way, the contraceptive pill had a potentially liberating effect on women. The women’s organisations became involved in discussions on family planning inviting international speakers and spreading the knowledge to fellow white women. For example, the Salisbury branch of the NCWSR, at one of their meetings in 1955, invited one Miss Gates (from New York), a representative of the International Family Planning Committee who was on a world tour. In the discussion, fears of the family planning facilities being abused by African girls were raised though the same concern was not raised for the white girls. Women’s organisations also made submissions on a different but related matter of pregnancy termination to the 1976 Commission of Inquiry

¹²³ Mrs. Wilkins, “Loyal Women’s Guild Council: Southern Rhodesia”, p. 75.

¹²⁴ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 21 June 1950.

¹²⁵ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 28 April 1950.

into the termination of pregnancy.¹²⁶ Though the report of this commission of inquiry does not exactly indicate the nature of the contributions by women's organisation, there is evidence that white women would have preferred a more liberal law on abortion. Existing laws of Rhodesia criminalised abortion. The Termination of Pregnancy Act which became law on 1 January 1978 is said to have been more conservative than previous legislations.¹²⁷ Jacquie Stafford, the President of the National Organisation for Women, in a letter to *The Rhodesia Herald*, opined that the proposals made by the Commission "show nothing but contempt for the women of this country, and make me wonder at the sanity of our parliamentary representatives. The recommendations of the Commission ... were quite conservative... not going as far as many women would have liked."¹²⁸ Stafford argued that making abortion illegal, as recommended by the Commission, would not stop its being done.

Women's organisations under their conglomerate body, the NCWSR, challenged the gender inequalities embedded in Rhodesian society and requested investigation into these inequalities. The Commission of Inquiry into Disabilities of Women chaired by T. H Beadle was, therefore, constituted. Some of the areas of contention raised by women organisations included the requirement that married women get the consent of their husbands to open accounts; court decisions that were deemed unfair, maintenance orders etc. The report from this Commission of inquiry, which was presented to parliament in 1956, concluded that "there was remarkably little evidence of any actual hardship caused by such disabilities or inequalities in the law as are alleged to exist".¹²⁹ The report noted that most of the discontent

¹²⁶ Commission of Inquiry into the termination of pregnancy, 1976, [W. A. Pittman] (CMD R.R. 2 – 1976).

¹²⁷ For a brief discussion on the abortion laws and responses of the white community see Law, "Writing White Women", p. 193- 4.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Law, "Writing White Women", p. 194.

¹²⁹ Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Inequalities and Disabilities as between Men and Women, 1956 [Beadle T. H.] (CSR 22 -- 1956).

raised by women referred to hardships caused by the failure to enforce maintenance orders as opposed to any hardships caused by the inequalities in the law in general.

However, the submissions by NCWSR, for instance, were concerned about the realities on the ground which disadvantaged women and, admittedly, they may have mistakenly identified the practices as being sanctioned by law. For example, the issue of surety from husbands for married women wanting to open accounts was even acknowledged by the commission but dismissed on grounds that there was “no law which required such consent where women are married out of community of property, which is the usual form of marriage in this colony.”¹³⁰ And yet in the same paragraph the report acknowledged that they were “many cases” in which the marriages were not clear if they were within or out of community of property and in such instances, banks required the surety of the husband. Here is one example of reality versus the rhetoric of the law and the commission seemed to prefer to deal less with the reality!

The efforts by the NCWSR to have the gender inequalities addressed at national level, therefore, failed as the Commission did not recommend a radical review of existing law. In essence, the Commission was missing the point. One of its arguments was that Inequalities, whether resulting in hardships or not for women, were supposed to be addressed. Even if the law seemed innocuous, there was need to investigate further the realities on the ground and seek to address glaring inequalities which it also acknowledged. Submissions to this commission came from nine white women, four women’s organisations, the Magistrate’s office in Bulawayo, the High court in Salisbury, the Education Department, Law Society of Rhodesia and the Salisbury bar Association. Invites for submissions had been sent to at least

¹³⁰ Ibid.

36 institutions and organisations some of which were national, however, the few responses might confirm the Commission's observation that public interest "was not great".¹³¹ This 'apathy', was interpreted to mean that "not great hardship has been caused to the community as a whole".¹³² This was a fallacy. Firstly, the apathy may have had little to do with lack of public interest in the subject matter per se and more with the knowledge that given the patriarchal hegemony of Rhodesian society, any exercise to call on radical review of existing inequalities was likely to be futile. Secondly, there may have been fears of being identified as deviant to social norms by subscribing to this radical review. This is perhaps why six of the nine women who made their submissions chose to be anonymous. One would also have expected a Commission such as the one under discussion to be headed and directed by women, particularly from the women's organisations of the country, so as to genuinely represent and investigate the inequalities identified by women.

When it came to challenging the existing inequalities between men and women in colonial society, RAUW was one of the most vocal and least conservative of the women's organisations. In 1976, the president of RAUW, Helen Hyslop, in her valedictory address lamented the discrimination against women in Rhodesian society, in particular, and the world at large, and located the problem in the attitude of both men and women towards women's emancipation. She noted, "we therefore wage war on two fronts: the first engagement is to put an end to male tyranny; the second, to maintain the great record of female achievement."¹³³ For the Rhodesian women, their problem was that they were comfortable:

There is a remarkable unwillingness by some women to trade the familiarity of the status quo for the uncertainties and responsibilities that greater freedom brings. Perhaps this feeling is uniquely a part of a country

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ *RAUW Newsletter*, No. 18 (July 1976), p. 6.

where we are generally comfortable, a country where we, too, often take our freedom for granted.¹³⁴

Helen's solution was to have a revolution just as had happened elsewhere in the worlds where women confronted gender injustice though she would prefer it to occur "on a basis more consistent with the need for conciliation than confrontation."¹³⁵ In her concluding remarks, she appealed to women's domesticity, "we are mothers of the human race, its nurses, its guardians and, it is no mere empty boast, its procreator. But this should not imbue us with arrogance."¹³⁶ Her perspective echoed that of domestic feminists who argued that women's domesticity was precisely what justified their need to be drivers of the destiny of humanity in the public sphere.

In summary, Helen's position and that of RAUW in general can be interpreted as subscribing to some kind of liberal feminism. The approach adopted by the organisation could be as a result of the nature of its membership and the class of people it represented. RAUW represented professional and educated women who had defied private domesticity and probably had been more enlightened by their education usually obtained outside the country. Their wider exposure to the western world through travel and education also exposed them to western feminist ideas. By the 1970s, ideas about women's emancipation had spread as a result of interactions with the industrialised world and RAUW's exposure to these ideas also had an impact on the organisation's ideology. It is difficult to state with certitude that Helen's perceptions represented those of RAUW as an organisation but they clearly were not very far from its ideology. The language she used and ideas she postulated were usually shared at their Annual General Meetings and other forums organised by RAUW.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid. p. 9.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

The efforts of women's organisations at improving the plight of white women did achieve some results. For example, demands by various women's organisations for women to be on Statutory Boards; attend Magistrate's Courts and sit in all tribunals where cases involving the welfare of women and children were being heard and other participations were also taken into account by the government.¹³⁷ In the 1970s, RAUW asked the government to allow for the creation of a Woman's Advisory Board, and a Steering Committee made up of women was created to look into this issue. After consultations, the Committee changed their demands for an Advisory Board to that for a Department for Women Affairs to which the Ministry of Justice was agreeable.¹³⁸

However, deliberations taking place between the state and women groups did not erode the existing gender inequalities. As noted in Chapter Two, one of the most debated issues of inequality was that of equal pay for equal work between men and women. This issue was raised by white women as early as 1941 at the congress of women of Southern Rhodesia (held under the aegis of the FWISR) where it was indicated that equal pay for equal work had already been adopted in UK and was the ideal route to take as it "would serve to raise efficiency standard among both sexes."¹³⁹ However, as late as 1979 the *RAUW Newsletter* was expressing disappointment at the lack of progress in this front, "In the Civil Service there has been almost no improvement with a little more being achieved in the public sector, but on the whole, women of all races are still being discriminated against both in basic remuneration and opportunities."¹⁴⁰ The demands for equality by women had reached their peak in the Europe with the escalation of the Women's Liberation movement in the 1960's and 1970s and the pressure from women's organisations was part of a broader international movement

¹³⁷ Ibid. p. 2.

¹³⁸ *RAUW Newsletter*, No. 22 (March 1979), p. 8.

¹³⁹ NAZ, S824/198/1, Minutes of the Congress of women of Southern Rhodesia under the aegis of the Federation of Women's Institutes of Southern Rhodesia, Salisbury, 30 September to 1 October 1941.

¹⁴⁰ *RAUW Newsletter*, No. 22 (March 1979).

that challenged women's subordination and the everyday gender inequalities in society. It is noteworthy that white women's organisations generally did not include African women in their pursuit of this equality.

Women as custodians of "moral virtue"

The domestic ideology placed a high value on purity for women and, by extension, high moral conduct.¹⁴¹ As noted in the introductory chapter, the private domain which was associated with domesticity was perceived as an embodiment of moral virtues while the public represented the immoral and chaotic. Thus women (as opposed to men), who were expected to occupy this private domain, were perceived as moral custodians. In the colonial setting, the expectations upon white women to champion high moral standards were even greater as they were expected to play a crucial role in the preservation and extension of western civilisation. Referring to the pioneer women of Southern Rhodesia, Philippa Berlyn writes, "It was these women ... who provided the climate in which men could build and develop Rhodesia, from the wild bush into civilisation. A woman has many functions in a pioneering country. The maintaining of standards is one of them."¹⁴²

It is within the above context that women's organisations in Southern Rhodesia took it upon themselves to be moral watch dogs for the Rhodesian society in the twentieth century. The issues that qualified as moral concerns varied within Rhodesian society and included interracial sex, prostitution, leading promiscuous life styles, and drunkenness for women, amongst others. This section, however, makes reference to morality in relationship to sexuality and narrows to two areas in which white women's organisations sought to

¹⁴¹ See the conceptualisation of domesticity in the introduction.

¹⁴² Philippa Berlyn, "... of Women Who Left Their mark". *Heritage of Zimbabwe*, No. 22 (2008) p. 123.

champion the moral cause. The first area is in interracial sex and the second regards controlling or keeping in check the sexuality of Africans. White women's organisations felt compelled to protect the white women from African men's perceived wild sexual appetites.¹⁴³ Undoubtedly, linked to all this moral custodianship was the belief in upholding the sanctity and respectability of white women.

White women's organisations continuously advised their members on high moral standards ostensibly to protect them from Africans. An advice to the Europeans, originally published for settlers in Kenya, was reproduced in FWISR's *Rhodesia, Home and Country* and white women were reminded of "proper" dressing before their domestic servants, "An European woman who allows her native 'boys' to see her insufficiently clothed is not only endangering herself, but all the white women of the country, where the respect for, and the prestige of, white women are of first importance [sic]."¹⁴⁴ The manner in which the white woman presented herself was important when it came to keeping in check the perceived wild sexual appetites of Africans. On this note, the advice to European women was:

Women of any age cannot be *too* careful in the presence of male native servants. That the native has a black skin is no reason for his being impervious to sex; in fact, belonging to a crudely uncivilised race, as the average native servant does, the primitive instinct of sex is such paramount interest that more care is necessary in dealing with him than with a member of a civilised race.¹⁴⁵

Women's organisations were critical of anything that could possibly arouse the so called "primitive instinct of sex"¹⁴⁶ within Africans which would in turn endanger the white

¹⁴³ In Chapter Four, I discuss in greater detail the sexual encounters between white women and black men.

¹⁴⁴ *Rhodesia, Home and Country*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (July 1936), p. 43.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Note that these perceived primitive or wild sexual instincts were seen as examples of unaccepted moral conducts.

women.¹⁴⁷ For example, in 1937, an emergency resolution was proposed by the Fort Victoria institute and seconded by Salisbury branch that:

Business firms be approached with a view to their discontinuing the exhibit in their shop windows Semi-nude dummy figures of white women displaying their intimate undergarments. It is felt that where there are a native people not fully civilised such displays are undesirable and detrimental to the prestige of the white woman.¹⁴⁸

Two points can be made from this resolution. First, the undesirability of the semi-nude dummies was in its perceived potential to trigger 'aggressive' sexual instincts in Africans that could lead to black peril cases. Secondly, the dignity and prestige of white women was at stake. Echoing a similar observation regarding white women's bodies, Oliver Philips notes that, "for a black man to gaze upon the sexual anatomy of a white woman or even the body of a white woman in a naturalist or intimate setting was seen to reverse the ordained positioning of subject-objectification because it implicitly objectified white women, allowing and reinforcing the subjectivity of black men".¹⁴⁹

White women's organisations also made contributions to debates on the subject matter of interracial sex. First, they supported the existing regulations against white women having intimate relations with African men. However, they also protested against the exclusion of white men in the existing legislation that governed these sexual relations. For example, the Rhodesian Women's League (RWL), in 1925 passed a resolution on the "equalisation of the 1916 Ordinance No. 1, whereby white men as well as white women who are guilty of miscegenation, shall be penalised."¹⁵⁰ Giving evidence in 1932 to the Departmental Committee on African female domestic service, the Vice Chairwoman to the RWL, Mrs.

¹⁴⁷ See Chapter One for an analysis of these sexual fears dubbed the black peril.

¹⁴⁸ *Rhodesia, Home and Country*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (July 1937), p. 39.

¹⁴⁹ Phillips, "The 'Perils' of Sex and the Panics of Race", p. 104.

¹⁵⁰ NAZ, S480/123, Rhodesia Women's League Resolution Concerning the Black Peril 1925, The Rhodesian Women's League to Hon H. O. Moffat, Minister of Mines and Works (n.d.)

McKeurtan, echoed similar demands for “equal moral laws for both men and women.”¹⁵¹ Pape makes an analysis of these responses by white women and demonstrates the frustrations and disappointment that they expressed campaigning for an amendment of the existing law.¹⁵² As Schmidt observes, “As guardians of western civilisation and its moral code, European women had a political as well as personal stake in discouraging sexual relationships between the European men and African women.”¹⁵³ The sexual relations were a threat to the foundation of colonial domination and “reduced European dignity, tarnishing the façade of European supremacy.”¹⁵⁴

Women’s organisations also based their arguments for the regulation of interracial sex between white men and African women on the need to protect the latter from the former. To this, the Superintendent of the CID responded by arguing that existing legislation already protected African women and that:

It is not evidenced that this form of immorality is on the increase, a condition which may be probably due to propoganda, social influence and civilisation. For the reason that legislation exists dealing with the crimes enumerated above and in my opinion with the penalisation of permissible and voluntary acts of sexual intercourse between European males and native females in Southern Rhodesia, if affected, would be difficult to enforce and largely abortive in effect, particularly having regard to the conditions in this Colony which differ entirely to those obtaining in the Northern territories of Australia where such legislation is in force.¹⁵⁵

According to the CID report, after two hours of discussion with the RWL, the latter claimed that “they fully understood the situation and that the legislation as now desired would not be

¹⁵¹ NAZ, S1561/48, Native Female Domestic Labour 1930 – 1932, Departmental Committee on natives Female Service, Evidence of Mrs McKeurtan, Vice Chairperson of the Rhodesian Women’s League, Bulawayo, 30 August 1932.

¹⁵² Pape, “Black and White”, pp. 714 – 716.

¹⁵³ Schmidt, *Peasants, Traders, and Wives*, p. 175.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ NAZ, S1227/3, Immorality Policy Reports 1917-1944, Extract from the report by Chief Supt. CID, 29 July 1925.

asked for.”¹⁵⁶ Clearly, this understanding was only temporary because as Pape shows, in 1927, the same organisation teamed up with the FWISR and the Women's Christian Temperance Union to petition, once again, the Legislative Assembly in the following words, “We therefore pray that laws should be framed to protect both white and Native women in Southern Rhodesia, and while the severest punishment should continue to be inflicted upon the native, commensurate punishment should most certainly be meted out to the white man for immorality with Native women.”¹⁵⁷

The spread of pornography and any such related material was also a concern of white women's organisations as it was believed to represent or encourage moral decadence. The advice to European women that I have cited above also made reference to this matter arguing that “Pictures of nude European women, which too frequently appear in illustrated papers are also another source of danger, and should not be carelessly thrown away to the natives.”¹⁵⁸ On a similar concern, the Rhodesia Association of University Women (RAUW), in 1969, resolved that “Action be taken by IFUW [international Federation of University Women's Association] on pornographic, perverted and sensational literature which has a demoralising effect on society (Material from Censorship Board, Declaration of Human Rights and memorandum to be used in Support).”¹⁵⁹ The concern of RAUW went beyond the perceived danger to Africans but to society as a whole.

Exporting private domesticity into the public domain

Women's organisations used their collective voice to also bring matters of the private sphere to the public space and this confirms the elasticity of domesticity. As Deborah Gaitskell

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ NAZ, S 1227, quoted in Pape, “Black and White”.

¹⁵⁸ *Rhodesia, Home and Country*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (July 1936), p. 43.

¹⁵⁹ *RAUW Newsletter*, No. 2 (April 1969).

states, "Voluntary work ... offered mid-way visibility bridging the gap between the private domestic sphere and public life."¹⁶⁰ They were concerned with the economics of the home and highlighted the perceived anomalies which they brought to the public's attention either by debating the issues at their congresses or by forwarding resolutions to relevant government ministries. Their areas of interest involved prices of basic commodities consumed in the home such as meat and milk. White women's organisations sought to cushion the white wives from exorbitant prices that made life in the kitchen and home difficult. Women's organisations were also concerned with the quality of consumable products. The WVS, in particular, had a unique activity which, in a different way, also brought to public an otherwise private matter. It was involved with debt-troubled families and it assisted with their budgeting in order to meet their debts as well and still be able to survive. Given the nature and extent of women's participation in the public sphere based on their normative gender roles in the private sphere, one would concur with scholars that challenge the public/private dichotomy. Indeed, this dichotomy underplays the involvement of women outside the home and fails to appreciate the ability of the domestic ideology to oscillate between the private and public domains.

The cost and quality of food was always of interest to women's organisations. The Salisbury Branch of the NCWSR, for example, passed resolutions, in 1957, to the following effect: that the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce Industry re-introduces "a) the control of Beef prices in regard to retail grade or b) to allow the Cold Storage Commission to open retail butchers' shops, selling clearly marked graded meat at prices giving them a fair profit."¹⁶¹ Since the CSC sold meat at wholesale prices, it was hoped its retail shops would provide

¹⁶⁰ Deborah Gaitskell, "From 'Women and Imperialism' to Gendering Colonialism", *South African Historical Journal* Vol. 39, No. 1 (1998), p. 186.

¹⁶¹ NAZ, F122/400/30/2, National Council of Southern Rhodesia, August 1955, NCWSR Salisbury Branch - Minutes of Meeting Held at the W.I club, 30 August 1957.

fairer prices. By 1980, CSC had adopted this resolution probably more out of economic logic than as a direct result of this resolution. In 1961, women's organisations took the Minister of Agriculture, to task demanding an explanation for the increase of meat prices by 1d. per 1b and suggested that investigations be carried out.¹⁶² In the same meeting, the Salisbury branch also passed a resolution "that the government be approached with the request that the rising cost of living be fully investigated by the government as the matter is urgent and serious."¹⁶³ Besides pressure on the government, women's organisations also encouraged "their members to shop selectively and to avoid excessively priced goods and foodstuffs"¹⁶⁴ as some kind of resistance to the exorbitant prices which were escalating the cost of living.

Women's organisations also requested the inclusion of women in statutory boards such as the Grain Marketing Board (GMB). The appointment of Muriel Rosin, for instance, as the Consumer's representative to the GMB, in 1950, was a result of pressure from women's organisations such as the FWISR. Women's organisations, including the FWISR, WVS, NHR and the B &PW, were also represented on the Consumer Producer Council. While these appointments demonstrate a process where the issues of domestic interest were being forwarded to national and, therefore, public platforms, this did not necessarily translate into effective advancement of the interests of women. A representative of the NHR on the Consumer Producer Council commented in 1975 on her experience, "I have now attended two meetings and find the waffle-work ratio rather high, but with hopes of more practical work being done in the future."¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² NAZ, F119/D52, Presidential Report for the Year Ended, 30 September 1961.

¹⁶³ NAZ, F122/400/30/2, NCWSR Salisbury Branch - Minutes of Meeting Held at the W.I club, 30 August 1957.

¹⁶⁴ NAZ, 3287/69/23, Resolutions by the 29th Annual Congress, Redcliff, 2 - 3 July, 1956.

¹⁶⁵ Audrey Balfour, "Consumer Producer Council", *NHR Newsletter*, June 1975.

As noted, the WVS also conducted a unique exercise bent on improving the welfare of bad debtors. The management of one's budget is usually a personal and/or domestic matter. However, in the case of bad debtors, WVS volunteered to look into individual cases and help rehabilitate the debtors as well as help in managing the repayment of debts. A description of this activity, worth quoting at length, was captured in a letter written in 1957 from the Secretary for Home Affairs to the Federal Treasury in which grounds for a government grant for WVS were being presented:

The organisation [WVS] has undertaken a task which has grown to dimensions of distributing monies to creditors on behalf of debtors. Apparently this started on a small way, but now Attorneys refer debtors to the organisation, as they know that the affair will be competently handled and without cost to the debtors. I understand that debtors place their affairs under the control of the organisation, which then becomes responsible for the maintenance of the family. After paying for this from these salaries the organisation distributes the balance of the money to the creditors. The debtor does not handle any money himself but his affairs are handled quite independently of him by the organisation. This is a Public Service to the community. Not only do the debtors keep themselves out of court but the welfare and security of their families are assured through the arrangement made. I am given to understand that many families have been protected through this Public Service.¹⁶⁶

As the letter acknowledges, this activity served the residual function of "relief of destitution"¹⁶⁷ which would help in alleviating or preventing the poor white problem.¹⁶⁸ Unfortunately, the grant that was being requested was turned down at both Territorial and Federal levels.

¹⁶⁶ NAZ, F119/D52, The Secretary for Home Affairs to the Secretary to the Federal Treasury, 12 February 1957.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ The poor white problem was a phenomenon largely experienced in South Africa where whites largely of the Afrikaner stock constitute a very poor class and their livelihood punctured the myth of racial superiority. This phenomenon always haunted settler societies like Southern Rhodesia and Kenya and measures were put in place, including immigration laws, to make sure that the 'undesirables' were kept away from the colonies or covered up if they were already in the colonies. See William Jackson, "Poor Men and Loose Women: Colonial Kenya's Other Whites" (PhD Diss., The University of Leeds, 2010).

Conclusion

The chapter has examined the role played by white women's organisations within settler society. It has noted that the membership and the organisation of the majority of these women's organisations were voluntary which also mirrored the unpaid contributions that women made on the home front. It has also analysed the nature of intervention that the organisations made within settler society as well as the resolutions they made at their conferences. By and large, this analysis conjures up an image of an elastic domesticity. White women were perceived as 'mothers of empire' and their organisations were, to a greater extent, attempting to fulfil this role in their activities. On the whole, most white women's organisations did not seek to confront Rhodesian patriarchy or radically transform the domestic ideal and, in many ways, can be likened to domestic feminists which I discussed in the introductory chapter. Their contributions were, nonetheless, transformative in some respects. However, some organisations like RAUW and B & PW were more confrontational and less conservative in confronting the gender inequalities in settler society.

CHAPTER FOUR

ENCOUNTER WITH AFRICANS, 1920s – 1980

Introduction

This chapter examines varied relations, activities and perceptions between white women and Africans from the 1920s to 1980. As discussed in previous chapters, domestic spaces and domesticity shaped these relationships. The domestic space also provides useful evidence of the nature of these relations between white women and Africans. The chapter has five sections. The first explores white women's interest in the welfare of Africans. The second section examines white women's involvement in social amenities such as health and education for Africans. The third section explores the nature of relations that white women had with Africans in domestic spaces on the farms and in the urban areas. The fourth section discusses the involvement of white women with the Homecraft movement. The final section reviews white women's political involvement and comments on what some have described as 'liberal' women.

Contextualising white women's interaction with Africans

White settler women were expected to play a significant role in the 'civilising' of the colonised, as being part of a bigger project of *domesticating* the empire.¹ As Oliver Phillips notes, "At a more symbolical level, white women, far more than men, were perceived as the embodiment of civilisation."² As already established, the women were also perceived as *mothers* of the empire and, therefore, were expected to put the 'colonial house' in order. This

¹ For an interpretation of the 'civilising mission' as domestication of empire, see McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 35.

² Phillips, "The 'Perils' of Sex and the Panics of Race", p. 107.

also involved giving 'guidance' to Africans who were seen as children. To a greater extent, women's interaction with, and deliberations on, Africans demonstrate the working of the domestic ideology in Rhodesia. The women were themselves "steeped in Victorian notions of domesticity and wifely propriety."³ The interactions and deliberations were also shaped by the dominant racial ideology. Thus, in the words of Schmidt, "the exact configuration of domesticity was necessarily shaped by race and class positions."⁴

The nature of white women's interaction with Africans as well as their attitudes towards, and perceptions of, these Africans varied and were dynamic. These included simply being aloof, being blatantly racist, feeling 'genuine' sympathy or being paternalistic and could change within individuals or women's organisation. Dampier's observation in the South African context is equally true of Rhodesia that "settler reactions to and representations of Africans were integral to the construction of their own identity".⁵ The racial perceptions and attitudes undoubtedly influenced the nature of white women's interactions with Africans. These perceptions and attitudes were ever changing and were influenced by different factors. In her research of pre-1939 settler society, Vassilatos concludes that there was one perspective that whites had of Africans "around which most others were clustered" and "this image was that Africans were seen to fit into the settler primarily as Labourers."⁶ She concludes this by analysing *The Rhodesia Herald* newspaper particularly the letters to the editor. Vassilatos does acknowledge that perspectives on Africans' sexuality also did exist but were not part of this category of labour.

³ Ranchod-Nilsson, "Educating Eve", p. 201.

⁴ Schmidt, "Race, Sex, and Domestic Labor", p. 222.

⁵ Dampier, "Settler Women's Experiences of Fear", p. 96.

⁶ Enetia Vassilatos, "Race and Class: The Development and Influence of White Images in Southern Rhodesia, 1890 -- 1939" (Ph. D. Thesis, Faculty of Arts, University of Rhodesia, 1977), p. ii.

The chapter, however, expands the scope of the images of Africans that the whites had and how these changed over time. It problematises Vassilatos' homogenisation of Africans and perceptions that the whites had of these Africans. The chapter shows that the views that whites held about African men were different to those they had of African women. Even within the white community, men and women, organisations and individuals perceived Africans in different and changing ways. By 1939, for example, the FWISR was already lobbying, within its membership, for white women to become involved with homecrafts for African women showing that African women were less seen as sources of labour but agents of rural transformation, among other things. The missionaries also had a different perception of African women beyond that of being labourers.⁷

The white women who were aloof simply did not have anything to do with Africans, at least directly. Maia Chenux-Repond, who was later involved heavily with African affairs in the Department of Community Development, remembered how she had never interacted with Africans in the initial years of her settlement in Rhodesia. She recalled:

When I came [in 1957] I was actually surprised and quite disappointed because I ended up in a suburban little cottage in Greendale and I never met any Africans because of the Land Apportionment Act which had divided us so neatly. So it took me quite a few years to actually establish a genuine contact apart from the vegetable seller who came on his bicycle to sell me vegetables. I didn't even have domestic workers at the time.⁸

Referring to some of the Rhodesian women in the colonial era, Irene Staunton, who was born in Rhodesia and lived there for part of her life, echoed a similar observation, that some of these white women, "did not have any black friends, did not go into the communal areas, and saw black people as 'the other', a phrase that could, I think, be interpreted in a variety of

⁷ See Schmidt, *Peasants, Traders, and Wives*.

⁸ Personal Interview with Maia Chenux-Repond, Harare, 24 June 2011.

different ways”.⁹ Thus, it must not be assumed that every white woman interacted with blacks on a daily basis as there were some who, either by choice or circumstances beyond them, were not involved with Africans. However, such situations were the exception rather than the rule and in some instances were just temporary.

For those who chose to concern themselves with the welfare of Africans, the dominant racial ideology at times shaped the attitudes and perceptions that modelled these interactions.¹⁰

Writing on the subject of the ‘Native Question’ in the 1940s, Mrs. Catherine Langham, herself a Rhodesian, summarised the nature of prevalent racist attitudes:

There are those who habitually speak of and to the African as if he were something rather less than human. Even amongst the many who treat their African employees with kindness and consideration there is the feeling that the Africans are, of course inferior and not capable of the same thoughts and feelings as ourselves. I have seen some white children speak to their domestic servants in a way I would not allow my dogs to be spoken to.... Many of us have got into the habit of thinking of Africans as inferior beings, people who cannot rise, who should always be hewers of wood and drawers of water. People who should be forced to labour for the white man’s good.¹¹

Catherine Langham, an English missionary (sometimes referred to as a former missionary in other sources), was one of the pioneering women in the Homecraft movement in Rhodesia which began with the establishment of what became known as the M’soneddi (Langham) Homecraft Village in 1943. Subsequently, different missions and women’s organisations followed this example and established Homecraft education throughout the country. Reflecting on her Rhodesian experiences after the 1960s, Irene Staunton also confirmed Langham’s observation noting that “many of them (white women) were racist is also certain.

⁹ Autobiographical note by Irene Staunton sent by email as attachment <weaver@mango.zw> (4 April 2012).

¹⁰ The report of the Commission of Inquiry into Racial Discrimination in 1976 showed that racism was ubiquitous in Rhodesian society and reflected a determination to maintain the status quo on the part of the state and most whites.

¹¹ Langham, “The Native Question”, p. 13.

They knew no better.”¹² Even as members of organisations, white women passed resolutions to maintain segregation believing it to be, “the only means of safe guarding our women and children”.¹³ As will be shown in this chapter, the dominant racial ideology also helped to configure how domesticity would be deployed.

The following case illustrates the racist attitude that Langham alludes to above and demonstrates how racial ideology shaped the direction and manner in which domesticity was played out. An ‘indignant mother’, as she called herself, in 1950 wrote to *The Rhodesia Herald* in 1950 complaining about the sale of milk to Africans, given the milk demand and shortages:

The first steps to improve the milk supply for European children and babies should be to stop the supply to the many Native tea stalls, to sell coupons to Europeans only, and refuse all cash sales to natives. It has made me furious to see crowds of husky, well fed loafers drinking 1d. cups of tea round a Native stall when I had friends and neighbours who could not get milk for their children under school age.... Even the pro-native government in England could not object to white children being supplied in preference to native males.”¹⁴

As women were considered responsible for feeding the family, they ‘naturally’ took an interest in issues such as the availability of milk. Thus, this subject matter fell into the domestic terrain. However, perceptions around this matter were, in the above case, informed by the prevailing racial ideology. Admittedly, the proposed segregationist solution to milk shortages was not held by all women. One white woman indicated that the proposed solution was unjust and selfish, “I feel that we shall pay dearly for this injustice and selfish attitude towards the African. Some people seem to have lost sense of proportion As a mother, and

¹² Autobiographical note by Irene Staunton sent by email as attachment <weaver@mango.zw> (4 April 2012).

¹³ NAZ, S246/59, The president of the Rhodesian Council of Women to the Hon. Minister of Internal Affairs, Salisbury, 19 February 1934.

¹⁴ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 12 June 1950.

a Rhodesian of 16 years standing, I say let us have rationing so that all, including Africans, may have tea.”¹⁵

If Langham, quoted earlier, was not blatantly racist in her attitude and relations with Africans, she certainly had a maternalistic view of how the white community, and white women in particular, were to relate to Africans. She wrote, “I would...put a plea to the women of our institutes that they would learn to know the African better and, so knowing, would realise that they are but children and as such need guidance, training and sympathetic thought.”¹⁶ In the same piece, Langham wrote, “Our judgements might be more kind did we remember that the Africans are at present a child race, passing through the trying phase of adolescence.”¹⁷ The perception of Africans as children was held by the general settler society. At the fourth session of the Legislative Council Debates, in 1907, a motion was presented that “Africans were only at the best of times children, and they must be dealt with as children.”¹⁸ Thus in the grand scheme of things, white women, as *mothers* of the empire, had a responsibility to oversee the welfare of these ‘children’. It is such representations of Africans that legitimised white women’s maternalistic relations with Africans.

Many white women believed that a maternalistic relationship was the best to have with Africans and, in fact, Africans not only sought their patronage but also stood to benefit from it. Making reference to her domestic servants, Miriam Staunton¹⁹ expressed her conviction on this point. She wrote:

¹⁵ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 21 June 1950.

¹⁶ Langham, “The Native Question”, p. 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Legislative Council Debates, Fourth Session, Third Council, 18 December 1907, p. 15.

¹⁹ Miriam Staunton (Irene Staunton’s Mother) is one of the first white women to actively participate and initiate the African Women’s Clubs. Miriam Staunton wrote almost weekly letters to her brother Clement and her parents and these were dated from 1954 to 1970. These letters, which are housed at the Rhodes House in Oxford, offer a rare opportunity to appreciate the social, economic and political terrain of S. Rhodesia through the eyes of Miriam.

I've realised before quite how much the ordinary simple African depends upon us. (Rita gives me her post-office book to look after – she doesn't give it to her own relatives). Thomas looks to us for *Muti*'s [medication] and loans and all the rest and so does Old Mateya.²⁰

What Miriam did not realise was that this 'dependency' had been engineered by the colonial system, and in particular, the social and economic exigencies that came with this system. The Africans' 'dependency' on her and other Europeans was merely one of several mechanisms they adopted to negotiate the various pressures and demands placed upon them by the colonial system.

It would be unfair to perceive white women's interest in Africans' welfare as having *always* been clothed in patronage or in blatantly racist and maternalist overtones. There are reasons to believe that, in several instances, white women's organisations and individuals did demonstrate what could be interpreted as a genuine interest in, and sympathy with, the plight of Africans. The difficulty in determining whether individuals or women's organisations were racist, genuinely sympathetic or simply patronising in their relations with Africans lies in the fact that attitudes and policies changed over time and space, or depending on the subject matter. This meant that white women could practise "benevolent sisterhood",²¹ as Kaler calls it, in Homecraft clubs for example, but might have a different relationship with their servants, or a different view of Africans in general in other circles. Although such nuances are difficult to capture in history, the possibility of the existence of such complex relationships cannot be dismissed.

²⁰ RHL MSS AFR. S. 2398, To Mrs. Cheales (Mother), 10 March 1959. Rita, Thomas and Old Mateya were all Africans she interacted with. Old Mateya was one of her domestic workers but I could not establish her relations with the other two.

²¹ Kaler, "Visions of Domesticity", p. 278.

The case of Miriam Staunton is a rare but apt example of the dynamics and changing attitudes of white women towards Africans. Her letters to her brother and parents in the United Kingdom demonstrate these attitudes towards different classes of Africans. At times she exhibited extreme prejudice against Africans, while in some of her writings she was liberal in her perceptions of them. For example, in February, 1958, she wrote, “the African in his primitive state is so horridly over-sexed”²² and commended efforts to train African Catholic priests and nuns. In March of the same year, she described her new domestic servant as a “raw damsel” and lamented, “I don’t think the poor creatures know what they do want; they have no standards or values and they live quite irresponsibly for the moment.”²³ In November 1961, she displayed a change of attitude and relations with Africans, especially the women. She wrote, “Certainly I have the dear black sisters popping in to see me all hours, which I would not have thought of 4 years ago. I am really fond of many of them as people.”²⁴ Miriam, however, held different perceptions of other Africans. In 1963, for example, she expressed fears of the British handing over the government to “half savages”²⁵ and throughout her correspondence she expressed disdain towards African nationalists whom she described, at one point, as “truly evil, quite as evil as Hitler”.²⁶ Staunton thus exhibits some of the complex and changing attitudes that white women maintained towards different groups of Africans and these attitudes cannot be simply dismissed as blatantly racist or maternalistic.

White Women and African Welfare: Social Amenities

As already noted, white women’s involvement with Africans was consistent with what was expected of them as mothers of empire. “In Africa”, read a 1938 article in *Home and Country*

²² Rhodes House Library (RHL) MSS AFR. S. 2398, To J. D. Cheales (Father), 17 February 1958.

²³ RHL MSS AFR. S. 2398, To Mrs. Cheales, 24 March 1958.

²⁴ RHL MSS AFR. S. 2398, To Mrs. Cheales, 13 Nov (ny.).

²⁵ RHL MSS AFR. S. 2398, To Mrs. Cheales, 5 March 1963.

²⁶ RHL MSS AFR. S. 2398, To Mrs. Cheales, 17 March 1966. It is possible that this remark may have been triggered by some acts of violence that may have been committed by African nationalists. Around this time nationalists were adopting more radical and confrontational measures towards the colonial regime.

magazine, “European women have a responsibility to the white race as a whole, as well as to the African natives themselves.”²⁷ As more white women entered the colony from 1900, their interaction with Africans also increased. Thus some white women, sometimes in their individual capacities and, at times, as part of larger organisations such as church missions and women’s organisations, became involved in activities relating to African welfare, providing Africans with different material needs or at least identifying their areas of lack such as in health, shelter and education.

Until the 1930s, the Rhodesian government had shown little interest in the health of Africans, especially outside the towns. When the state developed increased interest in African health, its efforts did not sufficiently address this issue of African health.²⁸ In an attempt to fill the gap, different women’s organisations became increasingly involved in programmes and projects aimed at improving Africans’ health, especially after 1930. The obsession that white women had with African health is reminiscent of what Maynard Swanson terms the sanitation syndrome in South Africa, where colonial authorities became engrossed in removing Africans from the urban environments, since it was believed that they were the source of diseases.²⁹ Several other factors triggered white women’s interest in the health of Africans, over and above the belief in their mandate over the welfare of Africans. The involvement of white women in African health and education can be appreciated in the context of the following

²⁷ “Advice to European Women” (Reprinted with acknowledgement to the East Africa Woman’s League), *Home and Country*, Vol. 1. No. 3 (1938), p. 43.

²⁸ See Glen Ncube, “The Making of Rural Healthcare in Colonial Zimbabwe”; G. Ncube, “‘The Problem of the Health of the Native’: Colonial Rule and the Rural African Healthcare Question in Zimbabwe, 1890s–1930”, *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (2012), pp. 807–826. In these works, Ncube notes that the colonial state had little interest in the health of Africans before 1930, which explains its lack of commitment to the construction of rural hospitals, except for Ndanga and Belingwe hospitals in 1912, with the latter not lasting beyond 1914. It was only after 1930, he argues, that the state took a dramatic shift and took an unprecedented interest in African health.

²⁹ Maynard W. Swanson, “The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900 – 1909”, *Journal of African History*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1977). For a discussion of the obsession of colonial state and society with African hygiene in Southern Rhodesia, see Timothy Burke, *Lifeline Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996).

remark by the Chairperson of the FWISR on the perceived high incidence of disease among Africans:

Surely self-interest, if no higher motive, should make us fight this 'overwhelming incidence of disease!' How can we hope for ourselves and our children if our foodstuffs and clothes are handled by the diseased? Members of the Federation [FWISR] have frequently urged that native women employed in domestic service should be medically examined, but we have been informed that this was almost impossible.³⁰

Blanche Gordon, one of the founder members of the National Council of Women of Southern Rhodesia (NCWSR), also made a similar remark in the 1950s, which betrayed the self-serving motive behind much of white women's interests in the health of Africans:

Perhaps the most important field of work to Rhodesians today is that of the African life, health and education. The African people number roughly 30 to 1 compared with the European population. It will, therefore, be readily realised what an enormous influence African health has on European health, and what a heavy drag their lack of education and mental development can have on the growth and progress of this country. Add to this the fact that their civilisation is entirely different from our own, and by whatever standards you assess it, far behind our own.³¹

Thus the 'benevolence' shown by some white women to Africans was often rationally calculated, a cost-benefit analysis in which settler society saw that they had more to gain from a healthy African population than from one which was diseased.

Indeed, especially in the pre-Federation period, correspondence on and discussions about the health of Africans are closely intertwined with the health of the European family, which was a priority for the colony's white population. Africans were seen as sources of diseases that could potentially be transmitted to the European family. A resolution made at the 1939 FWISR Annual Congress read, "The native being the reservoir of infections, tropical

³⁰ W. I. Notes, "Comment on Some Current and Important Subjects", *Vuka*, Vol. 1, No. 11 (June 1944), p. 65.

³¹ Blanche, "National Council of Women of Southern Rhodesia", p. 72.

diseases, from which the European and his family are subject to invasion, this congress urges the vital importance of attacking these diseases without delay at their source.”³² In 1951 the NCWSR echoed similar sentiments, “It is from the urban natives that many of the Infectious Diseases are spreading to Europeans.”³³ It is within this context that the NCWSR displayed grave concern about the squalid conditions under which Africans were living in urban areas. The organisation’s president, Mrs O Gumprich, wrote:

Bilharzia is spreading alarmingly in the towns; the African can be seen polluting the rivers and the vacant stands, and we still have the dreadful bucket system everywhere, even in the large towns where there is water sewage, and we feel that is one of the first urgencies, that there should be enough latrines for natives employed in the towns. The National Building and Housing Boards are great offenders. The houses they put up for the boys near their work are just shanties; and the whole place is overcrowded and filthy and just a few bucket latrines for over a hundred boys or more.³⁴

In light of the poor provision of sanitary facilities for Africans, the NCWSR made resolutions on African health to be presented to government at their 1952 conference.³⁵ One of the resolutions urged “the government to bring in Legislation to make it compulsory for all employers to have sufficient sanitary arrangements for their natives outside the towns where there is no sewage.”³⁶ Since the state seemed unable or unwilling to initiate a country-wide scheme of preventative measures, the NCWSR felt that the control of diseases believed to be endemic amongst Africans could be made possible by placing part of the burden on the shoulders of employers. In his response, the Secretary of Health described the resolution as laudable but also added that “adequate public health [however] cannot be enforced by mere

³² “Congress Agenda”, *Home and Country*, Vol.1. No. 4 (1939), p. 21.

³³ NAZ, F242/400/4/1, National Council of Women of Southern Rhodesia Biennial Congress 1950, The Secretary of Health (R. M. Morris) to NCWSR, 15 December 1950.

³⁴ NAZ, F242/400/4/1, The NCWSR National President (Mrs. O Gumprich) to the Secretary of Health, 29 January 1951.

³⁵ Other women’s organisations, such as the FWISR, also made resolutions at congresses and pressured the state to oversee the improvement of African housing in the urban areas. See *The Rhodesia Herald*, 8 September 1950.

³⁶ NAZ, F242/400/4/1, The NCWSR National President (Mrs. O Gumprich) to the Hon. W. Fletcher, Ministry of Health, 18 January 1952.

resort to legal sanctions and prosecutions. It must come through education and persuasion of the public, leaving the legal proceedings to flagrant cases of non-compliance.”³⁷

White women also indicated the potential impact that diseases could have on the African labour situation. At their 1950 Biennial Congress in Gweru, the NCWSR passed a resolution asking the government “to start without delay a Preventative Service for the Reserves”, adding that they “viewed with grave concern the rapid spread of diseases endemic amongst the Africans”.³⁸ As justification for their “grave concern”, the NCWRS made reference to the recommendations by one Mrs. Neville Rolfe, who had been mandated by government to study the health of Africans in the reserves, farms and mines. In her report, she stressed the need for medical services without delay to tackle diseases “at their source”.³⁹ “If you don’t”, she wrote, “I warn you that in fifteen years you will *have no labour*.”⁴⁰ The NCWSR made reference to such reports in an attempt to convince the government to increase its involvement in African health. It also believed that the poor health of Africans would only worsen the labour problem in the country. In its response, the government noted that it could not “afford a large scale prevention of disease”.⁴¹ This was not the first time that the NCWSR received a negative response on this subject. Earlier in 1951, Mrs. O. Gumprich had written to the Secretary for Health, expressing disappointment that the women’s resolutions on the improvement of African health that had been forwarded to the government “during the past fifteen years” had “met with so little success”.⁴² However, the lack of government

³⁷ NAZ F242/400/4/1, The Secretary for Health to the Resolutions of the NCWSR Congress of November 1951, 14 Feb 1952.

³⁸ NAZ F242/400/4/1 The NCWSR, National President (Mrs. O. Gumprich) to the Secretary of Health, 29 January 1951.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Quoted in NAZ, F242/400/4/1, National Council of Women of Southern Rhodesia Biennial Congress, Gweru, September 1950. Emphasis added.

⁴¹ NAZ F242/400/4/1, Mrs. O. Gumprich to Hon. W. Fletcher, Ministry of Health, 18 January 1952.

⁴² NAZ F 242/400/4/1, Mrs. O. Gumprich to the Secretary for Health, 29 January 1951.

intervention did not dampen the women's interests in and pressure for the improvement of African health.

The women's organisations, especially the conglomerated NCWSR, continued to be watchdogs of government policies on African health throughout the colonial period. Where the state seemed not to be taking sufficient action, the women were sometimes scathing in their criticism, and where it was making a positive contribution, this was applauded. The following remark by the FWISR convenor for the Standing Committee on Public Health in 1944 reflects this watchdog role:

Women's Institutes are always keenly interested in matters of public health and the recent proposal for a native maternity hospital for Bulawayo financed jointly by government and the Municipality is one that *we will watch very closely*.... It will be the duty of the Women's Institutes to see that the government fully meets the need.⁴³

The women's organisations were an important force in the social development of the colony and, most were recognised as such by the state. On several occasions, state officials took time to respond to the organisations' concerns, providing clarifications on issues raised. Where they could render assistance, this was given, but where state response would require financial intervention, cheaper options were usually pursued. In 1950, for instance, responding to the NCWSR resolution urging government to initiate without delay a preventative health service in the Reserves, the Secretary for Health, R. M. Morris, noted that such a service had already "started four years ago [1946] by the opening of a school for African Hygiene Demonstrators at Domboshava to work under the supervision of Health Inspectors and Government Medical Officers."⁴⁴ He went on to explain other schemes that were already underway, adding that the government actually believed they should go beyond African Reserves being suggested in the

⁴³ Convenor for the Standing Committee for Public Health, "W.I. Notes: Many Interesting Subjects of National Interest", *VUKA*, Vol. 1, No.12 (August 1944), 69. Emphasis added.

⁴⁴ NAZ F 242/400/4/1, The Secretary of Health (R. M. Morris) to NCWSR, 15 December 1950.

resolution. It is possible that the Domboshava scheme was a consequence of mounting pressure on government from various stake-holders, including women's organisations such as the FWISR which, in 1944, had passed a resolution on "the need for training African health advisors for the reserves".⁴⁵ The School of African Hygiene Demonstrators was opened in 1946.

On the farms, many white farmers' wives were also involved in providing health services to Africans, as seen in the case of Margaret (Peggy) Bashford. Born in 1910 in Salisbury, Margaret trained as a nurse but after marrying Pat Bashford (who became a farmer) in 1940, she left her profession and "embarked on her career as a farmer's wife".⁴⁶ In 1954 they bought a farm in Karoi, where her training as a nurse became invaluable. The biographic note on Margaret reads:

She ran a highly successful clinic on the farm and treated all manner of conditions. Snake bites were common - as were burns, malaria and bilharzia. She was an enthusiastic supporter of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign and "dosed" the young children on the farm with Pro-Nutro to prevent kwashiorkor.⁴⁷

Margaret's involvement with the health of Africans on the farms was not peculiar to her alone, but was carried out by several other white women on the farms. To a certain extent, the introduction of African clinics and farm schools constituted a "moral economy"⁴⁸ on the farms, where some members of the settler society made some concessions towards the

⁴⁵ Convener for the Standing Committee for Public Health, "W.I. Notes: Many Interesting Subjects of National Interest", *VUKA*, No.12 (August 1944), p. 69.

⁴⁶ Biographical note on Pat and Margaret (Peggy) Bashford (n.d.). C/O Irene Staunton. It is not clear who exactly wrote the biography.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ The term has assumed various meanings over the years and was first popularised by E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the 18th Century", *Past and Present*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (1971). It received wide usage amongst anthropologists of peasant studies. In this case, I use the term to denote a just economy based on fairness and goodness. Also see James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

advancement and general welfare of Africans in order to negotiate the retention of African labour.

In urban areas, white women also went beyond high sounding resolutions and were directly involved in activities aimed at improving the health and welfare of Africans. The Gweru branch of the NCWSR, for example, ran a clinic for African mothers in the 1950s.⁴⁹ The NCWSR also advocated the introduction of a compulsory medical scheme for Africans to be graded by income. The scheme was rationalised, at least in part, on the grounds that the African would be “made to realise he is paying for his health service and thus doing something to help himself and his fellow men”.⁵⁰ The eventual introduction of medical schemes for Africans had its origins in such resolutions. As already indicated, the interest of white women in African health bordered on self-interest and was informed by the racial ideology of the time. But, again, it would probably be ahistorical to assume that there were no white women with genuine concerns for African health. For example, their interest in improving African women’s maternity was surely not so much driven by a fear of disease contamination than by other health and hygiene matters raised by white women. There were some liberal women such as Catherine Langham, discussed above, who seemed to genuinely believe in the ‘civilising’ mission as the white woman’s burden.

Apart from health, white women also took an interest in African education. The missionaries had already pioneered in this field just as in the area of health. The education introduced by white women or in which they participated, was both “formal” and “informal” in nature. Informal education largely targeted African adult women and had a huge domestic orientation while formal education was usually, but not always, targeted at African children, particularly,

⁴⁹ Blanche, “National Council of Women of Southern Rhodesia”, p. 72.

⁵⁰ NAZ F 242/400/4/1, M. L. William (Convenor of Public Health) NCWSR (n.d.).

on the farms. On the farms, a number of white women became instrumental in establishing farm schools. Noll Farmer, for example, was involved in “organising a school on the farm for the children of the staff” in the 1930s.⁵¹ Mrs. Newmarch also contributed to the education of Africans at their farm in the Enterprise area:

We had the school, which eventually took in our neighbours’ children and children from Chinamora. The school had between 280 and 300 children and we took them all through to Grade 7. I ordered all the books and kept the accounts – I was the Responsible Authority, so I had to do it, to keep everything going. We built a house for the teachers, in which they had one decent-sized room, a shower and a WC each, plus a common-room, as well as electricity of course. Mind you they wanted a three-bedroomed house each, but we couldn’t supply that. We built these four big classrooms and a school office, where they could keep all the library books and so on.⁵²

Margaret Bashford was similarly involved in the education of her farm workers, as her biographical note states: “Keen to promote the education of farm workers, she started a farm school. At its height there were about 90 pupils. She religiously attended the school prize-giving ceremonies and always had something encouraging to say to pupils.”⁵³

In the urban areas, women also took interest in African education. In 1943, for instance, the FWISR pressured the government to give bursaries to African girls of Standards V and VI to be trained as nurses.⁵⁴ The government responded by noting that the bursaries were already being offered and that “consideration [was] being given to augment the provision.”⁵⁵ As the political climate became more tense and African nationalists more militant in the 1960s, African schools became easy targets for nationalist mobilisation and recruitment for the

⁵¹ Personal Interview with Mr and Mrs. Fox, Harare, 30 March 2012.

⁵² Bridget Newmarch interview with Irene Staunton, Harare, 2001, sent by email as attachment, Irene Staunton, <weaver@mango.zw>, (4 April 2012).

⁵³ Irene Staunton Papers, Biographical note on Margaret Bashford.

⁵⁴ McClintock, “WI. Notes: Matters of Importance that Merit Consideration”, *VUKA*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (February 1943) p. 33.

⁵⁵ Government response quoted by McClintock, “WI. Notes: Matters of Importance that Merit Consideration” p. 33.

Zimbabwean war of independence.⁵⁶ Writing to the Minister of Internal Affairs, the NCWSR deploring the use of school children as political pawns requested that “all authorities...increase to the maximum, every effort to support and protect them so as to ensure continuity of education at all stages”.⁵⁷ It would be naive to think, however, that the NCWSR was solely concerned about African children having their education disrupted. It was also in their best interest that the nationalist movement was stamped out, as it sought to undermine the privileged position of white society.

The health of African children in the schools also attracted the attention of women’s organisations. In 1951, the NCWSR began an investigation of African children’s nutritional standards in the schools. It wanted to provide a well-informed perspective on this subject as part of the oral evidence required by the Native Education Commission (Kerr Commission) of 1952. The NCWSR then wrote to the Secretary of Health in August, 1951, asking for the “existing figures on the malnutrition amongst African schoolchildren”.⁵⁸ The NCWSR were “advocating a school feeding scheme for urban African children” and they considered that “this information [was] necessary if [there were] to put a strong case before the African Education Commission”.⁵⁹ The Director of Preventative Services gave in to the pressure and provided a detailed nutritional survey for January 1950, featuring schools in Highfield North and South. By and large, this survey established the need for nutritional intervention in African schools. The NCWSR, through its member associations, then began to assist with the nutrition in African schools. A summary written around 1953 by the Union of Jewish Women

⁵⁶ For discussion on the liberation struggle and African nationalists in colonial Zimbabwe see Joseph Mtisi, Munyaradzi Nyakudya, Teresa Barnes, “War in Rhodesia, 1980-1997” in Brian Raftopoulos and Alois Mlambo, *Becoming Zimbabwe* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2009); Terence Ranger, *Writing Revolt: An Engagement With African Nationalism, 1957-67* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2013).

⁵⁷ NAZ, S3331/55, Mollie Hickman, the Hon. National Secretary of NCWSR, to the Hon Secretary for Internal Affairs and Public Service, 1 September 1964.

⁵⁸ NAZ, F242/400/4/1, NCWSR to the Secretary for Health, 6 August 1951.

⁵⁹ NAZ, F242/400/4/1, NCWSR Standing Committee for African Affairs to the Mr. D. M. Blair, 12 September 1951.

(UJW) indicates that this association had, under the auspices of NCWSR, been involved in activities intended to improve the health of African school children. Part of the summary read: "A soup kitchen was opened in the Native Location in Bulawayo for undernourished African school children and provided about 150 hot meals a day."⁶⁰ This service by the UJW typified "the activities of every branch of the Union of the Jewish Women in every town throughout Rhodesia".⁶¹

As African women increasingly took up employment in the towns, women's organisations became instrumental in establishing nursery schools for African children. A report written in the early the 1950s on NCWSR activities read:

Realising that just as in the European circles economic conditions were forcing African women to go out to work in industry, and in consequence their children were left without adequate supervision and regular meals, the standing committee convened a sub-committee to run an African Day nursery.⁶²

The nurseries reflected the changing domestic ideology in both African and European societies. Around the same period, white women were putting pressure on the government to also support crèches for the white community. There was increasing tolerance and acknowledgement of women's employment outside the confines of the home.

From the 1960s, there was an increasing interest in adult literacy programmes for Africans. This culminated in the Adult Literacy Campaigns to which white women made immense contributions as individuals and organisations. Chenux-Repond, for example, recalls her "rebellious" against private domesticity and taking up voluntary work with several other

⁶⁰ Dora Lazarus, "Union of Jewish Women", in O. Gumprich and E. Yates (compilers), *Women in Central Africa*, p. 103.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Gordon, "National Council of Women of Southern Rhodesia", p. 73.

women in the Adult Literacy program.⁶³ Ranchod-Nilsson notes that this Adult Literacy campaign was largely as a result of demands and pressure from African women “who were no longer interested in the limited emphasis on homecraft”.⁶⁴ These women “now demanded that the club provide a broader scope of adult education, including agricultural methods, literacy, club management, leadership training, and communications”.⁶⁵

African women also became instrumental as agents of this Literacy Campaign. The Newsletter of the Rhodesian Association of University Women (RAUW) indicated that its Bulawayo Branch was “involved in easing the mighty problem of illiteracy” noting that “A group for the teaching of English has been formed and registered with the Ministry...European and African women teachers are voluntarily aiding a big group of adolescent girls, who are excluded from secondary schools for the simple reason that there are not enough of them.”⁶⁶ Some would want to perceive these developments as part of a process of acculturation in which Africans were expected to “to think in English” and become sufficiently literate to serve the colonial economy. However, the process had a much more complex outcome with some women becoming better placed to run their own businesses and homes in the face of the ‘modern’ and changing times. Thus as, Schmidt has also shown, European education was appropriated by the Africans to advance their own interests.⁶⁷

⁶³ Personal Interview with Maia Chenaux-Repond, Harare, 24 June 2011.

⁶⁴ Ranchod-Nilsson, “Educating Eve”, p. 211.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *RAUW Newsletter*, No.7, 1972.

⁶⁷ Schmidt, *Peasants, Traders and Wives*



Fig 1: FAWC Adult Literacy class (Photo not dated) – Irene Staunton papers

Women's organisations also put pressure on the state to improve African housing. In 1938, a resolution passed by the FWISR Annual Congress stated "that the attention of the government be drawn to the urgent need for improved housing for the poorer classes of the population, with special reference to the coloured community".⁶⁸ The FWISR also pressured the state and society to improve the housing of domestic workers. At its 1938 Annual Congress, the FWISR resolved that "the time is now ripe for the question of adequate sleeping, bathing and latrine facilities to be improved in native servants' quarters, and the government to give a lead in this matter".⁶⁹ These resolutions were informed by the changing socio-economic context in which more and more Africans were moving into the cities in search of greener pastures. The result was pressure on accommodation, much of which was substandard.

⁶⁸ "Annual Congress, 1938", *Rhodesia, Home and Country*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1938), p. 17.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

The FWISR also successfully pressured the government into building accommodation for African girls who came to seek domestic work in the towns. Nora Price, the then chairperson of FWISR, recorded:

The opening of the Girls' Hostel in Bulawayo will give satisfaction to all our members for we have urged the opening of such homes all over the Colony for the past twelve years. Umtali has had a hostel for some considerable time and we are grateful for the Bulawayo city council for their efforts in this direction.⁷⁰

As T. Scarnecchia indicates, the issue over the housing for single women "underwent a lengthy debate".⁷¹ This debate brought different and contrasting views between African and Europeans over the suitability of such hostels. However, as T. Barnes notes that the state was "eventually ... forced into making few paltry concessions toward providing independent accommodation for women".⁷² The support for and existence of such hostels demonstrated a change of perception on the part of the state and the white settlers on the 'suitable' place for African women in colonial society. The new perception was characterised by an increasing acceptance of African women in the cities as potential sources of cheap labour. This increasing acceptance was, in part, a result of the increasing demand for domestic servants as white women took up professions to cushion families from war induced high cost of living or as part of their contribution to the war effort. Another important development was the opening up of new opportunities for African male employment which had dominated domestic service.

⁷⁰ Nora Price, "W. I. Notes: The Chairman Deals with a Variety of Issues", *Vuka*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (February 1945) p. 67.

⁷¹ T. Scarnecchia, *The Politics of Gender and Class of African Communities, Salisbury, Rhodesia, 1937-1957*, Michigan, A Bell and Howell Company, 1994, p. 224.

⁷² Barnes, "We Women Worked so Hard", p. 80.

Encounters on the domestic front

This section discusses the interactions of white women and blacks in the domestic spaces and their perceptions about having domestic servants. Scholars such as Schmidt and Pape have documented how African domestic workers were affected by these interactions.⁷³ However, the section is primarily concerned with how white women were affected by their interactions with Africans in their homes and the fears and concerns that these women had about domestic servants. There has been a general assumption that every household in Rhodesia had a household servant. Deborah Kirkwood writes, "It would be scarcely an exaggeration to say that every white household, no matter how poor, employed at least one servant. Every white woman was an employer - somebody's mistress."⁷⁴

As noted, the generalisation of white households as employers of domestic workers is, however, inaccurate. There were several white households without domestic servants for one reason or another, either at some point or throughout the period in colonial Zimbabwe. Kiki Divaris claims she never had domestic workers⁷⁵ while Chenaux-Repond, at some point in her marriage, lived without a domestic worker.⁷⁶ One woman who signed as MJM also wrote to *The Rhodesia Herald* claiming that she and her husband did not "keep any Native servants."⁷⁷ Admittedly, a greater proportion of white women did have domestic servants. Pape notes that "Even as early as 1904, there were 6,991 African domestic workers, more than *one for every two white* people in the colony", and adds that this ratio remained

⁷³ Schmidt, "Race, Sex and Domestic Labour"; Charles William Pape, "A Century of 'Servants': Domestic Workers in Zimbabwe 1890-1990".

⁷⁴ Kirkwood, "Settler Wives in Southern Rhodesia", p. 156.

⁷⁵ Personal Interview with Kiki Divaris, Harare, 15 October 2010.

⁷⁶ Personal Interview with Maia Chenaux-Repond, Harare, 24 June 2011.

⁷⁷ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 16 September 1950.

relatively constant until 1940.⁷⁸ But this ratio can be misleading if understood to mean that every white household had a domestic servant. Some households may have had as many as three, four servants or more while others had none.

The domestic front, both in the urban and non-urban areas, presented a platform for close interaction between Africans and white women. The relationship was usually that of an employer and employee and the evidence I have reviewed suggests that this was often a love-hate relationship. The tense relations that housewives had with their male domestic servants were so pronounced as to attract the attention of the FWISR. At their 1938 Congress, it resolved that:

The changing attitude of the natives to the Europeans, especially experienced by housewives deserves investigation as to its underlying causes and in any such investigation particular attention should be directed to the question as to whether natives are adversely affected by staying away from their natural family life for too long at a time.⁷⁹

It would, however, be grossly inaccurate to suggest that relations between white women and their servants were always acrimonious. Many families have affectionate memories of their domestic servants and speak of a fairly harmonious relationship.⁸⁰ On the farms, relationships could go beyond the employer-employee parameters as white women involved themselves with clinics, Women's Clubs and/or schools for their workers' families and other African families in the vicinity.

⁷⁸ Pape, "Black and White", p. 701. Emphasis added. Also see Charles William Pape, "A Century of 'Servants': Domestic Workers in Zimbabwe 1890-1990" (Ph. D. Thesis: Social Sciences, Deakin University, 1992), p.70.

⁷⁹ Chairperson's address, "Annual Congress, 1938", *Home and Country*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Sept 1938), p. 16.

⁸⁰ It may be difficult to tell if these affectionate references were not being influenced by the circumstances under which the interviews were being taken. But again, there are instances of servants who served up to retirement or their death, possibly suggesting that they had a relatively better condition of service and by extension good relations with their employers.

From the outset, the gender balance of the domestic labour in the urban areas was such that African men dominated domestic service. Pape notes that up to about 1940, the population of African men who were in domestic employment was 90 per cent of the total domestic labour force.⁸¹ Schmidt indicates that this dominance of male labour was a product of various forces, including the resistance of African women themselves who preferred better paying and independent sources of income such as beer brewing, and the reluctance of European women to train African girls for domestic labour, since they would eventually leave to get married, sometimes having worked for a short period of time.⁸² Other factors included the fears by white women of sexual relations between the African women and white men as well as the gender and economic ideology of the colonial era which encouraged the formal employment of African men while the wives stayed in the reserves where their labour subsidised the poor wages of their husbands.

The relations between white women and their domestic servants were dynamic and shaped, at times, by existing stereotypes against domestic servants. More often, these relations were a product of protracted negotiations with, and contestation of, authority. Some whites stereotyped African servants as addicted to pilfering, ignorant, lazy, unreliable and difficult to teach. In Jeannie Boggie's compilation, one contributor wrote: "Still another way in which the old order has not changed, is found in the natural inclination of the natives for thieving. The average woman's kitchen and pantry are still the happy hunting ground for the average cook-boy."⁸³ Miriam Staunton accused her domestic servants of lying and being "terribly deceitful", adding "that is their characteristic that gets so many decent white women down

⁸¹ Pape, "Black and White", p. 701.

⁸² Schmidt, "Race, Sex and Domestic Labour", p. 223. The resistance of African women to domestic service in the early colonial period was also part of a general resistance by local Africans to urban employment. The local Africans were generally well-off and could sustain their livelihoods without recourse to selling their labour continuously in the urban areas. This partly explains why African men in the cities were largely of foreign origin.

⁸³ Jeannie M. Boggie, *First Steps in Civilising Rhodesia* (Bulawayo, Philpot and Collins Ltd, 1940), p. 136.

and about them".⁸⁴ This stereotyping of African domestic servants was significant. "By reducing Africans to these knowable, recognisable, dehumanised images", writes Helen Dampier, "the white settler was able to assert her control and authority over the colonized races. Rather than remaining disturbingly foreign, impenetrable, exotic and unknown, African-ness could be rendered predictably unreliable, disloyal, lazy and thieving."⁸⁵

These accusations on Africans were not entirely baseless. Boggie's autobiographic novel, *A Husband and a Farm in Rhodesia*, which became popularised in Rhodesia from its time of publication in the 1950s, for instance, notes cases of pilfering servants. She writes:

When I came to Rhodesia I never found that the houseboys stole my husband's whisky. Each year I made a lot of Jam, and always put a paper soaked in whisky on top of each bottle of jam. Later, my jam was moulding. Investigation proved that the houseboy had been taking out whisky, and filling up the bottle with water.⁸⁶

These accusations obscure more complex realities and, in some cases, may have been exaggerated or made outside of their proper context. Where the employer was ill-treating or short-changing the servants, pilfering and other such like behaviours were likely to be more prevalent, and could possibly be less a commentary on the servant than they were on the master. Thus the attitudes and actions of servants were, to a larger extent, also part of what James Scott has called "weapons of the weak", a set of actions that represent passive resistance employed by those being dominated.⁸⁷

Most white women were not enthusiastic about employing African women in domestic service and, in fact, discouraged the idea of migration of black women into cities, at least

⁸⁴ RHL MSS AFR. S. 2398, To Mr Cheales, 24 May 1959.

⁸⁵ Dampier, "Settler Women's Experiences of Fear", p. 85.

⁸⁶ Jeannie M. Boggie, *A Husband and a Farm in Rhodesia* (Salisbury, 1959), p. 201.

⁸⁷ James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

before the 1950s. The FWISR, for instance, lobbied against the employment of African women in domestic service. Carolyn Martin Shaw notes that the 1939 report of the FWISR Standing Committee on Native Interests opposed the employment of African women in domestic service because “they [African women] would benefit little from social uplift and European contact; they cannot adjust to men’s new ideas [and] permitting more native women in urban areas would increase prostitution”.⁸⁸ Some white women were reluctant to employ African female servants on grounds that these servants were “completely spoiled.” Voicing the concerns of most employers, Mrs W. Russell of Bulawayo complained:

The girls do not want mealie meal for breakfast. They demand oatmeal porridge. They demand food other than the natives ordinarily get. It should be sufficient if a girl gets mealie meal, sugar and milk. Wherever they are trained their tastes should be simple.⁸⁹

The complex tastes that African women were adopting made their labour expensive and, therefore, incompatible with the objective of minimising expenditure. Moreover, others argued that “the native girl is not as strong as the native boy” and, as such, “there are certain forms of work she is incapable of doing such as heavy work like garden work and chopping wood”.⁹⁰ If one employed an African female servant, they could be forced to also get a male servant for the heavy work.⁹¹ Another fear that white women had was the potential sexual threat that African women posed in the house.

As noted earlier, in some circles, the idea of leaving Africans to do the domestic duties, which were expected to be the responsibility of the white female employers, was generally

⁸⁸ Shaw, “Sticks and Scones”, pp. 256-257.

⁸⁹ Cited in Schmidt, “Race, Sex and Domestic Labour”, p. 230.

⁹⁰ NAZ, S235/475, Departmental Committee on Native Female Domestic Service 1932, Evidence given by Mrs. Mile, Umtali, 17 August 1932.

⁹¹ For more detailed discussions on these perceptions on employing domestic servants see Barnes, Terri Barnes, “We Women Worked so Hard”.

contested.⁹² It was noted that “the social system that [made] this necessary was a dangerous one.”⁹³ This danger was articulated at a number of levels. Firstly, housewives with servants were now accused of neglecting their own children and other important domestic responsibilities.⁹⁴ Secondly, children from households with servants were said to be without the “dignity of labour”.⁹⁵ In her opening remarks at the 11th FWISR Annual Congress, Mrs Semor expressed grave concern over “the coming generation”, noting that “There is too great a tendency to allow children to be waited upon by natives, when they should at least do certain duties for themselves.”⁹⁶ Thirdly, it was argued in some circles that African servants could not be trusted to be left alone with the children of their white masters. This last concern was driven by fears generated by reports such as that of Brundell in 1915.⁹⁷

Brundell’s report referred to a case of assault allegedly committed by two African domestic servants on a 6 year old white girl. Part of the report read:

The attempt at rape by these natives resulted in the child contracting a venereal disease ... I make special reference to this case as it is one of the many offences of a similar nature although less serious. It constitutes a practical illustration of the danger attending the employment of male servants with the care and custody of children of tender age.⁹⁸

A letter of advice to European women in the colonies by the East Africa Women’s League reprinted in *Rhodesia, Home and Country*, in 1938, for the white women in Rhodesia confirms the fears that white women had about dependence on African domestic service:

⁹²See Chapter Two.

⁹³ “Children Left in Natives Care: Social System in Africa Criticised”, *Rhodesia Herald*, 12 January 1950.

⁹⁴ Sue Johnsen, “A Woman’s Place is in the Home”, *NHR Newsletter* (December 1977).

⁹⁵ Langham, “The Native Question”, p. 13.

⁹⁶ “Eleventh Annual Congress of the Federation of Women’s Institutes of Southern Rhodesia, Held at Que Que, July 6th and 7th, 1937”, *Rhodesia, Home and Country*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (July 1937), p. 9.

⁹⁷ NAZ, S1222/2, Black and White Peril in Southern Rhodesia - Special File 1916, Report by Jos A. Brundell, the Superintendent of the CID, BSAC Police, 13/03/1915. The report looked at the prostitution by white women in Southern Rhodesia. It also made reference to some cases where African servants were alleged to have abused white children.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

During the past years there have been a number of cases of rape by natives on European women and children of varying age, and there have been cases of venereal diseases among little white girls which have been and are being proved to be the result of contact with native servants... Facts such as these are a proof that European children should never be given into the unrestricted care of native servants, and that the greatest watchfulness must be exercised by parents who should never allow their children, of either sex to be with native servants, out of sight or earshot of a reliable European.⁹⁹

This may be an exaggerated picture where Rhodesian society was concerned. However, it indicates some of the fears, uncertainties and suspicions that white women held about their African domestic servants.

Africans were not the only ones under pressure to accommodate new practices emanating from their interaction with whites. The whites too were under pressure. They had to make concessions, twists and turns for relations with Africans to work. The letter cited above, for example, also advised white women coming to the colonies to learn the local language as one of the most important tasks adding that, "It is quite certain that being able to give servants orders in their own tongue and to understand what they say prevents many difficulties that otherwise arise."¹⁰⁰ Indeed, a number of women did make efforts to learn the local languages or at least corrupted versions of the local languages. Jeanette McDowell proudly reported to other members of NHR in 1978:

I wonder how many NHR members can speak or write Shona.... About seven of us in the Greendale area have been lucky enough to have Shona lessons given to us. Our teacher is another housewife who is attending a course at our local university.... I am now longing to speak more fluently with more practice. This must surely help towards a good relationship between our two main races.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ "Advice to European Women" (Reprinted with acknowledgement to East Africa Women's League), *Rhodesia, Home and Country*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1938), p. 43.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Jeanette McDowell, "Greendale Morning Group", *NHR Newsletter* (June 1978), p. 15.

In a narration of her grandmother's life in Southern Rhodesia, Anna Brazier captured the interaction between the domestic servants and their employers which contributed to cultural fusion and concessions in both worlds:

Through domestic servants my culture learned about the culture that was originally alien to them. This is because servants could speak more English in my grandmother's day, you would ask your servant about their families, about their lives and you might even go and visit them in their homes and that was the way our grandparents would learn about their African servants and of course the latter would learn about us because we stayed with them and they observed the way we lived.¹⁰²

It can be thus noted that white women in particular and white society and culture at large did not remain entirely culturally unaffected by their interaction with Africans.

Servants played a crucial role in the settler family and in the colonial economy at large. In her recollection of her grandmother's experience, Anna Brazier captures the freedom that the presence of servants accorded the white women:

My grandmother came here and she had people who would look after her children who would have been cooking her meals and would basically run her household and that gave her the freedom to become an artist. She became a fantastic water colourist. It also gave her the freedom to explore all the things that she became. She was a person who had to do good.... She started women's literacy groups... she started all kinds of things right up into getting to politics. She would never have been able to do that in Britain [where it was expensive to have domestic servants]. So it is really interesting how having servants, for a woman, is incredibly liberating because it means you can do all things you would not be able to do without them.... For any of those white women who came out here it should have just been so liberating to have all their drudgery taken away from them because they had servants.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Personal Interview with Anna Brazier, Harare, 15 August 2011.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

This crucial role played by servants was not unique to this case as many other families in Rhodesia, to a certain extent, experienced similar situations. White women could explore their interests beyond the confines of the homes because of the presence of domestic servants.

The sexual encounter

As noted earlier in chapter one, the domestic space was one of the areas where sexual encounters were prevalent including the perceived sex perils. The close contact between African male servants and their white women employers made this space the most prone to sexual connections between the two races. Lawrence Vambe observed, however, that some of these ‘peril’ cases were also a product of advances made by white women employers. He noted, “the true position about this problem has been that most white women, as most men in Rhodesia, especially if they were the employers, could have sexual intercourse on demand with their African servants.”¹⁰⁴

In a racialised society such as Rhodesia, sexual encounters between the dominant and the dominated classes were bound to be a cause of concern for the society. Given the patriarchal nature of settler society, white women’s sexual encounters with Africans attracted greater concern and aroused public outcry. Many scholars have explored the subject of interracial sex in the colonies and have demonstrated how sex was very much a signification of power, domination and control.¹⁰⁵ These scholars have also demonstrated the responses of society and colonial governments to this phenomenon and analysed the various efforts at controlling white women’s sexuality, ostensibly to protect them from Africans. Settler society did not

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Pape, “Black and White”, p. 699.

¹⁰⁵ Some of these scholars include Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*; van Heyningen, “The Social Evil in the Cape Colony 1868-1902”, pp. 170-197; Van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914*; Van Onselen, *The Fox and the Flies*; Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900*; Pape, “Black and White”; and McCulloch, *Black Peril, White Virtue*.

perceive it as normal for sexual relations to exist between African men and white women. In the words of Jeater, “any sexual encounter, indeed any *social* encounter, between a black man and a white woman became ‘perverted’”.¹⁰⁶ When such sexual relations did occur, efforts were made to rationalise this in different ways including demonstrating that the women involved were social outcasts or not in their ‘normal’ state.

As early as 1915, Brundell cited twenty-four cases in which white women had consensual sexual relationships with African men.¹⁰⁷ The existence of several more additional, but unreported cases cannot be dismissed. Brundell did not see the sexual encounters in which white women made advances to African men as emanating from any normal attraction of the former to the latter for it was unthinkable that a white woman could fall in love with a black man or want to have a sexual relationship with him. Something had to be wrong for such to happen and the Brundell Report searched for these factors to explain why such relations did take place. As part of its attempt to understand the ‘irrational’, the Brundell Report concluded that white women who had sexual relations with Africans were either prostitutes, indiscreet and careless or simply nymphomaniacs.

According to the report, white sex workers would “prostitute themselves with natives for the purpose of monetary gain or otherwise. Such prostitution [was] coupled invariably with the illicit sale or supply of liquor to natives.”¹⁰⁸ The indiscreet and careless attitude was “adopted by white females in their personal relation with their native male servants which undoubtedly [led] to undue familiarity” which was said to lead to “actual attempts to commit sexual crime”.¹⁰⁹ Finally, the so-called nymphomaniacs were said to have a “condition which takes

¹⁰⁶ Jeater, *Marriage, Pervasion, and Power*, p. 188.

¹⁰⁷ Also see another examination of Brundell’s report by Phillips, “The Perils of Sex and the Panics of Race”.

¹⁰⁸ NAZ, S1222/2, Report by the CID Superintendent of the CID, BSAC Police, 13/03/1915.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

the form of hysterical curiosity in sexual matters, in many cases due to inherent temperamental qualities of the individual.”¹¹⁰ Several examples of white women fitting into these three categories were given in an effort to explain consensual sex between white women and black men.

The Brundell Report cites cases to substantiate these three rationalisations. In the first instance, Brundell cites a number of examples of white women prostitutes in Bulawayo, Gweru, Que Que, Umtali and Salisbury. Most of these were also involved in the illicit selling of beer to Africans. The following is one example in the report:

They were living at Que Que a woman and her daughter aged 16 who, it is alleged, were supplying liquor to and prostituting themselves with natives. In confirmation of this allegation it may be well to mention that the elder female, in a case before court, was proved to have been supplied with one month no less than 12 doz. bottles of Dope.¹¹¹

Their alleged involvement with dope, probably an illicit intoxicant drink, was meant to buttress the image of way-ward nature of the individuals involved. The image being drawn was that these women being prostitutes, heavy drinkers and drug abusers, were perceived as ‘fallen’ and, as such, nothing rational could be expected of them.¹¹² Sometimes old age or drunkenness was cited as reasons for the ‘irrational’ and unimaginable intimacy between white women and black men. By way of illustration the report noted the examples of Margaret Herdies and Renee Bredof. The former was a prostitute in Pioneer Street, said to be “a habitual drunkard and during her periodic bouts of drunkenness associated with natives”.¹¹³ Renee Bredof was also reported to be indiscreet in her choice of clients “on

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² The perception of prostitution as fallen women was also held in the British Empire in general and the metropole in particular. See Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics*.

¹¹³ NAZ, S 1227/2, Case no. 12 Bulawayo and Salisbury, 1903; Margaret Herdies.

account of her age and unprepossessing appearance”.¹¹⁴ Women who did not tow the racial line in sexual matters, such as Margaret Herdies and Renee Bredof, eventually faced prosecution or deportation from the colony as their behaviour punctured the myth of racial supremacy.

Examples of inappropriate white female behaviour were also given to substantiate the claim that interracial intimacy was a product of ‘indiscreet and careless attitudes’. These attitudes included being loosely dressed in the presence of Africans, or not observing the set rules of propriety. The report cited the example of one white woman, “the wife of a well-known professional man in the Territory, who was in the habit, while she was naked in her bath of calling in her male native boy aged 17, ‘to pour water over her’”.¹¹⁵ It was felt that such careless attitudes could encourage or lead to intimacy between the white women and black men.

In the third category which Brundell referred to as nymphomania, a number of cases were highlighted. There was clearly an effort to dismiss the possibility of any ‘natural’ intimate relationship taking place between white women and black men. There were cases that could easily have been interpreted as examples of genuine sexual attraction of white women to African men. However, for Brundell, these could only be examples of nymphomania. Case no. 2, for instance, involved an English girl about 17 or 18 years who came to the country as a ‘nurse and general servant’ and was impregnated by the domestic servant. Brundell’s report read that, “Official enquiries also revealed that she was in the habit of voluntarily cohabiting with other natives without material gain to herself.”¹¹⁶ Case no 3 was of one “very attractive unmarried girl” who admitted to being pregnant as a result of “voluntary intercourse with the

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ NAZ, S 1227/2, Black and White Perils in Southern Rhodesia, 1916.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

native house servant".¹¹⁷ Case no 4 involved a married woman who, according to the Brundell report, one day called her servant and said to him "Come here. You do to me the same as your boss does", while "at the same time exposing her breasts by throwing open her nightdress".¹¹⁸ In this last case, the servant immediately left and went to report the case.

The final case cited by Brundell was of "a young male native servant about 18 years of age who was in the habit, on the instruction of his mistress, of going into her bedroom to put water into her bath and perform other small duties".¹¹⁹ The report adds that the husband and the woman involved in this case "were considered respectable, the former being in regular settled employment".¹²⁰ The ordeal narrated used to take place when the husband went to work. According to the report, the servant initially confessed to having "sexual intercourse with his mistress with her consent" on several occasions but subsequently denied that any sexual relations had taken place.¹²¹

In the opinion of Brundell, the white women implicated in the third category discussed above did not have any view other "than the illicit satisfaction of sexual desire due to unbalanced curiosity and hysterical wish to experience comparative sexual relationship."¹²² Brundell could not imagine the possibility of any normal sexual attraction of the mistress to her domestic servant and, as Phillips indicates, such an attraction was "contrary to scientific and medical knowledge of what constituted normal desire, and therefore it was unnatural and implicitly degenerate."¹²³ Clearly, the cases indicated that these sexual encounters were not a class issue, nor were they a result of the first two explanations given by Brundell. The

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Phillips, "The Perils of Sex and the Panics of Race", p. 111.

interracial sexual encounters cited above complicated perceptions about African sexuality. A situation where Africans would have consensual sexual relations with white women perforated images of racial superiority and compromised the colonial project that entailed dominating Africans in every sphere, including the area of sexuality. While African women were available to satisfy white men's sexual appetites, white women were not available to African men. This mentality became the basis upon which policies on sexual relations between African men and white women were established. The passing of the 1903 Immorality Ordinance and its subsequent additions in 1916, in the Immorality Suppression Ordinance, must be appreciated within these contexts. Both sought to prohibit sexual relations between African men and white women but were silent about the relations between white men and African women.¹²⁴

Throughout the colonial period, interracial sexual relations involving white women were considered to be scandalous and such women were described as having "gone native". Callaway notes that in colonial usage this expression also referred to "A European who lives among Africans, takes their point of view and defends their interests" as well as "a European who does not conform and is therefore excluded from the colonial group and considered to belong to the other".¹²⁵ In the later part of the colonial period, interracial marriages, such as that of Patrick Matimba to Adriana Van Hoorn, a Dutch woman were to attract public furore within Rhodesian society.¹²⁶ Patrick had to live in exile partly because existing legislation, particularly the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, did not allow him to live with his wife in

¹²⁴ Pape has shown how white women responded by contesting against the gender discriminatory nature of the legislation arguing, not for its repudiation, but for its extension to include white men having sexual relations with African women. These protests, however, fell on deaf ears as campaigns for an amendment of the existing legislation failed at least before the 1930s. See Pape, "Black and White", pp. 714 – 716. In Chapter Three, a brief reference is also made as to how white women's organisations responded to these legislations.

¹²⁵ Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire*, p. 247.

¹²⁶ See Munyaradzi Mushonga, "The Criminalisation of Sex Between 'Black' and 'White' and Miscegenation Hullabaloo in Rhodesia: An analysis of the Marriage of Patrick Matimba and Adriana Van Hoorn, 1955-1959", *Lesotho Law Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2009), pp. 435 - 456.

an “all-white-area”.¹²⁷ Even ‘liberal’ women politicians such as Muriel Rosin had difficulties challenging the policies that discouraged interracial marriages partly because of the strong sentiments held by the white community against such marriages.¹²⁸ Rhodesian white women, in fact, were as vehemently opposed to such interracial associations as they had been since the early decades of colonial rule. When Rosin was criticised by a nephew-in-law for not acting against this state of affairs, she defended her position saying that the nephew-in-law “was unable to see that I had to express the views of women, my white constituents”.¹²⁹

The Homecraft Movement

The interaction of white women and black women is one of the most documented subjects by scholars of Zimbabwe’s colonial social history.¹³⁰ These documented interactions focus on white women’s roles, participation in and contributions to African Women’s Clubs. Most scholars who have written on the Homecraft movement¹³¹ focus largely on the activities of the Women’s Clubs (also called the Homecraft clubs) after 1950 as opposed to pre-Second World War Homecraft movements such as the Wayfarer Movement. Scholars in this area of study tend to explain how Africans were affected by this interaction, with less attention being placed on the implications that this interaction had on white women. This section revisits these interactions and attempt to locate the experiences of white women within the context of this encounter.

¹²⁷ The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 and its subsequent amendments formed the legal basis of separation between white and black areas, and the two communities were expected to respect the boundaries provided by this piece of legislation.

¹²⁸ Diana Mitchell, Muriel Rosin Draft Biography, Chapter 6. Muriel Rosin is quoted claiming that she had to support policies against interracial sex because of her electorate though she believed that “everyone has the right to sleep with whomsoever they want to”.

¹²⁹ Diana Mitchell, Muriel Rosin Draft Biography, Chapter Six.

¹³⁰ See Law ““Even a labourer is worthy of his hire”; Kaler, “Visions of Domesticity”; Logan, “An Outline of the History”; Shaw, “Sticks and Scones”; Ranchod-Nilsson, “Educating Eve.” For a discussion of white women’s voluntary activities amongst black women in Northern Rhodesia see Karen Hansen, “White Women in Changing World”.

¹³¹ This thesis argues that this was broader than what some scholars have projected as it also included the Wayfarer Movement and formal Homecraft schools such as M’soneddi in addition to the usually discussed Homecraft/women’s clubs.

Scholars tend to discuss the Homecraft movement as though it was a post-Second World War phenomenon.¹³² Kaler does acknowledge the existence of institutions of domesticity prior to the much discussed Homecraft movement of the post-Second World War period, noting that “From the earliest days of the colony, Christian missions took the teaching of hygiene, health, and gender-specific home tasks as part of the overall effort of creating a cadre of ‘civilised’ Christians.”¹³³ She, however, does not see it as part of a continuous thread of homecrafting that proceeded into the post-Second World War. Shaw, on the other hand, limits the “Homecraft movement” to “secular women’s organisations, which included FWI’s Homecraft clubs and the Federation of African Women’s Clubs”.¹³⁴ Thus, by and large, scholars limit the Homecraft *movement* to the activities of FWISR and FAWC (Federation of African Women’s Clubs), which became popular in the post-Second World War period.

Scholars’ failure to appreciate that homecrafting, as a movement, had a longer history has misled them in their attempts to explain the origins of this phenomenon. Shaw, for example, sees its emergence in the context of “the discourse of progress and partnership that marked the ‘golden age of partnership’ during Federation”.¹³⁵ She also adds that, “Southern Rhodesia, with little change in its restrictive laws regarding treatment of the native population, needed to showcase black progress in the face of African independence movements to the north.”¹³⁶ These contexts are found in the post-World War II era and while they may explain the new orientations and emphasis being adopted in the Homecraft

¹³² See for example Ranchod-Nilsson, “Educating Eve”; Shaw, “Sticks and Scones”; and Law, “Even a labourer is worthy of his hire”.

¹³³ Kaler, “Visions of Domesticity”, p. 275.

¹³⁴ Shaw, “Sticks and Scones”, p. 272.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 257.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 257-58.

movement then, they do not explain the phenomenon itself which predated the Second World War.

Shaw also argues that the Homecraft movements “were part of a colonialist project to capture the loyalty of upward mobile rural and urban women”¹³⁷ whose broader objective was “to build a basis of consent for white hegemony, and to thwart desires of African nationalism”.¹³⁸ Presenting a somewhat similar argument, Ranchod-Nilsson argues that the decline of the Homecraft clubs during the Zimbabwean war of independence was because “by the mid-1970s it was apparent that no amount of homecraft training... could surmount the growing nationalist commitment to the liberation war.”¹³⁹ I do not rule out the fact that the colonial government did see political mileage in the direction indicated by these scholars and probably encouraged the movements on those grounds. The argument that these movements may have diverted women from the urgent political issues of the day can also not be dismissed. However, as will be shown, these were incidental rather than well-orchestrated outcomes of the club movement.

The Homecraft movement was founded, in part, on the belief that ‘civilising’ Africans would necessarily have to begin with African women. One white woman expressed this belief in reference to her own experience; “Because I have long thought that if we wish our native people to progress quickly in the right way we must start with the women, I was interested in the Homecraft classes run by the Umtali Women’s Institute in Sakubva Town.”¹⁴⁰ Referring to the Homecraft clubs and their successor, Jekesa Pfungwa/Vulingqondo (JP/V), Shaw notes that these “taught groups of black women homemaking skills in order to reproduce middle-

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 253.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 254.

¹³⁹ Ranchod-Nilsson, “Educating Eve”, p. 196.

¹⁴⁰ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 30 June 1950.

class European domestic relations".¹⁴¹ An earlier, but slightly different version of the Homecraft clubs was the Wayfarer movement. In many ways, 'wayfarism' was part of the Homecraft movement similar in content taught and its objectives to the movement popularised by the FAWC and FWISR in the post-Second World War era. The Wayfarer movement, which had been in existence for a longer period, was Christian based and targeted younger girls, while the two women's organisations targeted, largely, married and 'marriageable' women. In many ways, the Homecraft movement of the post-Second World War period did not depart much from the fundamentals of the Wayfarer movement. Both movements, for instance, shared the goal of extending European domesticity and European perspectives on health and hygiene, among other things, to the African female population.

The Women's Clubs/Homecraft clubs (which fell under the FAWC) were separated from, but usually closely linked to, the Women's Institutes (FWISR). In its annual report, in 1944, FWISR reported that "African Women's Clubs [were] still being carried on by institute members."¹⁴² This demonstrates the nature of relations existing between the FWISR and most of the Women's Clubs. However, Women's Clubs did not necessarily always operate under the auspices of the Women's Institutes. The origin of the club movement is itself attributed to Miriam Staunton, the wife of a Native Commissioner, and Helen Mangwende¹⁴³ neither of whom had links to the Women's Institutes.

Both the Women's Institutes and the Women's Clubs, notwithstanding their differences in their orientation and outlook, however, shared an interest in entrenching private domesticity for women, black or white. There were striking differences between the Women's Institutes

¹⁴¹ Shaw, "Sticks and Scones", p. 254.

¹⁴² "Annual Reports from Institutes", *VUKA*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (October 1944), p. 67.

¹⁴³ "Who Started the Homecraft Movement?", *Homecraft* ((August 1965), p. 12. Also see Ranchod-Nilsson, "Educating Eve".

and Women's Clubs. The former, on the one hand, derived their membership from the white women in the colony while the latter derived their membership from both the black and white female populations and were usually led by white women. In the words of Irene Staunton, Women's Institutes "were dominated by middle class [white] women. They made scones, decorations and it was more proper... Women's Clubs were dominated by [black] rural women."¹⁴⁴ Over time, some Women's Clubs resembled the Women's Institutes in the activities they engaged in, including the making of "scones and decorations" and observed standards similar to those of Women's Institutes. In 1952, the independent clubs and those run by the Women's Institutes came together with the assistance of the FWISR to constitute the FAWC under the patronage of Lady Kennedy, the wife of the then Governor.¹⁴⁵ The close link between the homecraft clubs and FWISR was intended to ensure a standard on how and what could be exported of the western domesticity.

The FWISR adopted various means to export its ideology. They used the *Home and Country* magazine as their mouthpiece, while the Women's Clubs used the *Homecraft* magazine which was published from 1962 to 1975. Both clearly sought to entrench domesticity as the epitome of femininity. Radio Homecraft was also established in 1952 and it enjoyed immediate success. It involved women presenting shows on homecrafting which were publicly broadcasted. Radio Homecraft and the *Homecraft* magazine had become a necessity because of the overwhelming expansion of clubs and increasing need to keep all club members updated and on the same ideological platform. By 1965, the Homecraft clubs under the now renamed Federation of Women's Institutes of Rhodesia (FWIR) had expanded so much that they could make the following boast:

¹⁴⁴ Personal interview with Irene Staunton, Harare, 30 March 2012.

¹⁴⁵ Dorothy Quaile (editorial), "Gatooma", *Home and Country*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (March 1965), p. 7.

FWIR now administers two hundred Homecraft institutes and clubs throughout Rhodesia. With the invaluable advice of a handful of outstanding African women, a full programme of instruction in nutrition, hygiene, home economics and child care has been established. In addition, a series of courses in leadership training in Home Economics and Demonstration has been undertaken with financial support of many organisations at home and abroad.¹⁴⁶

In recognition of its remarkable Homecraft activities, the FWIR received two Land Rovers from Freedom from Hunger National Campaign in 1965 to help them with their trips to the remote areas of the country.¹⁴⁷

Individual white women were driven by compassion, a genuine belief in their civilising mission, self-satisfaction in doing good things and many other self-centred motives, but not necessarily by the desire to nip nationalism in the bud. The following extract of FWISR patron Lady Kennedy's speech to the Bindura Women's Institute gives some insight into the apolitical but somewhat maternalistic motives of white women:

Should each W.I. member go to work at one African woman in the way of teaching her to be clean it will help.... The British are born leaders and in this country, where there are few Europeans and so many Africans, there is certainly scope for leadership. Could we not at least teach the Africans to bring up their children in a cleaner and better way of living? It will be difficult and uphill work but I know that Bindura and other Rhodesian W.Is will not fail.¹⁴⁸

The attempt to explain the rise of the Homecraft clubs in the context of African nationalism, therefore, oversimplifies a process which, in its infancy and throughout the period, was also driven by social factors.

¹⁴⁶ Editorial, "Freedom from Hunger Campaign Presents Two Land Rovers to FWIR Homecraft", *Home and Country*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (April 1965), p. 12.

¹⁴⁷ Ranchod-Nilsson, "Educating Eve", p. 210.

¹⁴⁸ *Rhodesia Herald*, 14 September 1950.

In practice, the missionary efforts and, particularly the Wayfarer movement which began in 1927, were not very much different from the Homecraft movement of the post- Second World War period, especially in their orientation towards domesticity. Indeed, these earlier movements were just as much concerned with teaching Africans how to run their homes and to impart skills in the area of hygiene, housework, laundry and child-nursing.¹⁴⁹ The same interests were also central in the later Homecraft movements. In both instances, African women met in groups to receive homecraft instructions from either European women or one of their own who had received training from the European women. The major differences between the pre and post - war movement may have been the emphasis placed on Christian values by the Wayfarer societies and other earlier Christian movements, and the intensity of the programmes. Statistics relating to the Wayfarer movement in 1938 indicated that the movement had 2 015 African girls aged from 11 years upwards, and that these were enrolled in 73 detachments, "some at missions, some at kraal schools, others in town locations".¹⁵⁰ The post-war Homecraft clubs were found in almost every part of the country and at their peak in 1975 had 23,000 members. At its peak, in 1975, the FAWC had 23,000 members.¹⁵¹ Christian teaching was not totally absent from the programmes of post-war Homecraft clubs but it was not central. Clearly, there was more continuity across the century in 'homecrafting' than other scholars have noted, partly because these scholars focused on individual organisations rather than the patterns of white women's organisational work.

In the late 1930s, white women organisations encouraged their members to take a keen interest in the Wayfarer societies. This marked a re-orientation of the homecraft movement in that secular groups in the white society were beginning to be interested in making

¹⁴⁹ Schmidt, *Peasant, Traders and Wives*, pp. 151-54.

¹⁵⁰ R. B. Standing, "Wayfaring: An Explanation and an Appeal", *Home and Country*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (September 1938), p. 51.

¹⁵¹ Ranchod-Nilsson, "Educating Eve", p. 210.

contributions. In an appeal for greater involvement by white women with Wayfaring, R. B.

Standing wrote:

The Wayfarer movement of Southern Rhodesia needs the interests and support of members of Women's Institutes. People sometimes think it is a matter of concern only to missionaries. True the movement has a Christian basis... but it is the woman-in-the-street (by which I mean the average woman) who should exercise her power of leadership for the benefit of the somewhat neglected African girl.¹⁵²

In 1943, Mrs. Basil Price (the Liaison Officer to the Kindred Societies in FWISR) noted that "Wayfaring does more for the African women, generally speaking, than any other efforts in the colony, and the movement deserves the most practical support the Federation (FWISR) is able to offer."¹⁵³ It is from such appeals and encouragement that individual women and women's organisations such as FWISR promoted the idea of engaging in the Homecraft movement and complementing missionary activities.

Another of the pioneering homecraft undertakings in Rhodesia was initiated in 1942 by Catherine Langham and Miss Freda Tully,¹⁵⁴ a decade before the post-war Homecraft movement of FAWC. This culminated in the Hasfa Homecraft Village, M'soneddi, which was run on a private basis from January 1943. Langham became the Principal of this avowedly domestic-oriented institution. Teaching was focused on four aspects as reflected in a review on the village's activities and curriculum, written in the 1950s, which read:

The life of the Spirit: ... the religious teaching of the Homecraft Village stresses... the mother's duty to train their children from earliest days, by family prayer and bible study, to turn to God in all needs of the life, material as well as spiritual.

The life of the Body: Around this is grouped teaching hygiene, sanitation, sick nursing, simple first aid, care of pregnant women, child welfare etc...

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Quoted in K. McClintock, "WI. Notes: Chairman Comments on Many Matters of Interest", *VUKA*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1943), p. 37.

¹⁵⁴ Tully was responsible for investing capital in the project.

The women and girls take turns to work as orderlies in the little dispensary, cook for, and look after all in-patients and maternity cases.

The life of the family as a whole: this takes in teaching on food, need for balanced diet, vegetable gardening, cooking for the sick and for children, clothing, cutting out, sewing, machining, knitting for all family needs.

The life of the home: Home as a place of love and laughter, where all fear is eliminated – so training is given in simple crafts to beautify the home patchwork, both patterned and crazy, basketry and sisal work, soft toy making, so that the children may have the wherewithal to play.¹⁵⁵

The objective of the institution was that “the [African] women and girls may be able to build up *happy and healthy homes*, and take their share in raising the general tone of the Reserve life.”¹⁵⁶ The mandate and operations of the village school was thus clearly marked out for the entrenchment of private domesticity for African women and this was extended into the post-war Homecraft movement. In many ways, it was also an extension of the Wayfarer activities because of its emphasis on Christian and domestic values. The school, which was established during the Second World War, popularised the concept of Homecrafting in Rhodesia to unprecedented levels and its mandate was clearly spelt out in its name, Hasfa *Homecraft* Village. Given the period this school was established, it also becomes problematic to locate the reasons for the emergence of the Homecraft movement during the Federation of the Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

The activities of the Hasfa Homecraft Village were so successful that FWISR, before the so called golden era of partnership,¹⁵⁷ advocated the expansion of such homecraft activities, “particularly one or two for Matebeleland”.¹⁵⁸ An editorial note in the *Homecraft* magazine acknowledged the significance of the village, “Hasfa Homecraft Village was the forerunner

¹⁵⁵ “Hasfa Homecraft Village, M’soneddi: Southern Rhodesia”, in O. Gumprich and E. Yates (compilers), *Women in Central Africa*, p. 106.

¹⁵⁶ “Women’s Institutes Notes: Summary of year’s work by officers and conveners” *Vuka*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1943), p. 43. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁷ Refers to the era of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1953-63) where the argument of racial partnership was used to rally support for the Federation of Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Southern Rhodesia and to justify its establishment.

¹⁵⁸ “Hasfa Homecraft Village, M’soneddi”, *VUKA*, Vol. 1. No.6 (February 1944), p. 59.

of our club movement and leadership training courses, so we can be grateful to those fine women who started them, Catherine Langham and Helen Mangwende.”¹⁵⁹ In 1947, the Gatooma Women’s Institute branch, following the example of Mangwende, started a Women’s Club in the area for African women.¹⁶⁰ As noted, such developments caution us from reading too much into the Federal era in attempting to understand the emergence of the Homecraft movement.

Like the Hasfa Homecraft Village, the Homecraft clubs/institutes were largely engaged in domestic oriented subjects. An article in the *Homecraft* magazine of January 1966 described what constituted ‘a good Homecraft Club’:

A club is not only a place to learn to sew and knit and cook – there are many other things which members must learn if they want to have a good Club. A Club is a place for opening the mind to all kinds of new ideas such as how to wean a baby; how to cook the right food for the family, how to care for your compost and manure... how to look after your cattle, goats and fowls so that they do not die so that your family can have milk, meat and eggs, which are so nourishing; how to keep your home and grounds to keep mosquitoes and flies away, which things bring sickness; how to keep the veldt clean so that you and your children do not get hookworm... how to look after the Club’s money.¹⁶¹

The standard of a good women’s club exposed above betrayed its orientation towards entrenching private domesticity. Clubs were exhorted to religiously conform to the above set standards. In most cases the *Homecraft* magazine, which was published by FWISR, provided the *modus operandi* of Homecraft clubs.

On many occasions, it was difficult to impart western-oriented domestic programmes and activities because of limitations, including the unavailability of necessary resources.

¹⁵⁹ Editorial, “Who Started the Homecraft Movement?” *Homecraft* (August 1965), p. 13.

¹⁶⁰ Dorothy Quaile (editorial), “Gatooma”, *Home and Country*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (March 1965), p. 7.

¹⁶¹ Vivienne Whales, “What is a Good Homecraft Club”, *Homecraft* (January 1966), p. 2.

According to Gaidzanwa, “Given that most of the black women, both rural and urban, did not have the wherewithal to lead this type of life it was not possible for most of them to excel in the approved domestic style of the settlers.”¹⁶² Baking scones, for example, could be limited in the rural areas, by the unavailability of ingredients and stoves, among other things. One Ms E. Mudzinga wrote to the *Homecraft* in 1965 expressing these challenges, “We had nowhere to do our practical cooking. I thought of having a small earth stove. To do this we had to collect some half bricks, unfortunately we found small pieces.”¹⁶³ Evidence from articles written to the *Homecraft* magazine suggests that the use of earth stoves generally became an innovation adopted for baking lessons by many Women’s Clubs throughout the country.

Miriam Staunton recalled an experience that indicates the disparity between what was taught and what was practically possible:

I remember the first time that I met and talked to a group of African women, sitting on the ground in front of me; (Helen [Mangwende] had organised a chair and table for me on which to demonstrate how I washed my baby – using my two-year old daughter’s doll) how humbled I felt. I could explain how I washed my baby each day in her own bath using germ free water from a tap in my bungalow. These women in front of me probably had to walk several miles to a local river, or pond, where the water could be fetched with bilharzia or some pollution and a crocodile could be lurking! How could I expect washing babies to be carried out in these circumstances?¹⁶⁴

In reference to the European lifestyle that was being taught to African women, Miriam admitted to the infeasibility of some of the things. She wrote, “It’s almost pathetic in a way, this yearning to live like we do! I don’t think this is very practical but I hope their coming and my liking to be with them teaching them each week is a small contribution towards our

¹⁶² Rudo Gaidzanwa, “The Ideology of Domesticity and the Struggles of Women Workers in Zimbabwe”, in Amrita Chhachhi and Renée Pittim (eds). *Confronting State, Capital and Patriarchy: Women Organising in the Process of Industrialisation* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), p. 275.

¹⁶³ E. Madzinga, “Letters to the Editor”, *Homecraft* (April 1965), p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ Irene Staunton Papers, Interview given by Miriam Staunton, November 1986.

understanding of one another.”¹⁶⁵ She was referring particularly to unsuccessful baking efforts by one of the women she had taught. It is ironic that she finds the attempts by African women to embrace the teachings “pathetic”. However, Miriam clearly had a self-awareness of the discrepancy between what was being taught in the clubs and what the black women could actually implement.

Some white women, especially in the countryside, also initiated and ran Women’s Clubs for the wives of their labourers and women from neighbouring farms. While these bore some resemblance to the Homecraft clubs run by Women’s Institutes country-wide, the farm clubs were different and usually independent of the mainstream Homecraft movement. The farm clubs were more localised and not affiliated to any women’s organisation and probably did not attend or send representatives to women’s congresses. Libby Garnet recalled her mother, a farmer’s wife, establishing a women’s club in the 1960s for African women in the vicinity. These women “would come to the house and they could sit on the veranda and so she would teach them very simple things like knitting, making a dress... how to cut and make sleeves... making bread and many other things”.¹⁶⁶ African women on such farms were usually involved in club activities during off season when their labour was required less.¹⁶⁷ Like the rest of the Homecraft movement, the Women’s Clubs on the farms reflect continuous interaction and exchange between the white and black women and, at a broader level, the coloniser and the colonised. The farm versions of the Homecraft clubs helped in establishing a good rapport with the farm labour and, by extension, kept a check on ‘desertions’.

¹⁶⁵ RHL MSS AFR. S. 2398, To Mrs. Cheales, 21 July (ny.).

¹⁶⁶ Personal Interview with Libby Garnet, Harare, 2 April 2012.

¹⁶⁷ Miriam Staunton makes this observation and comments on it in her letters to her parents and brother in Britain.

The Homecraft movement declined from the early 1970s, largely owing to the intensification of the Zimbabwean war of independence. In 1978, the membership of the FAWC, for example, had declined to as low as 7,000 from 23,000 in 1975.¹⁶⁸ The war itself made movement dangerous, and the colonial state also made public gatherings illegal. Thus, Edone Logan, a former active member of the Women's Institutes, wrote, "During the war years it became more and more difficult to travel to remote areas. It became illegal to hold meetings, and membership dropped."¹⁶⁹ The attentions and energies of both black and white women were also re-directed to the more pressing demands of the war situation.



Fig 2: Members of FAWC receiving some instructions (n.d.) – Irene Staunton Papers

One might ask whether the relations between white and black women in the Homecraft movement rose beyond maternalistic and racist overtones. In the early period, it seems that the relationship was based on the premise that African women were the recipients of knowledge while the white women were the disseminators of it, what Kaler terms

¹⁶⁸ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 21 June 1978.

¹⁶⁹ Logan, "An Outline", p. 68.

“benevolent domesticity”.¹⁷⁰ Part of an appeal for the increased participation of white women with Wayfarer societies reflects this well:

As regards home-making, the mass of native women who, unlike the native men, have not the advantage of close contact with Europeans, are ignorant: they are unable to use their meagre material resources to the best advantage, and are living and bringing up their children in appalling unhygienic conditions. Who has not felt sorry for the little piccanins with eyes encrusted by disease? Wayfaring is teaching African girls to avoid disease through greater cleanliness.¹⁷¹

The appeal also clearly indicated that the white women were to assume leadership roles in their interactions with African women. It persuaded “the women citizens of Rhodesia” to provide “greater help towards Wayfaring, either by undertaking the leadership of Wayfaring detachments, or by serving on organising committees”.¹⁷²

Kaler provides evidence of at least two perspectives of what she calls visions of domesticity, one she terms “benevolent sisterhood”. She quotes the example of a song by the Bantket Homecraft club, in which African women express gratitude to one Mrs. Mears for teaching them.¹⁷³ Explaining this perspective of domesticity, Kaler indicates that white women expressed “benevolence and philanthropy, founded in the common ‘sisterhood of maternity’ shared between black and white wives and mothers and aimed at the transmission of wifely and motherly skills from white to black”.¹⁷⁴ Miriam Staunton is one of the several women whose initiatives may fall into this category. Her husband reflected in his memoirs that “Miriam [was]... a bit too friendly towards the Africans.”¹⁷⁵ She herself admitted to becoming

¹⁷⁰ Kaler, “Visions of Domesticity”, p. 279.

¹⁷¹ Standing, “Wayfaring: An Explanation and an Appeal”, *Home and Country*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (September 1938), pp. 51-53.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Kaler, “Visions of Domesticity”, pp. 278-9.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 279. Kaler generally seems to underplay the paternalistic and racist overtones that sometimes shaped the relations between black women and white women.

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in Law, “Making Marmalade and Imperial Mentalities”, p. 19.

“really fond” of African women “as people” and noted that “quite a number of Europeans have never met them on equal terms.”¹⁷⁶ Mrs Zenda’s letter of appreciation confirms the close relations that Miriam now had with African women. It reads, “Herewith a hen. What a nice time we had last evening.”¹⁷⁷ Another reference that seems to confirm the close relationship is one she makes regarding one Chief Svosve who “produced half a crown which he said to Frank was to give to me, to ‘Amai wedhu’, which Frank says means something like ‘our dear mother.’” She describes this as “the sweetest gestures of all”.¹⁷⁸

Although white women may have continued to provide leadership within the Homecraft movement in the post-Second World War era, there was also a shift in this approach as African women, too, were increasingly accepted in the 1960s as leaders and teachers of their fellow country women. The *Home and Country* magazine reports of different leadership training programmes that were targeting African women and were sometimes conducted by fellow African women under the auspices of the FWISR. The April issue of 1965, for instance, mentions three leadership programmes that were conducted in Victoria Province, Mashonaland South and Matebeleland in that year. In Victoria Province, “32 rural women attended and the aim was to train the rural women leaders to organise and run their own classes.”¹⁷⁹ This move to involve African women in leadership was born partly out of expediency, as the demand for club activities from African women was overwhelming in relation to the availability of leadership from white women.

Amongst the white women themselves, voluntary activities such as involvement with the Homecraft movement were also a source of debate since it sometimes could compromise

¹⁷⁶ RHA, Mss. Afr.s.2398, To Mrs. Cheales, 13 Nov (ny.).

¹⁷⁷ Irene Staunton Papers, Mrs. I. Zenda to Mrs. Staunton (Wedza), 29 June 1963.

¹⁷⁸ RHA, Mss. Afr.s.2398, To Mrs. Cheales, 7 June 1962.

¹⁷⁹ “FWIR Leadership Training Report”, *Home and Country*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (April 1965), p. 17.

white women's own private domesticity which was held as the ideal by society. Langham, who was instrumental in the establishment of the M'soneddi Homecraft Village, was never married and as such had not endured private domesticity as prescribed by society. In a way, she did not conform to the very same conventions of good housewifery that she was attempting to entrench. While the white women were teaching African women to make the home and its 'pleasures' their destiny and being available to serve the needs of their children and husbands, in most cases they were not doing the same. It is such women that Mrs. Trotman, quoted earlier, described as bad citizens "no matter how much good they may be doing outside their own homes".¹⁸⁰ In one of her letters to her father, Miriam Staunton indicated how it was important for her to maintain a balance between her home and her voluntary work: "This FAWC (Federation of African Women's Clubs) is jolly nearly a full time job and could be if I let it but I have my family and home to consider which some of the spinsters forget!!"¹⁸¹

Despite some isolated cases of dissent amongst the European women about their involvement with Africans, the Homecraft movement registered widespread success, especially before the intensification of the Zimbabwean war of independence in the 1970s. The movement owed its success in part to the efforts of both white and black women. African women, in most cases, enthusiastically embraced the movement, realising benefits that could be derived from their involvement.¹⁸² In an editorial note in the *Home and Country* magazine of 1965, gratitude was extended to African women who had been pivotal to the Homecraft movement, namely,

¹⁸⁰ Chairperson's Address, "Thirteenth Annual Congress of the Federation of Women's Institutes of Southern Rhodesia, Salisbury, July 5th-6th, 1939", *Rhodesia, Home and Country*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1939.

¹⁸¹ RHA, Mss. Afr.s.2398 To Miriam's Father, Rev. J. D. Cheales, 10 March (ny.).

¹⁸² See testimonials of African women in Teresa Barnes and Everjoyce Win, *To Live a Better Life* (Harare: Baobab Books, 1992).

Mrs. Dorothy Moyo and Mrs. Mtero.¹⁸³ These and several other women openly embraced the clubs thereby contributing to the success of the movement. However, there were some African women who chose not to cooperate or participate in these clubs. One frustrated white woman wrote to the *Home and Country* magazine, noting that she was now giving up on forming a women's club because there was little cooperation from the farm African women.¹⁸⁴ It is not clear why there was little cooperation but this indicates that the overwhelming responses of African women to the movement must not be universalised.

It would be wrong to assume that even for those African women who chose to associate with the western oriented domesticity, the relationship with white women was always a top-down one, in which the former were passive recipients. A letter to Miriam Staunton by a leading member of the Wedza Women's Club, Priscilla Mutambirwa, indicates that African women actively advanced their agendas in these clubs and where these may have clashed with those of white women, the former would sometimes win the day. Mrs. Mutambirwa, referring to their disagreement with the wife of the new Native Commissioner, wrote to Miriam: "I had points of disagreement with Mrs Peter Bowyer about the work of the Club and as a result she resigned from the Club. Our committee thinks better without her. Mrs. Grand and Miss Wise were there [sic]."¹⁸⁵ Such instances are rarely captured but they clearly demonstrate that the Homecraft movement was a dialogue between African women and white women, and in this case, the former could negotiate and contest the parameters drawn by the latter.

There is evidence to suggest that African women also worked with white women to negotiate and contest external influences on the manner in which Women's Clubs were run. This could

¹⁸³ Editorial, "Freedom from Hunger Campaign Present Two Land Rovers to FWIR, Homecraft", *Home and Country*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1965), p. 2.

¹⁸⁴ "Around the Institutes", *Home and Country*, Vol. 12, No. 5 (1965), p. 21.

¹⁸⁵ RHA, Mss. Afr.s.2398, Priscilla Mutambirwa to Miriam Staunton, 18 October 1963.

involve challenging local authorities that sought to manipulate or derail the women's movements. Miriam Staunton's letters help illustrate this point. In August 1967, for example, she wrote to her brother that, "I and other members of our FAWC committee are in for a head-on collision with an autocratic District Commissioner (in Mrewa)."¹⁸⁶ She had given the reason in an earlier letter to her mother, "I am preparing to do battle on a matter of principle. He is bullying the African women and imposing a wretched African leader onto them of whom they are afraid (I think myself she has got a screw loose)."¹⁸⁷ Miriam, however, did not have hope in their succeeding: "I don't suppose we shall 'win' the battle but I absolutely refuse not to try to show up truth from false-hood and mercifully have the full backing of other women who feel just as strongly."¹⁸⁸ It is not clear how widespread such alliances between black and white women were but their existence should not be underestimated.

In the 1960s, the colonial government also began to take an interest in the Homecraft movement and established the Department of Community Development whose mandate included extending and assisting with the works of the Homecraft clubs, especially those in the rural areas. This, to a certain extent, represented what white women's organisations had been agitating for. Maia Chenaux-Repond, who became the Provincial Community Development Officer for women in 1973, retold part of her experiences in this department. She was involved in "all aspects of community development whether it was brick and mortar, civic affairs"¹⁸⁹ and worked closely with Homecraft clubs. She remembered at one time having forty-two African women field workers assisting her as women advisors in their areas. This increasing state interest in community development projects may have led scholars such as Shaw and Ranchod-Nilsson to interpret the Homecraft movement as part of an effort to

¹⁸⁶ RHL MSS AFR. S. 2398, To Clement, 5 August 1967.

¹⁸⁷ RHL MSS AFR. S. 2398, To Mrs. Cheales, 1 August 1967.

¹⁸⁸ RHL MSS AFR. S. 2398, To Clement, 5 August 1967.

¹⁸⁹ Personal Interview with Maia Chenaux-Repond, Harare, 24 June 2011.

stamp out the African nationalism that was threatening the power base of the white society. This conclusion poses a danger of denying agency to such white women as Miriam Staunton and Catherine Langham and women's organisations like FWISR whose motives and involvement with African Women's Clubs were independent of the state.

Liberal White Women

In Southern Rhodesia, white women who went to great lengths to interact and mingle with Africans have been labelled "liberal".¹⁹⁰ This is a contested term however. According to Ian Hancock the Rhodesians used the term "to denote attitudes towards race relations and, specifically, on the desirability or otherwise of African political, social and economic advancement".¹⁹¹ Thus the description of one as liberal must be appreciated within the context of Southern Rhodesia's racialised society. Equally important is the fact that there were gradations and variants to this liberalism. Most of the white women who volunteered to work with African women, especially in the early years of the Homecraft movement, could be described as liberal because they extended their relations to Africans when the dominant racial ideology promoted otherwise. These interactions were, at times, informed by certain erroneous assumptions about, and racial prejudices against, African ways of living. Because the subject of liberal white women has already been dealt with by Kate Law¹⁹² in a manner that is quite persuasive and detailed, this section makes what can be largely considered a cursory commentary on this subject bringing in cases different to those she cites.

¹⁹⁰ For a detailed analysis on the use of the term white liberals see Ian Hancock, *White Liberals, Moderates and Radicals in Rhodesia 1953-1980* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); and Law, "Writing White Women: Whiteness, Gender, Politics and Power in Rhodesia", c. 1950 -1980" (Ph. D. Thesis, University of Sheffield, History Department, 2012); "Liberal Women in Rhodesia: Report of the Mitchell Papers, University of Cape Town", *History in Africa*, Vol. 37 (2010).

¹⁹¹ Hancock, *White Liberals*. In this category of liberal whites can be included women such as Muriel Rosin (discussed in greater detail in chapter 5), Eileen Haddon and Margaret Moore, among many others.

¹⁹² Kate Law looks at Miriam Staunton, Eileen Haddon and Diana Mitchell in her various works. See Law, "Writing White Women"; "'Even a labourer is worthy of his hire"; "Making Marmalade and Imperial Mentalities" and "Liberal Women in Rhodesia: Report of the Mitchell Papers".

It can be argued that the liberals were not very much different from the so-called conservatives in that the former sought to preserve the status quo, especially the economic power of the whites by making concessions to black majority rule which was believed to be inevitable. A peaceful concession, it is claimed, would have ensured these liberals a piece of the economic cake of an independent nation under majority rule. The advice given by National Unifying Force (NUF), a liberal political organisation formed in January 1977,¹⁹³ to the business community not to oppose majority rule, seems to support this thinking. NUF advised the business community “to stand up and be counted, so that when majority rule comes it will be remembered that your heart was in the right place.”¹⁹⁴ The liberals were thus simply more far-sighted than the conservatives but no less self-centred. This argument, however persuasive it sounds, must not be universalised. There were many white men and women who were driven by genuine belief in justice and prepared to even endure persecution for such. Sadly, for the historian, it is not easy to measure with certainty whether or not one was genuine in their relations to Africans.

Being liberal was certainly not a fixed attribute and the manner in which this was played out by an individual was complex and dynamic. There were individuals who were liberal in their perceptions of and relations with Africans as a whole but some whites were liberal in as far as they related to certain groups of Africans. Mention has already been made of Miriam Staunton who held conservative ideas about African nationalists and the ability of Africans to rule themselves. In one of her letters written in 1964, for example, she condemned the support that Britain gave to the independence of African nations and argued that these new

¹⁹³ NUF was made up of old members of the Centre Party (CP) and the Rhodesia Party (RP) which had now lost their momentum as opposition parties to the ruling Rhodesian Front (RF). For a discussion of Rhodesian politics in the 1970s see Godwin and Hancock, *Rhodesians Never Die*.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in Law, “Writing White Women”, p. 202.

nations were without democracy, “hence the arson and murder now going on all over Africa”.¹⁹⁵ She wrote, “In spite of all the evidence before their eyes the British still wanted us to give up our rule to these kinds of Africans [sic].”¹⁹⁶ In the same letter, she referred to African nationalists as “inexperienced, power hungry Africans”.¹⁹⁷ Writing to her mother two years later Miriam opined, “I do not think Africans as yet ready for full government responsibility in a modern state.”¹⁹⁸ Thus clearly, when it came to African nationalists, Miriam remained conservative and yet, as indicated in this chapter, regarding African women, she shifted noticeably over time in terms of her racial stereotypes. Miriam’s example demonstrates the complexity of labelling white women “liberal” in their relations and attitudes to Africans. Clearly, being liberal did not necessarily imply being immune to racial prejudice or stereotypes.

Langham, discussed earlier, is another white woman who could be classified as liberal as she went out of her way to interact more with Africans, especially women, at a time when such interactions were frowned upon. She even persuaded her contemporaries to understand Africans and do away with some of the racial prejudices.¹⁹⁹ In the political side of things, apart from women like Diana Mitchell and Eileen Haddon discussed by Law, other liberal white women included Margaret Moore,²⁰⁰ Patricia Pearce²⁰¹ and Muriel Rosin. The discussion will be restricted to the last three women. These women were extraordinary in their interactions with and relations to Africans as they demonstrated tolerance to the concept of majority rule. Margaret was more radical in this regard, having served as secretary in one

¹⁹⁵ RHL MSS AFR. S. 2398, To Mrs. Cheales, 28 October 1964.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ RHL MSS AFR. S. 2398 To Mrs. Cheales, 1 November 1966.

¹⁹⁹ Langham, “The Native Question”, p. 13.

²⁰⁰ I am grateful to Terence Ranger and Clarke Marieke for leading me to the Stanley and Margaret Moore papers in the Rhodes Library, Oxford. The latter’s arrangement of the papers makes it easy for researchers to follow the subject matter.

²⁰¹ Information about the life of Patricia Pearce was obtained through an interview with one of her grandchildren, Anna Brazier. Personal Interview with Anna Brazier, Harare, 15 August 2011.

of the African nationalist parties in the country, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). Margaret Moore became associated with African nationalism from the late 1950s, and, in 1962, she wrote a note in which she described the nature of her involvement with African Nationalists as follows:

I am not really a 'political type.' My concern has always been for people, and so over some nine or ten years, Stanley and I have become more and more closely associated with people of other communities, and have been accepted and trusted by them. We have thus come to know hundreds of people and know how they feel about life in this country. We have felt with them the indignation of the "colour-bar" and been impressed at the dignity and the good nature in which it has been ignored or made allowance for.²⁰²

Confirming this acceptance of the Moores by, and trust from, African Nationalists is a letter from Josiah Chinamano, a prominent nationalist then based in the Wha Wha Restriction Area, to Margaret and Stanley in 1966. He wrote: "Many thanks for your letter of 15 October and for reminding us of our good old days at Waddilove and other places. Indeed, God willing, those days will come back again."²⁰³ He proceeded to entrust them with a cheque for £10 and gave them a set of instructions for his family.²⁰⁴ Margaret and her husband earned labels such as "plotters or subversive agents of African Nationalism" and "organisers of action against the Smith Regime"²⁰⁵ for their continued close association with African nationalists. In 1962, Margaret and two other white liberals were "restricted as political offenders".²⁰⁶ Significantly, Margaret's involvement both with ZAPU and, later, with organisations assisting detainees and ex-detainees was all voluntary.

²⁰² RHL (not catalogued), Margaret and Stanley Moore Papers, A note by Margaret Moore (n.d.).

²⁰³ RHL (not catalogued), Margaret and Stanley Moore Papers, Josiah Chinamano to Margaret and Stanley, Wha Wha Restriction Area, 12 December 1966.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ RHL (not catalogued), Margaret and Stanley Moore Papers, Stanley Moore to Elizabeth, Member of the Quakers/Friends group (n.d.).

²⁰⁶ *Observer*, 20 September 1962.

Unlike Margaret Moore or other white women, Muriel Rosin's interactions with Africans were largely shaped by her political career. She was the second, of the only three women parliamentarians in colonial Zimbabwe, and she became associated with Africans as a member of a multi-racial party, the United Federal Party. She also opened up her home to Africans, especially those from the middle class. Like Margaret, Rosin believed that majority rule was inevitable and criticised the lack of freedom in the media which she called "a very one-side media which did not allow any controversial debate on political subjects to take place".²⁰⁷ She campaigned for the opening up of the media to everyone, including nationalist leaders and opposition parties, and urged Smith to "accept the irreversibility of the progress to majority rule openly and without fear."²⁰⁸ Being a strong believer in meritocracy, Rosin's philosophy was that, "cream would always rise to the top, whether male or female, black or white".²⁰⁹ In the later years after independence, she was described as an "arch-enemy of UDI" who "stood and believed in elimination of racial discrimination".²¹⁰ Like Margaret, Muriel was also criticised for working closely with Africans, and particularly for her close association with Chad Chipunza, a fellow party member and Member of Parliament.²¹¹

Another personality who could be considered to have been liberal is Patricia Pearce who, according to her grandchild, Anna Brazier, lived in Rhodesia for most of her life. Patricia became involved with the African nationalist liberation struggle, "helping the wives of guerrillas and giving support to the whole movement including helping the Tangwena people in Manicaland".²¹² Like several white women, Patricia had also been "involved with women's literacy and health projects and numerous other do-gooding as well as promoting African

²⁰⁷ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 7 March 1977.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Kufakurinani and E. Musiiwa, "The Unsung Heroine", p. 8.

²¹⁰ *The Herald*. 10 December 1998.

²¹¹ Mitchell, Muriel Rosin Draft Biography, Chapter 8 – Federation.

²¹² Personal Interview with Anna Brazier, Harare, 15 August 2011.

artists”.²¹³ Anna Brazier notes that Patricia was secretly involved with African nationalists and “through grapevine the white community started to become more and more suspicious about what she was doing... at one point she was hiding a radio which was used for communication between the liberation army and their headquarters.”²¹⁴ It is said that Patricia became some kind of communications person for the liberation fighters. The state made investigations into Patricia’s alleged subversive activities, leading to her deportation. Narrating some of her contributions, Anna noted that, “My grandmother then started getting involved with people like Didymus Mutasa and Morvan Mahachi and she actually sent or she thought she sent Didymus Mutasa to China to become a proper communist because she was quite a socialist.”²¹⁵ Unfortunately, no other material has been available about Patricia apart from such memories, and efforts to track down other family members have been fruitless. Though the narration by Anna Brazier has limitations in terms of detail and accuracy on dates and other things, it indicates that some white women went out of their way to assist African nationalist in their cause.

Conclusion

The chapter has assessed the various spaces of encounter between white Rhodesian women and Africans. It explained the increasing interest of white women in the affairs of Africans within the context of the dominant gender, racial and class ideologies. The chapter has also contextualised the interest of white women in African welfare and has indicated that this was largely driven by self-interest. It has discussed the nature of relations between white women and Africans within domestic spaces. The Homecraft movement was assessed in terms of its origins, mandate and impact. As indicated, the domestic ideology was important in the

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

formulation of this movement. I have demonstrated that, contrary to what some scholars have stated, the Homecraft movement was already part of the colonial system before its more closely studied post-Second World War activities. In the final analysis, the chapter examined the “liberal” women and the nature of their encounter with Africans. On the whole, the chapter has illustrated the patterns that emerged and the variety of activities that cemented varied gendered and racialised set of practices between white women and blacks.

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CHAPTER FIVE

DOMESTIC DEVIANCE

Introduction

The introduction of this thesis explored the concept of domesticity, explained its main tenets and provided an operational framework of how it would be applied in the rest of this research. The subsequent chapters used empirical evidence from Southern Rhodesia to demonstrate the workings of this ideology. The story thus far, has been largely about conformity to, and the hegemonic influence of, the domestic ideal. But in reality, ideology is more complex in its working. This final chapter seeks to present a break in the thread of conformity and hegemonic influence by demonstrating that there were women who, at least at face value, did not necessarily conform to or fall under the hegemonic influence of the domestic ideology. This discussion further illustrates the complex nature of domesticity and its workings, while acknowledging the grey areas of this ideology. Thus, attention in this chapter is paid to cases of what appears to be domestic deviance.¹ Such deviance went well beyond contesting housewifery by taking up wage employment.

The women who defied domesticity to relatively extreme degrees did exceptional or extraordinary things. It is such deviant women that are referred to here as 'wild' or deviant - for they defied being domesticated/tamed.² This group of women included those who broke into the male dominated arenas of executive management, politics and business. Also

¹ The use of the theme of deviance in understanding and conceptualising empire was inspired by a discussion that I had with William Jackson at the International Federation for Research in Women's History & Women's History Network - International Conference, Sheffield Hallam, 29 August - 1 September 2013, on what he termed 'deviance and empire' in which he argued for greater analysis of how deviance was handled by the colonial regimes and how this also shaped colonial society. Broadly defined, deviance implied behaviour or way of doing things that was against accepted norms at various levels.

² The conceptualisation of domesticity in the introduction of this thesis has shown how domesticity also echoes images of taming something wild.

included in this category of domestic deviance were women who refused to be bound by social norms and expectations in terms of morality and/or their final career destinations. Examples of women that fell into this category are those who had extra-marital affairs, those “who had become native”,³ white women prostitutes, drunkards and those who chose not to marry.

This chapter has four main objectives. The first is to illustrate the nature of experiences of the deviant women; the second is to account for the domestic deviance for selected categories of these women. The third objective is to discuss the responses of the Rhodesian state and society and finally to examine how, and to what extent, wild women defied the domestic ideology. The chapter has three sections. The first section addresses the subject of white women who defied social norms and expectations. From this category, the analysis will narrow down to and revolve around white women’s prostitution which, because it was considered immoral, defied domesticity. While it would be interesting to look at the everyday conduct of this business, the section will concentrate largely on how this trade, and the debates on it, interacted with the domestic ideology. The nature of available sources limits the analysis to the first two decades of the twentieth century. It also makes it difficult to explore the voices of the white women prostitutes themselves. The second and third sections will be dedicated to the category of women who took up active participation in the public spaces and will narrow its analysis to one woman, Muriel Rosin, who penetrated the male dominated public and political world. It will be shown that while at face value Rosin may have penetrated the male world and, therefore, defied domesticity, a closer analysis suggests that she also appropriated and exported elements of domesticity into the public and political world. Her experience further demonstrates the complexity of domesticity.

³ Personal Interview with J. Stewart, Mount Pleasant, 13 April 2010. This referred to white women that became “excessively” associated with Africans in ways not expected by society.

Defying social norms: White women's prostitution, 1900 to c1920

As discussed in previous chapters, the social norms in Southern Rhodesia sought to domesticate white women. However, some women defied domesticity. Women were expected to eventually marry and settle down as mothers/wives. Avoiding marriage was therefore one way of contesting domestication. Bridget Sinclair recalled, "amongst my mother's friends I could think of five spinster women who were teaching."⁴ A single woman could enjoy a set of liberties such as managing her own accounts and finances and did not always need a husband to get things approved or done. As shown in earlier discussions, the domestic ideal also assumed and expected high moral standards – i.e. monogamous behaviour – for married women. White women were thus also expected to exhibit and spread moral virtue. Women who indulged in prostitution, interracial sex, heavy drunkenness and extra-marital affairs, among other acts interpreted as social vices, were thus wild in the Rhodesian context. Because of the nature of sources available and constraints of space, this section will narrow its discussion to the practice of white prostitution in early Southern Rhodesia and the controversies surrounding this trade.

Prostitution challenged the domestic ideology in several ways. First, in the words of Levine, "Sexual commerce upset ... boundaries of public and private."⁵ Secondly, it is likely that, the women prostitutes did not marry, which meant defying expected social norms and 'escaping' domestication in the form of motherhood or housewifery. Thirdly, the trade was considered immoral by settler society and thus antithetical to domesticity. Despite apparent deviance to domesticity, prostitution in early Salisbury and the debates on this trade fed into the domestic ideology to a certain extent. White cautions us from understanding prostitution from the point

⁴ Personal Interview with Bridget Sinclair, Harare, 23 February 2013. Of course, there could be several other reasons for their not marrying which were not necessarily linked to a conscious effort to defy domesticity.

⁵ Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics*, p. 298.

of “reform moralisms” and isolating prostitution “in the categories of deviancy and subculture”.⁶ For her, understanding the trade “must come from the labour process of prostitution”.⁷ My research on white women prostitution, however, suggests otherwise. Indeed, the debates on and perceptions of this trade were moulded by categories of deviance and subculture. This is because arguments for and against the trade were intertwined with prostitution as deviance from socially accepted norms.

Prostitution in Southern Rhodesia dates as far back as the late 1890s, when white women began to trickle into the country. The 1915 Brundell Report dated the earliest cases of white prostitution to 1899. Two cases were noted, namely one of Louisa Newman, a French national who had been “convicted several times for supplying liquor to natives [and] ... was known to be a prostitute and to cohabit with natives”.⁸ This woman was tarred and feathered on 11 December 1902 by the general public of Bulawayo which was “so incensed at her manner of living”.⁹ The second case was of Maud Cotter, “a Colonial born woman known to be a prostitute resident of Bulawayo who was repeatedly convicted of supplying liquor to natives, known to live with natives and commit such acts of immorality which are too impossible to describe”.¹⁰ She too was tarred and feathered on the same date as Louisa Newman, and both women were also arrested and convicted later in 1903, under the Immorality Suppression Ordinance of the same year, for continued practice of their trade.

The Immorality Suppression Ordinance and the Immorality and Indecency Suppression Ordinance of 1903 and 1916 respectively, were some of the pieces of legislation provided to

⁶ White, *The Comforts of Home*, p. 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸ NAZ, S1222/2, Report by the Superintendent of the CID, BSAC Police, 13/03/1915.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

tighten control over white women's sexuality.¹¹ These ordinances criminalised sexual intimacy between white women and black men. Sexual intercourse with an African man could attract up to two years imprisonment with hard labour for white women while the men could get up to five years. Another piece of legislation was Ordinance 13 of 1900. This Ordinance was "To amend the Criminal Law and make further provision for the protection of women and girls, the suppression of brothels and other purposes."¹² The third piece of legislation was the 1904 Immigration Ordinance, which imposed restrictions on immigrants and provided for the removal of prohibited immigrants from Southern Rhodesia. Section 4 of the Ordinance defined 'prohibited immigrants' to include "any person male or female, who lives on or knowingly receives any part of the proceeds of prostitution, either by way of rent or otherwise."¹³ In the early twentieth century, most white women were immigrants and, as such, the Ordinance could easily be applied to those who became prostitutes. Brundell's report gives a few examples of female prostitutes who were convicted under the existing laws and, at times, deported. Those deported usually would have transgressed racial boundaries in their choices of clients.

Prostitution in Salisbury's Pioneer Street attracted the most attention of the public media, residents, the colonial government and the company administrators in London.¹⁴ Prostitution in this street can be dated to as early as 1900.¹⁵ Some of the prostitutes residing in or operating from Pioneer Street around the Kopje area had migrated from localities such as

¹¹ For a discussion of immorality ordinances in early Southern Rhodesia see Pascal Stewart Chideu, "Regulating White Women's Sexuality in Southern Rhodesia: The Immorality and Indecency Suppression Ordinance of 1916" (Hons. Diss., University of Zimbabwe, Economic History Department, 2014).

¹² Ordinance No. 13, 1900.

¹³ Ordinance No. 10, 1904.

¹⁴ There also similar public debates over prostitution in South Africa in which the state clashed with different stakeholders over the existence and regulation of prostitution. See van Heyningen, "The Social Evil in the Cape Colony 1868-1902"; Van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914*; Van Onselen, *The Fox and the Flies*.

¹⁵ These cases are documented in File NAZ, S1222/2, Report by the Superintendent of the CID, BSAC Police, 13/03/1915.

Gwelo, Bulawayo and Umtali,¹⁶ while others came from different parts of the world including France, South Africa and Buenos Aires.¹⁷ In Salisbury it was in 1907 that “the attention of the Town Council was drawn to the prevalence of the Social Evil in a certain street, and a special committee was formed to deal with the matter.”¹⁸ This committee, referred to as the Special Committee on Prostitution in Pioneer Street, concluded that the “open prostitution in Salisbury”¹⁹ practised by some white women was cause for grave concern. The Town Council proceeded to make appeals to various authorities including the High Commissioner of South Africa, the Resident Commissioner, BSACo board members in London and the Company Administration in Southern Rhodesia, which was ruling the country.

Prostitution by white women seemed to be on the increase in the first decade of the century, especially in Pioneer Street raising concern amongst the public. Writing in April 1909, the Town Council noted that “the number of brothels in Pioneer Street [had] gradually increased and there [were] now nine of them, containing 20 or 30 females.”²⁰ Eight of the brothels were actually “owned and occupied by prostitutes [and were] valued for municipal purposes at £3,665”.²¹ This implied some kind of prosperity, which had the potential to attract more women into the business. Members of the public were also concerned about the behaviour of these prostitutes. It was also noted in 1909 that prostitutes in Pioneer Street were, “day by day getting more insolent to passers-by, and out-stepping all the bounds of propriety even during

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ NAZ, A3/28/60, The Town Clerk to the Administrator, 19 February 1912; NAZ, S1222/2, Report by the Superintendent of the CID, BSAC Police, 13/03/1915.

¹⁸ NAZ, A3/28/60, H. H Brown to H. Birchenough (Company board member), London, 4 February 1910. The committee was made up officials of the Town Council and some residents.

¹⁹ NAZ, A3/28/60, The Salisbury Town Council to the High Commissioner per (via) the Resident Commissioner, 30 April 1909.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

day time".²² It is not clear what form this insolence and outstepping of boundaries of propriety took. However, these developments clearly sparked concerns from the public and appeals were made as part of a series of debates, which invoked moralist, materialist, racist and imperialist reasons for and against prostitution in Salisbury in particular and Southern Rhodesia at large. Noteworthy is the fact that debates over prostitution were not a peculiar development to Southern Rhodesia. Heyningen and Van Onslen, in their separate studies, have shown that similar debates which involved the state, colonial residents, media and moralists, among others featured in colonial South Africa at times leading to formulation or repeal of certain policies.²³

The debate over prostitution in Salisbury's Pioneer Street reveals the extent to which the workings of the domestic ideology interplayed with other forces such as race, class and religion. The government, in the person of the Administrator, on the one hand, saw prostitution in Salisbury's Pioneer Street as a necessary evil. On the other hand there were residents, such as the ministers of religion and municipal officials who wanted this 'evil' extirpated. Despite conflicting attitudes on how white female prostitution in the street was supposed to be managed, a closer analysis shows that these debates were also concerned with, among other things, domesticating the 'wild' women involved in or contemplating prostitution as an occupation.

The manner in which the different groups of settlers intended to domesticate these women differed widely. For the state, prostitution was a necessary evil in that these 'wild' women could play a crucial role in the reproduction and preservation of the imperial race. It was argued that given the skewed sex ratio, white women's prostitution would help draw away

²² NAZ, A3/28/60, Annexure no. 1, 2 February 1909.

²³ van Heyningen, "The Social Evil in the Cape Colony 1868-1902"; van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand*; van Onslen, *The Fox and the Flies*.

white men's attention from African women, which was diluting the imperial race. In his response to the 1907 petitions against prostitution by Salisbury residents, the Administrator wrote:

If the evil [prostitution] were absolutely suppressed, such suppression would be a source of danger to the community in general and would almost inevitably cause relations to be established between Europeans and natives which are wholly undesirable and dangerous.²⁴

The relations between whites and Africans were "undesirable and dangerous" on at least two levels. Firstly, it could compromise the project of domesticating/civilising Africans. Secondly, as noted, it would impinge on the reproduction of a 'pure' imperial race.

In light of this, the Administrator, therefore, argued that the government, at best, could only control the "social evil" rather than eradicate it. Part of the response of the Administrator to the petition highlighted this policy:

As the evil undoubtedly must exist, the only course open is to provide that anything of a nature offensive to the public shall be absolutely controlled and prevented. The most effective way of ensuring this is that these unfortunates should remain in that part of the town least frequented by the general body of the inhabitants. This, in the opinion of the Administrator, has been achieved by their spontaneous settlement in the locality where they now live. In addition, the constabulary have informed those concerned that anything occurring which might be offensive to those of the public who are obliged to use that part of the town will be severely dealt with, and offenders prosecuted under the stringent provisions of the existing law.²⁵

The supervision of prostitution cases and the restriction to a locality that could be monitored was an attempt to domesticate these 'wild' women by way of controlling/containing their 'wild' activities.

²⁴ NAZ, A3/28/60, The Administrators' Office to the petition by the public on prostitution, 9 March 1909, quoted in *The Herald*, 29 April 1909.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

The relegation by government of prostitution to a certain street was not well received in some circles. A campaign was launched against the trade in Salisbury. One letter to *The Herald* of 1909 invoked notions of respectability for the colony and displayed outrage at the manner in which the government sought to control “anything of a nature offensive to the public”.²⁶ The correspondent wrote, “This communication (from the government), which is likely to achieve notoriety, places Salisbury in the position of being about the *only town in the British Empire* where prostitution is officially recognised, and where a particular locality is indicated as a sanctuary for unfortunates.”²⁷ The mere recognition of the trade was in itself considered deplorable, and reference was made to how the attitude of the government was “utterly out of keeping with the high standard of Administration obtaining in all other parts of His Majesty’s Dominions”.²⁸

The anti-prostitution campaign challenged the oxymoron “a necessary evil” used by the government in its description of prostitution by white women in Pioneer Street, arguing that this phrase was illogical. Mr. Cleveland, one of the councillors, said he “had yet to learn the logic of a thing being an evil and being also necessary”,²⁹ adding that “if it was necessary it was not an evil and should be regulated by licence”.³⁰ Ministers of religion quizzed the government on its usage of this phrase and protested “emphatically against the description of prostitution as a ‘necessary’ evil”.³¹ For the clergy, such a description cast “a slur on the good character of our citizens and on the good name of our town, and would appear to be distinct encouragement of vice”.³² The government then tried to disassociate itself from the initial use of the controversial phrase, pointing out that, on its part, it considered the occurrence an

²⁶ *The Herald*, 12 March 1909.

²⁷ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

²⁸ NAZ, A3/28/60, The Town Clerk to the Administrator, 25 March 1909.

²⁹ NAZ, A3/28/60, Minutes of Town Council Meeting (nd). The meeting was convened to respond to a letter from the Administrator’s office written on the 9th of March 1909 (the meeting itself is not dated).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ NAZ, A3/28/60, Annexure 3a, The ministers of religion to the Administrator, 17 March 1909.

³² *Ibid.*

'inevitable evil'. But this did not make the government's case anymore acceptable. *The Herald* noted that whether the 'evil' be called necessary or inevitable, it remained so, adding that "as long as human nature is what it is, there will be crime, but to say that crime is inevitable is an unconvincing argument against the employment of the strenuous methods to suppress it".³³

The anti-prostitution campaign used various arguments to justify the termination of prostitution, and one of which was centred on prostitution constituting immoral conduct. The involvement of white women in this trade also challenged their expected roles, as mothers of empire, of advancing civilisation. In fact, white patriarchal society saw this trade as hampering efforts to extend western civilisation to Africans. The ministers of religion were among those who championed the moralist argument. Referring to the brothels and prostitution in Pioneer Street the Reverend John White, in his presentation to the High Commissioner for South Africa, stated that "the very existence of such houses and such traffic in itself constituted a condition of public indecency".³⁴ Further evidence of the degree of immorality of prostitution and its impact was provided by reference to increased impropriety in Pioneer Street. It was noted this impropriety was so great that residents, together with their children, were being "debarred from making use of the readiest means of access to the town",³⁵ and those living on the south side of the Kopje were forced "in the heat of the day... to climb up and down the Kopje on their way to and from their work instead of going round by the natural road".³⁶ All these arguments were presented to demonstrate the perceived unacceptable extent of this immoral conduct.

³³ *The Herald*, 22 March 1909.

³⁴ NAZ, A3/28/60, Untitled notes of an interview between the deputation from public bodies and H. E. The Earl of Selborne, High Commissioner for South Africa held at Cecil House, Salisbury, Rhodesia, 10 November 1909.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

White women's prostitution in Pioneer Street was also argued to have the potential to trigger or encourage moral deviance amongst Africans, whom the colonialists also sought to *domesticate*. In 1909, the Salisbury Town Clerk expressed his fears that prostitution would negatively impact on Africans:

The street to which they [prostitutes] are confined lies directly between the town on the one hand and the Native Location and cemetery on the other. The native population is thus obliged to pass and re-pass day after day, the whole stretch of the tainted area; and the effect upon the native mind of [such] visible and flagrant vice is too awful to contemplate.³⁷

One can only conjecture on the perceived effect on "the native mind". For Mr. Coxwell, a member of the Special Committee on Prostitution in Pioneer Street, the concern was "the moral influence on the minds of the natives when they saw a whole street given up to the purpose of immorality in such an open and bare faced manner".³⁸ Mr. Coxwell's concern, like that of his contemporaries, was with maintaining a certain standard of respectability believed to be in keeping with the image of a superior race. Failure to do so would also compromise efforts at 'civilising' Africans.

The 'wild' behaviour of the white prostitutes in the presence of or with Africans also punctured the images of racial superiority and further compromise the civilising project. In his presentation to the High Commissioner, the Reverend John White made reference to one High Court case in which an African had intervened to prevent a fight in Pioneer Street between one drunken prostitute and "another unfortunate woman".³⁹ He added, "It is needless for me to comment on the awful effect such a sordid spectacle would have on the

³⁷ NAZ, A3/28/60, The Salisbury Town Council to the High Commissioner, 30 April 1909.

³⁸ NAZ, A3/28/60, Annexure no. 5, 25 March 1909.

³⁹ NAZ, A3/28/60, Notes of an interview between the deputation from public bodies and H. E. The Earl of Selborne, High Commissioner for South Africa held at Cecil House, Salisbury, Rhodesia, 10 November 1909.

minds of any natives who may have witnessed it.”⁴⁰ In another case, one Margaret Herdies, a prostitute in Pioneer Street, was known to be “a habitual drunkard and during her periodic bouts of drunkenness associated with natives”.⁴¹ Renee Bredof was one of several prostitutes who took in African clients.⁴² As already indicated, these sexual relations between African men and white prostitutes were also perceived as contributing to ‘black peril’.

Brundell’s report on the cases of white prostitution noted that the prevalence of the black peril in Bulawayo, the second largest city from Salisbury, during the years 1902 and 1903 was mainly attributed by the general public to one notorious white prostitute who took in black clients.⁴³ According to Jeater, such women were accused of ‘lowering’ their standards while at the same time ‘raising’ those of Africans, leading the latter “to imagine themselves equal to whites”.⁴⁴ This would incite “African men to attack white women”.⁴⁵ Some members of the white community believed these sexual encounters were responsible for awakening “the inherent perversity of African male sexuality and led to assaults on other European women”.⁴⁶ According to settler stereotypes, where sexual matters were concerned, an African was also seen as wild and uncontrollable.⁴⁷ Thus these wild women would, in this respect, also compromise the project of *domesticating* Africans on the moral frontier.

‘Extreme’ instances of interracial sex that involved white women prostitutes such as those referred to above usually led to deportation, as in the cases of Margaret Herdies and Renee

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ NAZ, S 1227/2, Black and White Perils in Southern Rhodesia: Special File, 1916.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Jeater, *Marriage, Pervasion, and Power*, p. 92.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 89.

⁴⁷ Miriam Staunton in one of her letters to her father in London, for example wrote, “the African in his primitive state is so horridly ‘over-sexed’”, RHL, MSS AFR. S. 2398, To J. D. Cheales (Father), 17 February 1958. These images of Africans as sexually untamed have also been captured by scholars such as Schmidt, *Peasant, Traders and Wives* and McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.

Bredof mentioned above. These deportations were usually made under the 1903 Immorality Suppression Ordinance. In 1916 Brundell recommended that sexual relations between blacks and whites continue to be prohibited as these had “the effect of lowering the status of the European or governing race”.⁴⁸ As Pape notes, “the white population was quick to unleash their wrath upon any white women who were not prepared to tow the racial line in their business affairs.”⁴⁹ Elsewhere in the British Empire similar trends were observed. William Jackson has noted in the case of Kenya, that white women who were “thought to be having sex with Africans were instantly ostracised from respectable society”.⁵⁰ Indeed, in Southern Rhodesia, as in Kenya, “physical intimacy between white women and black men was perceived as symbolic of the yielding of civilisation to barbarism”.⁵¹ It is not surprising that the arrests which took place in Pioneer Street and subsequent convictions seemed to target the more “offensive” cases that crossed the racial boundary. However, this piecemeal solution to the problem of prostitution did not address the larger concerns of the Salisbury residents, who wanted to have the whole trade extirpated.

Apart from arguments informed by the domestic ideology, there were also those informed by economic, social and aesthetical considerations. On the economic front, opponents of white women’s prostitution argued that this trade would have a negative impact on property values. In February 1909, the spokesman of the Deputation to the Administrator noted that prostitution in Pioneer Street led to “the serious depreciation of property in the neighbourhood”.⁵² “On this ground alone”, the spokesman continued, “we feel that we are

⁴⁸ NAZ, S1222/2, Report by the Superintendent of the CID, BSAC Police, 13/03/1915.

⁴⁹ Pape, “Black and White”, p. 703.

⁵⁰ William Jackson, “Poor Men and Loose Women”, p. 114.

⁵¹ Phillips, “The Perils of Sex and the Panics of Race”, p. 107.

⁵² NAZ, A3/28/60, Extract from remarks made by the spokesman of Deputation to the Administrator, 2 February 1909.

amply justified in taking action to purify the street".⁵³ Appealing to the Directors of the BSAC in London, the Salisbury Mayor, W. H. Brown, proposed that the company purchase the eight houses used as brothels, and added; "I am confident that the enhanced value of these stands, once the brothels were removed would more than recoup the company for the expenditure. There is every indication that Pioneer Street will become a respectable residential quarter once the brothels are removed."⁵⁴ It was hoped that given the profit-seeking motive of the company, an appeal coated in prospects of financial gains would persuade the BSAC officials.⁵⁵ This appeal, however, like several others to follow, did not register any success for Salisbury residents.

Aesthetical considerations were also put forward in the campaigns against prostitution in Pioneer Street. Proponents against prostitution argued that the continued existence of the trade in Salisbury would tarnish "the good name and well-being of this place"⁵⁶. On this note, the deputation from the Salisbury Town Council to the Administrator argued that "Pioneer Street forms the main avenue of approach to the town from the south, and it is much to be regretted that strangers entering the town whether by train or otherwise should receive such an unfavourable impression as the first view of the town must present."⁵⁷ Being "situated at the foot of the east side of their beautiful kopje",⁵⁸ it was also felt that the area had the potential to become a pleasure resort and in this respect, the Town Council were doing all that they could to make this a reality.⁵⁹ Yet by failing to act swiftly and more decisively against this 'social evil', it was argued, "the Government ... were doing all they could to

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ NAZ, A3/28/60, W. H. Brown, Mayor of Salisbury to H. Birchenough, London, 1 February 1910.

⁵⁵ For an interesting discussion on the BSAC and its profit making motives, see K. Chitofiri, "Hopes and Expectations: the relationship between the British South African Company Directors and Shareholders, 1890 to 1923" (M. A. Diss., University of Zimbabwe, Economic History Department, 2007).

⁵⁶ *The Herald*, 22 March 1909.

⁵⁷ NAZ, A3/28/60, Annexure no. 1, 2 February 1909.

⁵⁸ NAZ, A3/28/60, Annexure no. 5, 25 March 1909.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

damn it”.⁶⁰ For the council deputation to the Administrator, the Kopje was “being given up to... base uses [and] the townspeople are not only debarred from the enjoyment of a splendid natural park, but they are ashamed to invite visitors to ascend the kopje or even take a drive around the circular road at the foot”.⁶¹

Social considerations were also presented, as the dead were also brought into the arguments for a hard line against prostitution in Pioneer Street. Coxwell noted that “Pioneer Street was the natural road to the cemetery, yet what happened now was that every funeral had to go by a straggling road at the back of it.”⁶² According to the spokesman of the deputation to the Administrator, “even if a circuitous route is taken, it is difficult if not impossible to avoid seeing objectionable sights on the melancholy occasions when we are conveying our dead to the burial”.⁶³ An article in *The Herald* of 21 April 1909 also made reference to the proximity of the area to the cemetery, noting that “people cannot bury their dead here without being reminded of a scandal which could not be permitted in any other town in the British Empire”.⁶⁴

When the Town Council petitioned the government to consider the implementation of Ordinance 13 of 1900 in the case of brothels in Salisbury’s Pioneer Street, the government advised the council to bring the issue to the Legislative Council and suggested that the council use its municipal by-laws to deal with “houses of ill-fame”.⁶⁵ The Town Council, however, pointed out that the suggestions by the Administrator were missing the point. First, there was no need to approach the Legislative Council, since the petition of the citizens was

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ NAZ, A3/28/60, Annexure no. 1, 2 February 1909.

⁶² NAZ, A3/28/60, Annexure no. 5, 25 March 1909.

⁶³ NAZ, A3/28/60, Annexure no. 1, 2 February 1909.

⁶⁴ *The Herald*, 21 April 1909.

⁶⁵ NAZ, A3/28/60, The Salisbury Town Council to the High Commissioner per (via) the Resident Commissioner, 30 April 1909.

“not appealing for any fresh legislation, but for carrying out a law that was already in the statute book.”⁶⁶ Second, to these residents, it was “superfluous to pass any local by-law before it has been proved that the law is inadequate to deal with the offence”.⁶⁷ In any case, in the eventuality that a by-law would be made, the Council argued, this would not be effective given the fact that the maximum fine of breaking a municipal law was £10, “a sum which would not prove a deterrent in this case.”⁶⁸

Apart from the above reasons against taking the path of the Legislative Council, the residents also had little faith in this body effecting the desired change. The Salisbury Mayor pointed out that the country was only “partially self-governing” and from their past experience, once the government took up a certain attitude, this would receive unanimous support from the members of the Council.⁶⁹ As Anthony DiPerna indicates, “the 1898 constitution gave the white Rhodesians only a limited voice in the affairs of their government”.⁷⁰ The constitution provided for an Executive Council and Legislative Council, both presided over by the Company Administrator. The Legislative Council initially had four members elected by the settlers and five by the Company. Following pressure from the settlers the Company made concessions in 1907 and the settlers now had seven to five majority representation. However, the Administrator could also cast his vote, meaning that the company effectively had six representatives in the Council. Casting doubt on the option of taking the legislative route, the Mayor noted:

There was considerable doubt whether the elected members would be prepared to act with a like unanimity. We had reason to believe that there

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ NAZ, A3/28/60, Notes of an interview between the deputation from public bodies and H. E. The Earl of Selborne, High Commissioner for South Africa held at Cecil House, Salisbury, Rhodesia, 10 November 1909.

⁷⁰ Anthony DiPerna, “The Struggle for Self-Government and the Roots of White Nationalism in Rhodesia, 1890-1922” (PHD Diss. Michigan, University Microfilms International, 1976), p. 66.

were some elected members who, not yet having on themselves the responsibilities of life in the way of marriage or domesticities, might perhaps not have agreed with the views on morality taken up by the others, and it only required one such member to go against us, and side with the government, to defeat our object.⁷¹

Thus, given the representation ratio, once a member from the settlers group decided to support the government, no change would be effected. These continued disagreements in some ways also allowed for the continued practice of prostitution in Salisbury, with little deterrence from officials.

Those opposed to prostitution strongly believed that invoking the full terms of existing legislation was one way of taming the wild women and deterring existing and potential culprits in this trade. For the Salisbury residents, ministers of religion and the Town Council, Ordinance 13 of 1900 was clear in its criminalisation of prostitution and brothels. However, the government differed on this, arguing that the law did not authorize action against existing brothels as it, for example, “[did] not admit of the wholesale removal of the persons referred to from the locality they presently occupy”.⁷² It was felt that all that the government could do was “to ensure, by a continuance of the special police supervision now maintained, that no acts contrary to public decency [would] occur”.⁷³ Ministers of religion responded to the Administrator “expressing their profound disappointment”⁷⁴ with the Administrator’s reply and pointed out that they had not asked for the wholesale removal of people but only the application of the law which, if applied, would prevent the persons concerned from conducting their trade in any locality in the country.⁷⁵ *The Herald* of 22 March 1909 also argued that the government only had to use the 1900 Ordinance and apply heavy penalties

⁷¹ NAZ, A3/28/60, Notes of an interview between the deputation from public bodies and H. E. The Earl of Selborne, High Commissioner for South Africa held at Cecil House, Salisbury, Rhodesia, 10 November 1909.

⁷² NAZ, A3/28/60, Annexure no. 3b, The Administrator’s Office to addressed to the Ministers of Religion, 20 March 1909.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ NAZ, A3/28/60, Annexure no. 6 and 7, Second Memorial by Ministers of Religion, 26 March 1909.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

which “would make it impossible for the people complained of to remain there or anywhere else in town”.⁷⁶ In any case, it was argued, “the very existence of these houses [was] an offence against public decency”.⁷⁷

However, the government argued that “neither the Ordinance of 1900 nor any other law force makes prostitution unlawful and punishable. At common law promiscuous illicit intercourse is not punishable unless it amounts to public nuisance.”⁷⁸ According to the government, the Ordinance only dealt with “certain practices incidental to prostitution by which persons other than the unfortunate women themselves make profit, thus, leasing a house knowing that the occupier is a prostitute, managing or conducting houses where these persons resort ... are punishable offenses”.⁷⁹ The government claimed that it was aware of these provisions and with sufficient evidence, it had “prosecuted and [would] continue to prosecute”.⁸⁰ However, for the Administrator to claim that there was not any other law in force that made prostitution unlawful and punishable was inaccurate. The 1904 Immigration Ordinance, already cited, which stipulated in one of its sections that any person living on prostitution was considered “undesirable” and therefore liable for deportation could have been used against white prostitutes in Pioneer Street.⁸¹

The lack of clarity in one of the important sections of Ordinance 13 of 1900 complicated the application of this piece of legislation and it seems the government took advantage of this. The government had its own interpretation of this section while the Town Solicitors felt that

⁷⁶ *The Herald*, 22 March 1909.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ NAZ, A3/28/60, Annexure no. 6 and 7, Administrator’s office to the Ministers of Religion, 20 April 1909.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Ordinance No. 10, 1904.

“the interpretation placed by the Administrator upon the Ordinance [was] incorrect”.⁸² There did not seem to be any disagreement over the definition of a brothel, which was spelt out in section 1 of the ordinance as “a room that is occupied by a prostitute for the purpose of receiving men for carnal connection”.⁸³ However, Section 7 complicated the application of this law, and it stated that “any person who *keeps* a brothel shall be guilty of a contravention of such a section.”⁸⁴ It seems the interpretation by the government of the word ‘keep’ was limited to ‘ownership’ while the Town solicitors interpreted it to mean ‘maintaining.’⁸⁵ As long as the government stuck to its interpretation, it remained difficult to apply the Ordinance because most of the inhabitants in Pioneer Street did not own but did maintain brothels. In 1912, for example, the police in one of their investigations, failed to establish ownership of the six out of seven brothels in Pioneer Street, especially given that some of these houses had more than one occupant.⁸⁶ In the one case where ownership was established, the woman who occupied the premises rented it from another who resided in Buenos Aires and was, therefore, beyond the reach of the law.⁸⁷ Thus, the interpretation of the word “keep” by the government meant that many cases of “open prostitution” in brothels did not contravene Ordinance 13.

While the disagreements with the government raged on, the residents made appeals beyond the Administrator, whom they began to see more as an impediment than a solution to their problem. Appeals were made to the High Commissioner for South Africa, with whom a meeting was held and representatives from the Rhodesian government, Salisbury Council and ministers of religion were present.⁸⁸ However, the High Commissioner indicated that since

⁸² NAZ, A3/28/60, The Town Solicitors to the Town Clerk, 8 March 1912.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ NAZ, A3/28/60, The Town Clerk to the Administrator, 19 February 1912.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ NAZ, A3/28/60, Notes of an interview between the Deputation from public bodies and H. E. The Earl of Selborne, High Commissioner for South Africa, held at Cecil House, Salisbury, Rhodesia, 10 November 1909.

Southern Rhodesia now had a Legislative Council, he could not meddle in its affairs and recommended that the issue be taken to this body. Appeals were then made to the BSAC board members in Britain, but this did not bring desired results either, as the board members initially recommended that the Administrator settle the question “in consonance with the wishes of the community”,⁸⁹ then after further clarifications from the Administrator, the board members wrote, “the Directors appreciate the many difficulties with which the question is attended and have full confidence that any further action which may be necessary can be left safely to your discretion.”⁹⁰

Once the issues were referred back to the discretion of the Administrator, they returned to where they had started. Attempts were made to appeal again to the Administrator. In 1912 a letter from the Secretary to the Administrator re-affirmed the position of the government, “in reply, I am directed to inform you that the Administrator adheres to the opinions previously expressed.”⁹¹ This response also happened to be one of the last documentations of the debate in the file used, and suggests that the government remained intransigent in its attitude towards white prostitution primarily on grounds that it sought to use white prostitutes to help reproduce or at least preserve the imperial race, by keeping white men away from African women.

Undoubtedly, prostitution by white women continued in Salisbury, particularly in Pioneer Street, but under closer supervision, which limited the cases of public indecency. Reporting in August 1910, the Attorney General, C. H. Tredgold, noted:

⁸⁹ NAZ, A3/28/60, The BSACO Directors (London) to the Administrator, BSACO, Salisbury, 28 May 1910.

⁹⁰ NAZ, A3/28/60, The BSACO Board of Directors (London) to the Administrator, BSACO Salisbury, Rhodesia, 15 October 1910.

⁹¹ NAZ, A3/28/60, The Secretary, Department of the Administrator, to the Town Clerk, 21 May 1912.

I may say that for many years the condition of Pioneer Street from the social evil point of view has been a gradually but distinctly improving one. The police have had nothing like the trouble they had about 1900 and onwards, and statistics prepared during investigation of this matter show that the number of prostitutes has been lessening.⁹²

After periodic visits to Pioneer Street detective Sergeant T. Delahay concluded in December 1911 that:

The houses are conducted in a very orderly manner, there is not an act of soliciting come to my knowledge during the past year and since the prosecution of certain individuals for malicious injury to property there, I have not witnessed one case of disorder.⁹³

Partly because of efforts to protect the image of Rhodesian women and that of white society at large, white women's prostitution was covered up and numerous attempts were made to contain it. The need to protect the image of white society may, to some extent, explain why very little documentation on this subject exists in the National Archives of Zimbabwe especially for the period after 1920. Efforts to get more information, through interviews, about prostitution in the latter part of the colonial period were also fruitless. Respondents either professed ignorance to its existence or suspected that it existed but did not have first-hand experience of it. Maia Chenaux-Repond, for example, had this to say, in her response to a question on the existence of white prostitution, "I don't think it manifested very much. It was there but it was not all that widespread."⁹⁴

However, the existence of white prostitution in Southern Rhodesia in the post 1920 period cannot be dismissed. In 1963, an appeal against the death sentence of white woman prostitute, Anna White, who had killed a white man, indicated that this trade existed together

⁹² NAZ, A3/28/60, The Attorney General (C. H. Tredgold) to Sir William (BSACo board member), London, 1 August 1910.

⁹³ NAZ, A3/28/60, Detective Sergeant T. Delahay, BSAC Salisbury, CID to the Commanding Officer - Town Detachment, BSAP, Salisbury, 18 December 1911.

⁹⁴ Personal Interview with Maia Chenaux-Repond, Harare, 24 June 2011.

with related activities such as abuse and pimping. The appeal read, “It seems likely that the poor creature – Anna was employed by a man who lived on her earnings made from prostitution and fear of him compelled with an insane impulse caused her to commit a horrible crime.”⁹⁵ One informant also referring to the 1960s and 70s noted that “there were also brothels even during Smith’s time in which [ordinary] white women were restricted to attend ... In my day I remember we had white women strippers.”⁹⁶ One can only conjecture about the absence of the documentation on white women’s prostitution in the post-1920 period. Apart from the possibility that the documents were deliberately destroyed or moved elsewhere, it is also probable that the extent of prostitution by white women may not have been so great as to attract public scrutiny or major concern. Thus one would be inclined to agree with Chenaux-Repond that it probably did not manifest itself very much.

Chenaux-Repond’s observation could be close to the truth and there are a number of factors that may explain why prostitution by white women was not so manifest. Firstly, the population imbalance between men and women that had encouraged prostitution in the early years of colonial rule had been corrected if not reversed. A. S. Mlambo indicates that between 1904 and 1911, the number of white females per every 1000 white males was between 406 and 515.⁹⁷ The report of the 1913 Cost of Living Committee of Inquiry that attributed gender imbalances to the poor conditions in the colony which saw men sending their wives away, noted the link between these imbalances and prostitution, “The effect on the men is bad in every way” read the report and added, “prostitution is an abnormal evil owing to men sending their wives away”.⁹⁸ However, as table 9 below demonstrates, over the years, the acute ratio

⁹⁵ Unprocessed Cabinet Memoranda of 1963, Rhodes University, Smith Papers, Letter of Appeal from Cecil J. K. Jeffrey to Humphrey Vicary Gibbs, Governor General, 10 September 1963.

⁹⁶ Personal Interview with Robert Challis, 7 December 2010.

⁹⁷ Alois S. Mlambo, “Aspects of White Immigration into Rhodesia”, *Zambezia* Vol. 25, No. 2 (1998), p. 128.

⁹⁸ Report on the Cost of Living Committee of Inquiry, 1913 cited in Kirkwood, “Settler Wives in Southern Rhodesia”, p. 147.

between men and women improved. As such the explanation of existence of prostitution in Southern Rhodesia, especially in the later period, might be sought elsewhere beyond acute sex ratios.

Table 9: Distribution of Sexes, 1911 to 1946

SEX	1911	1921	1926	1931	1936	1941	1946
Males	15,580	18,987	21,808	27,280	29,725	36,615	44,220
Females	8,026	14,633	17,366	22,630	25,683	32,339	38,166
Total	23,606	33,620	39,174	49,910	55,408	68,954	82,386
Excess of Males over Females	7,554	4,354	4,442	4,650	4,042	4,276	6,054
Proportions of Females per 1,000 Males	515	771	796	830	864	883	863

Source: Report on the Census of population of Southern Rhodesia held 7th May 1946.

The second factor could be related to the economic position of whites in Southern Rhodesia. It has been shown in various studies that the causes for prostitution have often been grounded in economic conditions. Given the privileged position of white society, which was more often than not cushioned from financial hardship, it is possible to argue that economic motives were not so pronounced as to result in the widespread participation of white women in this trade. Thirdly, there was great social pressure on white women to conform to 'civilised' lifestyle so as to preserve the myth of a superior and civilised white race, and the trade itself was greatly condemned by society. For example, the trade was referred to as "a social evil",⁹⁹ "dire incubus"¹⁰⁰ and "a deplorable profession".¹⁰¹ Finally, government immigration policy

⁹⁹ This term or simply "the evil" were used in correspondence exchanged between the Administrator and the anti-prostitution groups from 1907 to 1912 found in File no. NAZ, A3/28/60, Prostitution in Salisbury 1909 - 1912.

¹⁰⁰ NAZ, A3/28/60, Annexure no. 1, Extract from remarks made by the spokesman of the Deputation to the Administrator, 2 February 1909. He used this expression when he was making a case for the elimination of prostitution in Pioneer Street, and it reflects the perceptions that he had of this.

¹⁰¹ One of the terms used in a letter of Appeal for the commuting of the death sentence for Anna White, a white prostitute. Unprocessed Cabinet Memoranda of 1963, Rhodes University, Letter of Appeal from the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) to Governor General, Humphrey Vicary Gibbs, 16 September 1963.

and anti-prostitution legislation may also have helped to deter potential and real 'undesirables' from entering the colony.¹⁰²

While prostitution may have been a deviation from domesticity, its existence and debates on this trade in Salisbury were informed by a number of factors, one of which was the dominant domestic ideology. These debates, and the existence of the trade, were also part of a bigger and complex subject matter informed by, among other things, the interpretations of the law and issues of respectability, race, religion and economic considerations. The silence on white male clients, who were certainly part of this problem, in these debates is most telling as is the exclusion, in the Immorality Suppression Ordinance of 1903 and its subsequent extension in 1916, of penalties for white men having sexual relations with African women. All these point to the workings of a domestic ideology, which sought to emphasise the subordination of women in all spheres, private or public. The discussion now turns to a different type of contestation of domesticity, which was the penetration of white women into the male worlds.

Penetrating the political 'male world': Rosin's Political Experiences, 1945- 1980¹⁰³

The second category of domestic deviance involves women who penetrated the traditional male arenas of executive management, politics and entrepreneurship. Indeed, there were quite a number of women who established viable businesses in Southern Rhodesia including boarding houses, motor mechanics, garages and security companies, among other trades.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² See A. S. Mlambo, *White Immigration into Rhodesia: From Occupation to Federation*. (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 2000). Similar policies were also adopted in Kenya, see Jackson, "Poor Men and Loose Women".

¹⁰³ This section is based on research conducted with E. Musiiwa, the result of which was a publication, Kufakurinani and Musiiwa, "The Unsung Heroine", pp. 36 - 48.

¹⁰⁴ *The Herald* and women's magazines such as the *Town and Country* make reference to such exceptional women. In my interviews, one Lyn Uzelac indicated that she owned a security company in the 1970s, Personal Interview with Lyn Uzelac, 10 October 2010.

There were also some white women who got into politics. Three women made it into Parliament during the colonial era and a few more became councillors and mayors. Maud Godsmark is one of these few women. She was the first woman councillor in Gatooma (now Kadoma), in 1947, and she became mayor from 1955 to 1958.¹⁰⁵ The worlds of politics and that of business were constructed as masculine and public as opposed to the home front, which was perceived as feminine and private/domestic. Thus, by crossing into the public and political domain, women were defying the domestic ideology. This section will, however, use the case of Muriel Rosin's urban political experiences to analyse my second category of domestic deviance.

While Rosin's involvement in politics was a mark of domestic deviance, paradoxically, she also appropriated and exported domesticity into the political and public space. The section will chronicle stages in Muriel Rosin's political career and assess the nature of her contributions. Judging from her perceptions and contributions in the political sphere, she can be classified as a domestic feminist as she saw the political realm as an opportunity to extend domesticity. The other women who became parliamentarians in colonial Zimbabwe were Ethel Tawse-Jollie, a Member of Parliament from 1924 to 1928¹⁰⁶ and Maureen Watson,¹⁰⁷ who followed Rosin. From 1958-63 Rosin served as the only woman member in the Federal Parliament of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The relative absence of women in parliament is not to suggest that white women were apolitical. The example of Maud Godsmark who was at one point the mayor of Gatooma has already been cited. Indeed, there were women who were candidates but lost failed to get elected into parliament.¹⁰⁸ In some instances, too, women

¹⁰⁵ *Home and Country*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (March 1965).

¹⁰⁶ Lowry, 'White Woman's Country'.

¹⁰⁷ It seems that Maureen Watson did not attract as much public attention as the other two and little has been written about her even in the public media.

¹⁰⁸ In the 1946 elections, for example, Rosin and five other women ran for office although none were elected. MRP, Muriel Rosin Federal Election File, 1960- 1962, Paper titled - 'Mrs. Muriel M.B.E'.

became directly involved in politics. Some women, for instance, actively helped their husbands to campaign for political positions at various levels. For example, Jeannie Boggie's autobiography recollects her active participation in assisting her husband's campaigns to be a member of the Legislative Council.¹⁰⁹ Other women were active members of political parties in the women's wings of these parties.¹¹⁰ But despite all these political participations, the extent of women's involvement in politics was clearly limited in comparison to that of men.

Within the context of limited women's political participation, Muriel Rosin provides a unique and fascinating case of women's political involvement. Her levels of involvement and political participation were unparalleled. She was the only woman to enter the Federal Parliament, the second woman in Southern Rhodesia's parliament and the only woman to ever lead a political opposition party. She also became a member of several boards and an honorary member of different organisations between 1950 and 1980. The sources on Muriel Rosin are housed at her former residence in Mount Pleasant, Harare, which are now the offices of the Southern and Eastern African Regional Centre for Women's Law (SEARCWL). Among these sources are different draft versions of Muriel Rosin's biography, which are made up of transcribed interviews conducted by Diana Mitchell.¹¹¹ There are also newspaper cuttings as well as letters written to her by different people, black and white, on various subject matters.

Muriel Rosin was born in London in 1909. She was married to Kipps Rosin, a surgeon, and came to Southern Rhodesia in 1933. From the outset, she was not a domesticated woman in the sense that she was never a fulltime housewife. The nature of her involvement as well as the positions she held also testify to this. Upon arrival in Rhodesia she joined the Children's

¹⁰⁹ Boggie, *Experiences of Rhodesia's Pioneer Women*.

¹¹⁰ One such example is Diana Mitchell, See Law, "Liberal Women in Rhodesia".

¹¹¹ It is not clear when these interviews were conducted but it is possibly in the period after 1990.

Home Committee in 1933, and was the Chairperson of the House Committee from 1943 to 1946. She became the founder and Hon. Secretary of the Lady Stanley Girls Club. She was also a Member of the Committee of the Loyal Women's Guild, Chairperson of the Salisbury Women's Institute for a number of years, a member of the Executive of the FWISR, and Liaison Officer to government for this women's organisation for three years.

Rosin was also Chairperson of the Lady Chancellor Maternity Home for two years before it was taken over by the Government. For ten years (until elected to Parliament) she was Chairperson of the Salisbury's Women's Council, and Founder Chairperson of the Salisbury Union of Jewish Women, and for several years Chairperson of the Women's Zionist League. Rosin was also a member of the Ellis Robins School Council and a member of the Inaugural Board of the University of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Prior to election to Parliament in 1954, she was the Consumers representative on the Dairy Marketing Board and the Grain Marketing Board. She was also the first woman to be appointed to a statutory board in Rhodesia. Rosin was also the Founder Chairperson of the National Soroptomists Organization. Because of her contribution to public life, especially her wartime effort in giving voluntary translation services in French and German on the censorship board, Rosin was awarded an MBE (Member of the British Empire) in 1949, and the Coronation Medal in 1953. All these involvements demonstrate that Rosin was far from being the domesticated type.

While women were generally constrained by several factors, including patriarchal hegemony, from participating in politics, Muriel Rosin's entry into the political arena demonstrates the contrary. In fact, her husband, I. R. Kipps Rosin, encouraged her to participate in public life. She recollected "my husband, then a busy young doctor building his practice always

encouraged me to find outside interests.”¹¹² Kipps, a surgeon by profession, was a well-known and powerful personality, with a wide circle of admirers and friends ideal for political support.¹¹³ Upon invitation to participate in politics, Kipps found that he was far too devoted to his surgical practice and so he suggested the United Party ask Muriel instead.¹¹⁴ This is how the name of Muriel entered mainstream politics.

Although some credit can be given to Kipps, it should be highlighted that Muriel had the option of turning down the political career suggested. Thus, we must not take away the agency in Rosin in our acknowledgement of Kipps’ encouragement. Her domestic servant, who took care of domestic responsibilities, also liberated her from domestic drudgery and this afforded her the liberty, in this case, to experiment with politics. Clearly, her participation in politics did not immediately arise from a feminist kind of framework, where she was determined to correct long-standing gender imbalances that excluded women from public affairs. The circumstances in which Muriel Rosin took up a political career are important in contextualizing her apparent deviance from domesticity.

Rosin’s first entry into the political arena came towards the end of the Second World War when she joined the United Party Action Group in 1945. In 1946, she stood for what was known to be “a losing seat” in Salisbury South, and lost the election.¹¹⁵ Rosin had been invited into the male-oriented political arena, but she felt that elements of male chauvinism lingered on. She lamented that “they didn’t want women in parliament that is why I lost. The Speaker threatened to resign if I was elected”.¹¹⁶ She added, “In any case Allan Welsh who

¹¹² SEARCWL offices, University of Zimbabwe, Muriel Rosin Papers (MRP), Newspaper Cuttings, *Rhodesia Herald* (n.d.). The sources used on Muriel Rosin are located at her former residence now SEARCWL offices.

¹¹³ MRP, Diana Mitchell, Muriel Rosin Draft Biography, “Introduction and/or Synopsis”, Chapter One.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ MRP, Federal Election File, 1960- 1962, Paper titled - ‘Mrs. Muriel M.B.E’

¹¹⁶ *The Herald*. 10 December 1998.

had sat with Mrs. Tawse-Jollie in the first Southern Rhodesia parliament had so disliked hearing her voluble contributions that he vowed he would resign if another woman was admitted to parliament.”¹¹⁷ This male chauvinism reflected the perceptions of many people in Southern Rhodesia, who saw the political world as not fit for women and were keen to keep women ‘domesticated’, believing that home was their proper place.

Rosin stood again in 1953 and the campaign was characterized by competition from established male politicians and she also had to contend with apathy on the part of the voters.¹¹⁸ She contested and won the Marimba seat for the old United Rhodesia Party, which she was to represent in parliament between 1954 and 1958. This period was arguably the most important era of Rosin’s political life. “It was a marvelous time to be in politics”, she recalled, “We were all so idealistic, so highly motivated to do something for the country. Some of the men I worked with: Hardwick Holderness, Garfield Todd (now Sir Garfield), the late Ralph Palmer, Paddy Lloyd and many others all believed they had an important role to play in building the country which was rapidly becoming a little gem in Africa.”¹¹⁹ After a break of twenty years a woman had, for the second time, invaded the parliament, a public and political sphere, which had long been regarded as a male preserve.

As criticisms against Prime Minister Garfield Todd mounted, Rosin decided to leave the Southern Rhodesia Parliament.¹²⁰ At the end of her career in the Southern Rhodesia territorial parliament, Rosin had held one of the United Rhodesia Party’s 26 seats (there were four independents) and gained valuable political experience. From 1958 to 1963, Rosin took up another serious political career in the Federal parliament, where she was affectionately

¹¹⁷ MRP, Diana Mitchell, Muriel Rosin Draft Biography, Chapter 6

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ MRP, Diana Mitchell, Muriel Rosin Draft Biography, Chapter 1 – Introduction and/synopsis.

¹²⁰ For discussions on the career of Garfield Todd see, Ruth Weiss and Jane Parpart, *Sir Garfield Todd and the Making of Zimbabwe* (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 1998).

referred to as “the only ‘man’ in Welensky’s Party”.¹²¹ Rosin’s five years of service in the Southern Rhodesia Parliament, commencing in 1954, earned her great respect as an impressive debater and a conscientious representative of her constituents, amongst whom was a tiny minority of blacks qualified to vote under the common voters roll.

VOTE ROSIN

MURIEL ROSIN

PUBLIC MEETINGS

ALL AT 8.15 P.M.

21st October • Meyrick Park with G. Eilman Brown.

27th October • Lochirvar School with G. Eilman Brown.

28th October • Blakiston School with Sir Edger Whitehead and S. Sawyer.

30th October • Queen Elizabeth School with L. M. N. Hodson.

4th November • Bichopslea School with J. Greenfield.

6th November • Alfred Beit School by invitation of J. W. Swan.

11th November • Athenaeum Hall, Eve of Poll Meeting with Sir Edger Whitehead.

24TH OCTOBER • SIR ROY WELENSKY • ALLAN WILSON SCHOOL

POLLING DAY: THURSDAY 15TH NOVEMBER FROM 7.30 A.M. TO 7.30 P.M.

POLLING STATIONS


St. Peter's Church Hall - Meyrick Park
Copper Hall, Showgrounds - Belvedere
Magistrate's Court - Forbes Avenue
Highfield Police Station
Old Superintendent's Office - Highfield

PUBLISHED BY M. ROSIN, 1 LANCASTER AVE. BELVEDERE.
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MURIEL ROSIN

United Federal Party

Candidate



SALISBURY WEST CONSTITUENCY

COMMITTEE ROOM
1, Luncheon Avenue
Belvedere

TELEPHONE 83163

Fig 3: Campaigning for the Salisbury West Seat, 1958¹²²

With the end of the Federation, Muriel Rosin did not win her political seat and for some time decided ‘not to stand again.’ She explained, “My seat in the Federal parliament was no longer in existence. Not only was I of the wrong political persuasion, being regarded in the context of the times as far too liberal, but I was also a woman!”¹²³ She, therefore, felt that she was

¹²¹ *The Daily News*, 10 September 1999.

¹²² MRP, Federal Election File, Campaigning for Salisbury West Seat.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

doubly disadvantaged. However, the end of Federation did not imply an end to her active political life. She became actively involved in opposition party politics against Ian Smith and his Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), which she criticized as untenable, as can be seen in the following extract:

Taking independence unilaterally is rather like chopping off your leg to cure an in-growing toe nail. In the last couple of years we have allowed fears to dominate our lives that we have only – two choices – to allow ourselves to become victims of black domination, or to achieve independence speedily, even to steal it – with all the evil consequences which would flow from such action. These fears are entirely unfounded.¹²⁴

In her post-parliamentary political activism, Rosin worked closely with such women as Peggy Southby, Mary Myers, and Kay Thomas. They formed committees to keep each other in touch with political developments in the country. Rosin joined the Rhodesian Constitution Association (RCA), where she led the Woman's Wing which organized meetings, raised funds and generally remained loyal to the concept of legitimate constitution. She campaigned together with the Centre Party against Smith's 1969 Constitution in the referendum which took place in the same year. With other women, she distributed small insignia among RCA members, a gold crown to indicate their continued loyalty to the British crown.¹²⁵

Rosin made numerous speeches, especially with the multiracial Centre Party, to counter the propaganda of Ian Smith and his Rhodesian Front (RF) party. She addressed audiences in many parts of the country, but the task was overwhelming. In the elections that followed shortly after the Referendum, the Centre Party returned seven blacks to parliament but every one of their white candidates was defeated. In the 1974 elections Rosin joined the Rhodesia Party and she stood for the Mount Pleasant Constituency. Although it fielded 35 candidates

¹²⁴ MRP, "Time on our Side: Candidate" Muriel Rosin Files, Newspaper Cutting (n.d.). Muriel Rosin makes this statement probably some probably some five or so years after UDI.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

and mounted a national offensive, they did not win. She reminisced, "My only consolation, as a loser in Mt. Pleasant constituency was that I was later to discover that I was the 'top of the losers', having scored the most votes among the opposition candidates".¹²⁶

In 1977 the Centre Party, Rhodesia Party and Bob Stumble's pressure group - 'The Pledge', joined forces to form National Unifying Force (NUF) in a final futile attempt to unseat the RF in the general elections of 1977. Rosin explained the intentions of the NUF:

We have joined with the Centre Party and the National Pledge Association - the National Unifying Force - so that the voices of those 25 per cent of whites who have supported us can be heard. We represent the people we feel genuinely want to stay in this country under black rule - providing it's non-Marxist. We feel we have a role to play in whatever interim government is set up; a part to play in the setting up of a constitutional commission and the evidence presented to it. We feel we have an educative role to play as well, acting as catalyst between black and white. We don't feel white people are sufficiently aware of the need for established points of common interest between the black people, nor of how to learn to live together. In a word: we want peace in the country.¹²⁷

Because of its policies, especially its support for majority rule, NUF appealed to some blacks. One Mr. Sadamba, who was contesting a seat as an independent, said that it was the only white party which stood on the platform of reality, adding that "if whites vote for NUF, we shall know that their thinking has changed."¹²⁸ Rosin did not stand for any constituency at that time but was drawn once again into the busy schedule of political meetings. She took on the role, as often before, of leading the women's effort, supporting the party in organization, fundraising and other activities. When Tim Gibbs resigned in 1977, Muriel Rosin was unanimously appointed President of the Rhodesia Party.¹²⁹ As party president of an opposition party, Rosin continued to challenge the policies of the Smith government.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 25 January, 1977.

¹²⁸ *The Sunday Mail*, August, 1977.

¹²⁹ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 25 January, 1977.

Muriel Rosin – A Domestic Feminist?

Muriel Rosin can be perceived as a domestic feminist. As indicated in the conceptualisation of domesticity in the introductory chapter, domestic feminists celebrate women's domestic roles and use this as justification for greater participation by women in the public sphere instead of being confined to the private domain.¹³⁰ These feminists do not dismiss the importance of women's involvement in the home but rationalise women's inclusion in the public spaces on grounds of women's strength which, they claim, "lay in their natural connection to virtue and self-sacrifice, qualities reinforced by their isolation from the immoral public sphere".¹³¹ Thus women's involvement in the public domain, it is argued, will bring that much needed moral influence and sanity to this space. Rosin's participation in politics seemed to be informed by this mentality. She strongly believed in the need for women's participation in politics, in part for the reasons indicated by domestic feminists. She tried to bring sanctity, purity and peace into the public sphere. Rosin used the public domain to express the domestic and private – a process that resulted in the exportation of the normative private into the normative public, thereby collapsing these two worlds into each other.

Muriel Rosin's identity as a domestic feminist stems, in part, from her belief that it was important for women to have interests outside the home without compromising the running of it. In her words, having these outside interests was "terribly important for a wife ... *so long as they don't interfere with the running of a woman's home or with looking after her children*".¹³² Thus she did not oppose domesticity and as her political career demonstrates, she saw women's domesticity as a tool that equipped them well in politics, enabling them to

¹³⁰ Gillis and Hollows, "Introduction", p. 4.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

bring a different but valuable perspective to different issues. Thus, she argued, “the world is made up of men and women, and both should make their contribution to its affairs... or perhaps it is better expressed by saying they have the same outlook but from a slightly different angle. This angle has value.”¹³³ Thus as Law correctly observes; “while she [Muriel Rosin] called for the wider participation of women in political life, it is clear that gender codes still conditioned the form of women’s contribution to politics.”¹³⁴ For Law, this brought ambiguity to her approach. However, I will demonstrate that, far from being ambiguous, this approach was consistent with the perceptions of domestic feminists, who see compatibility between domesticity and women’s political/public participation.

Rosin lamented the low participation of women in politics and attributed it, in part, to a lingering Victorian attitude in which “not all husbands are happy at the thought of their wives going in for politics”.¹³⁵ She continuously challenged this attitude during her political career. In 1958, for instance, she caused a stir at a Rhodesia Party meeting when she accused the government of having an “archaic outlook”, because the Party never put a woman candidate up for parliament. She remonstrated, “in this day and age it appears unbelievable. Look at the world and see the part women have played and are playing politically in other countries.”¹³⁶ She also accused the Federal parliament of actually being more gender insensitive than it was racist. “But our parliament is far from anti-black”, she noted, “there are 12 African members, and only one woman- by comparison you might say it was anti-feminist!”¹³⁷ While the domestic ideology may explain, in part, the apathy of white women in national politics, overemphasising it would risk denying these women agency. Some women (like some of their male counterparts) simply did not have interest in politics as they preferred to

¹³³ *The Rhodesia Herald*, 22 October 1958.

¹³⁴ Law, “Writing White Women”, p. 184.

¹³⁵ “She’s the Only Woman MP in the Federation”, *Edinburgh Evening News*, 24 March 1961.

¹³⁶ *The Daily News*, 10 September 1999.

¹³⁷ “She’s the Only Woman MP in the Federation”, *Edinburgh Evening News*, 24 March, 1961.

concentrate on immediate everyday demands for survival. I interviewed one Edith Gard who stated; “well, I never had anything to do with politics; I had my own work to attend to.”¹³⁸

The nature of Rosin’s contributions in the political public space exhibited attributes of a domestic feminist. She not only brought the normative ‘feminine private’ into the ‘public male’ sphere but also worked on the traditional female avenues of social and education welfare. One of her first speeches in the House was on the Children’s Protection and Adoption with particular reference to white children adopted outside the Colony. She recommended that they should be allowed birth certificates in the name of the adopting parents.¹³⁹ According to *The Umtali Post*, she also received much publicity and support for drawing attention to child marriages where children reaching the age of puberty could legally contract marriage, and there was actually a record of a 13 year old girl getting married.¹⁴⁰ She also supported a law passed on intestate estates, which helped improve the welfare of widows and their children. She recollected, “My success in getting through a motion on the improvement of women’s rights in the matter of wills and inheritance laws was an achievement which gave me great satisfaction.”¹⁴¹

Another critical area of the political world that Muriel Rosin sought to reform was of race relations. In the words of Diana Mitchell, her biographer, Rosin was, to a certain extent, “devoid of the racist sentiment endemic among many of her fellow Rhodesians”.¹⁴² Like some of the liberals of her time, she embodied a multiracial sentiment. Rosin also saw the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland as “an important step in building a black middle

¹³⁸ Interview with Edith Gard, Mr and Mrs. Taylor, 4 December 2010.

¹³⁹ *The Umtali Post*, 29 April 1957.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ MRP, Diana Mitchell, Muriel Rosin Draft Biography. It is likely that Rosin’s reference to ‘women’ only referred to white women only.

¹⁴² MRP, Diana Mitchell, Muriel Rosin Draft Biography, Chapter 8 – Federation.

class".¹⁴³ The administration of African affairs, however, had remained in the hands of territorial governments. Rosin found such an arrangement not only deplorable, but working against the whole idea of a multiracial society whose upward mobility was based on merit for all people, irrespective of colour. She maintained that:

It was a mistake not to have made African Affairs the responsibility of the Federal government when Federation was first formed. The separation of certain Ministries on racial lines with the European as the privileged class gave Africans the impression that Federation was meant to perpetuate, and even strengthen, white supremacy.¹⁴⁴

In fact, she was convinced that "the running of some 'African' affairs separately from 'European' affairs contributed to the downfall of the Federation, as Africans felt 'cheated'", adding that "African Affairs should have been a Federal subject, so that African people would have taken on the same degree as whites."¹⁴⁵

Debates on mixed racial couples proved to be one of the most difficult issues Rosin had to contend with. At one point, she was challenged by some women's organizations to oppose any proposed changes in the racial law that discouraged interracial marriage. The question of mixed racial couples was to be raised in both the Federal and territorial Houses throughout Rosin's time in Parliament. Rosin herself had at one time been criticised by other women for her association with Chad Chipunza, a fellow MP in the Federal parliament whom she worked with in Highfield and Mbare (Harari). She recollected, "Women here at home were horrified that I should be travelling about with a black man! I thought it perfectly natural and still wonder what all the fuss was about."¹⁴⁶ The issue of inter-racial marriage in the country

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ MRP, Federal Public Relations Division, African Newspapers Federation, 3- 6 May 1963.

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in *The Herald*. 10 December 1998.

¹⁴⁶ MRP, Diana Mitchell, Muriel Rosin Draft Biography, Chapter 8 – Federation.

developed into an unbalanced and emotional issue.¹⁴⁷ Rosin says she was in favour of change, but had to compromise in order to accommodate the interests of white women:

I believe that everyone has the right to sleep with whomsoever they want to. But I could not stand alone on this. As in the Federal parliament later, I was approached by every woman's organization of that time. They all wanted it to remain illegal to mix the races. 'After all, our daughters wouldn't be safe,' they insisted.¹⁴⁸

Rosin went along with the policies that discouraged the mixing of races in marriage. Of course, she had to place the interests of her constituents above her desire for multiracialism in order to protect her parliamentary seat. This highlights how her desire to bring sanity to the public and political stage had to bend to the whims of the electorate. Referring to her failure to act against the law on inter-racial marriage, Rosin confessed that she "had to express the views of women, my white constituents".¹⁴⁹

Perusing documents on Muriel Rosin, one gets the impression that people from different walks of life had faith in Rosin's ability to address their plight and make things right for them. Rosin was approached on several occasions to assist people with or represent them on a variety of issues that included addressing African women,¹⁵⁰ Business and Professional Women's Clubs,¹⁵¹ dealing with divorce and maintenance policies within Rhodesian Society,¹⁵² voicing frustration and disappointment with government departments such as the Education Department,¹⁵³ The documents also include requests for pensions for the 1900 Boer War veterans,¹⁵⁴ for general old age pensions,¹⁵⁵ and requests to resolve challenges

¹⁴⁷ See the case of Patrick Matimba and Adrian Van Hoorn in Mushonga, "The Criminalisation of Sex".

¹⁴⁸ MRP, Diana Mitchell, Muriel Rosin Draft Biography, Chapter 6.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ MRP, Federal Election File, 1960-1962, Winfred Wilson, African Administration Department, to Muriel Rosin, 13 September (ny).

¹⁵¹ Ibid, The Business and Professional Women's Club of Bulawayo to Muriel Rosin, 3 November 1961.

¹⁵² Ibid, Mrs. B. Caine to Muriel Rosin, 11 March 1958.

¹⁵³ Ibid, Bill to Muriel Rosin, 23 May 1961. A copy of this letter was also sent to the Director of Education.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, F. E. Evans to Muriel Rosin, 2 November 1958.

associated with immigration.¹⁵⁶ Many hoped that Rosin would use her influence in the public and political arena to help bring change to their respective situations.

Conclusion

The chapter has demonstrated in detail two cases that deviated from domesticity. Domestic deviance went far beyond leaving the home for wage employment, and constituted deviance from societal expectations of white women. The term “wild” is used to describe such women and conjures up images of deviance to domestication. I have shown that there were at least two categories of deviant women; those who outstepped boundaries of socially accepted norms and values and those who penetrated the ‘male world’. In the latter category, I have analysed white women’s prostitution and demonstrated how the ideology of domesticity was deployed by the opponents of prostitution on the one hand the state on the other. The chapter also narrowed to the case of Muriel Rosin who became a high political figure in the colonial era. What I have shown is that there was a certain amount of diversity of experience amongst white women and that some women negotiated and contested domestication. I have also demonstrated that deviance from domesticity also paradoxically included the re-invocation of domesticity in new, public spaces.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, Financial Minister (Macintyre) to Rosin, 10 August 1959.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, Muriel Rosin to Malcolm Barrow, Minister of Home Affairs, 27 September 1960.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has looked at the socio-economic history of white women in Southern Rhodesia within the context of the domestic ideology. This ideology was, by and large, instrumental in ordering the gender terrain of Rhodesian society. Although domesticity has normally been analysed in terms of women and private/domestic spaces, this ideology went beyond the so called private sphere and was also played out in public spaces. It was therefore instrumental in shaping the experiences of white women in both the private and public spaces. In many ways, the social/gender hierarchies in the former were exported to the latter. The research has also shown that white women played a significant role in shaping colonial terrain. They influenced policy on a number of socio-economic issues, initiated and actively participated in different voluntary activities among both the white and black communities. In a nutshell, this thesis re-inserts the experiences of white women into the Zimbabwean historical narrative, challenging colonial, nationalist and patriotic historiographies that have tended to be androcentric and trivialise the contributions of white women to colonial society.

The introductory chapter noted the debates surrounding domesticity and the nature of its impact on women, among other things. On the one hand, there are scholars who perceive domesticity as the source of women's subordination and oppression in society. On the other, are those who argue that domesticity can actually be exploited to one's advantage and is not necessarily a source of women's subordination and oppression. This thesis has shown that, in the Rhodesian case, this bifurcation of the impact of domesticity oversimplifies the experiences of these women. Further complicating the experiences of white women was racial ideology, which also favoured the white race and placed white women in privileged positions. White women thus occupied a paradoxical position insofar as their status was concerned. While they appropriated their western domesticity and even exported it to the

African women who occupied a lower rank in the racial order, domesticity provided a platform for their exclusion from certain occupations and roles in society. There were also several other women who did not conform to domesticity or at least confronted and contested their domestication. In this light, the bifurcation referred to above fails to accurately capture white women's experiences in colonial Zimbabwe.

This study is a contribution to the small but growing studies on the experiences of white women in colonial Zimbabwe. As already noted, another work that attempts a rigorous academic analysis of the experiences of white women is one by Kate Law, who looks mainly at the political and exceptionally outstanding women in Rhodesia's settler society. Apart from the obvious difference in the sources used as well as the period covered, this study focuses on white women's organisations, white women's quotidian experiences and changing roles and status over space and time. This thesis argues that ordinary women played a crucial role in shaping the colonial terrain and it gives a wider analysis of white women's experiences in relationship to the domestic ideology. The manifestations of this ideology, its appropriation, and the responses of the state, society and white women in particular are all part of a detailed inquiry undertaken in this thesis.

This thesis has also demonstrated that in practice white women were not simply passive victims, particularly of domesticity. Not only did they challenge it; at times they appropriated it and contributed to its propagation, configuration and outlay in society. This thesis underscores the complexity of the domestic ideology using the evidence of white women's experiences both as individuals and organisations. The analysis of white women's experiences explores domestic spaces on the farms as well as in the towns, and also examines the nature of their experiences in the public spaces such as formal wage employment. Their

experiences on the farms, in particular, challenge claims by Marxist feminists that domesticity excludes women from economic participation. White women on Southern Rhodesian farms were heavily involved in the running of crucial 'side-line' activities such as poultry breeding. This was an indication of the immense contributions by women to the family's economic survival. White women's experiences on the farms, and even in the towns, therefore, substantiate the claim that these women were not necessarily victims of domesticity, nor were they passive recipients of this dominant ideology.

While domesticity was undoubtedly a very powerful ideology influencing Rhodesian society, the study acknowledges that this was not the only force and, in many ways, interacted with race and class. The thesis demonstrates how race and, to some extent class, interacted with the domestic ideology in shaping the roles and status of white women. This thesis analysed the dynamism of housewifery, its nature and impact as well as the responses that women made to this institution. Housewifery was central to Victorian domesticity, which was imported in various degrees into Rhodesian society. White women were expected to take up marriage as their final destination and withdraw to private domesticity/housewifery. These expectations were much stronger before the Second World War. In fact, as indicated, before 1930, the Civil Service Regulations barred married women from taking up wage employment and after this period, up until 1971, married white women could only be employed as temporary employees. This state policy mirrors the attitude of settler society towards women and their expected roles and status in society.

In an attempt to illustrate the workings of the domestic ideology beyond the private sphere, this thesis examined white women's experiences as employees, using the case of women clerks in the public service of Southern Rhodesia. The Second World War had a far reaching

effect on the institution of housewifery as the demand for women's labour increased to meet the war needs. Increased demand for crèches, for example, testified to the increase of married women taking up formal employment. In order to exploit white women's labour more effectively, the state intervened by subsidising crèches for children and introducing refresher courses for married women. Once in the workplace, white women also continued to be domesticated as they were subjected to inferior conditions of service to their male counterparts. In many ways, the roles, status and gender hierarchy in the home were duplicated in the workplace. Some white women challenged their domestication in the workplace but, for the most part, they continued to receive unequal conditions of employment in comparison to their male counterparts.

The study has also demonstrated that domesticity was a powerful force ordering the lives of white women but also acknowledged deviance to domesticity in various forms. An obvious way of contesting domesticity was to take up formal employment, which would take women outside the home. This did not, however, necessarily absolve them from domesticity both in the home and the workplace. This thesis explored what could be perceived as a much more radical contestation of domesticity. It discussed women who defied domesticity and classified them into two groups. Firstly, there were those women who overstepped the boundaries of social expectations including those of propriety. This group is made up of the female prostitutes, who were used as a case study. The second group included those women who embarked on careers in the public sphere in those domains which were considered to be male preserves. In this category, the study uses the case of Muriel Rosin, one of the only three women parliamentarians in the 90 years of colonialism. However, one needs to be cautious in interpreting Muriel Rosin's experiences because, while she undoubtedly defied private domesticity by entering the public and political, her experiences suggest that she was a

domestic feminist. As shown, domestic feminists do not see incompatibility between private domesticity and participation in the public sphere. On the whole, the contestation of domesticity, whatever forms this took, demonstrates that ideology does not always translate into reality.

The study is not a final word on the historical experiences of white women. There remain a number of areas for further investigation. For example, there is need for further research on the role that missionary women played in both pre-colonial and colonial Zimbabwe. The presence of missionary women predates the colonisation of Zimbabwe and they played an important and far reaching role in Rhodesian society particularly in relationship to African colonial experiences. The relations between women missionaries and the colonial state and with their missionary bodies also constitute a potentially rich historical account that would help to complete the story of white women's experiences in the colonies. Other areas of further research include the investigation of white women and colonial legislation. There was much debate, particularly in the post Second World War, on the legal status of white women and the various pieces of legislation that affected them. The workings of legislation in the past and present always help us reflect on the role of legal institutions as potentially oppressive when they purport to be playing a protective and liberating role.

Another possible area for further study would be on methodological issues relating to the study of white women. For example, there are several letters and diaries of Rhodesian women which constitute what can be termed as personal archives, and which remain largely untapped as historical sources or as subjects of study in their own right. This has been done elsewhere, for example by Helen Dampier in the case of South Africa. Such a study would undoubtedly allow for comparative analysis to be carried out on such sources. Finally, while the story of

white women in the colonial era has begun to be told, their experiences in post-colonial Zimbabwe or many other post-colonial states is yet to receive serious academic attention. The stories of the dominant and powerful groups have tended to dominate post-colonial historiography, while the white society which has withdrawn into their shells, with little presence in the new political dispensation, has been paid little attention. In recent years, whites in Zimbabwe have resurfaced in academic discourse as many of them were displaced from their farms to make way for the resettlement of blacks during the Fast Track Land Resettlement exercise. It would be fascinating to know the story of white women in the face of these and several other post-colonial developments.

This thesis will conclude by answering a question that I was usually asked by both black and white people while investigating this subject area. The question was, "why would a black man be interested in studying white women?" In the African context, it is unusual for black male scholars to take an interest in the study of colonial/white women though, ironically, the reverse might not raise the same question. The fact is that my interest in this subject matter was not influenced by my gender or that of my subjects of study. It arose from a realisation that white women in colonial Zimbabwe were generally excluded from academic historical accounts save as adjuncts to male accounts although preliminary investigations suggested that these women actually played a very crucial role in society. White women's relative lack of participation in public politics may have obscured their immense contribution to colonial society. Their experiences were even less acknowledged by the nationalist and patriotic histories whose emphasis is on blacks (largely male) and their encounters with their white male counterparts. Even when scholarship began to re-insert the experiences of women into historical narratives, emphasis was largely focussed on the black women. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, there is an incomplete story on colonialism if white women are

absent from the narrative of colonial processes. I strongly believe that attempting to understand the colonial setting in the absence of other groups may misrepresent colonial realities. White women clearly had a huge influence on the social, economic and political development of the colonial societies and yet there has been little rigorous academic effort to appreciate their experience, roles and status particularly in colonial Zimbabwe. The growing interest in gender and empire, whose focus attempts to recover colonial women's experiences, is evidence of the growing realisation of the importance of studying these women.

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Appendix A

My Wife DOES NOT WORK!!!

Conversation between a Husband (H) and a Psychologist (P):

P: What do you do for a living Mr. Bandy?

H: I work as an Accountant in a Bank.

P: Your Wife?

H: She doesn't work. She's a Housewife only.

P: Who makes breakfast for your family in the morning?

H: My Wife, because she doesn't work.

P: At what time does your wife wake up for making breakfast?

H: She wakes up at around 5 am because she cleans the house first before making breakfast.

P: How do your kids go to school?

H: My wife takes them to school, because she doesn't work.

P: After taking your kids to school, what does she do?

H: She goes to the market, then goes back home for cooking and laundry. You know, she doesn't work.

P: In the evening, after you go back home from office, what do you do?

H: Take rest, because I'm tired due to all day works.

P: What does your wife do then?

H: She prepares meals, serving our kids, preparing meals for me and cleaning the dishes, cleaning the house then taking kids to bed.

Whom do you think works more, from the story above???

The daily routines of your wives commence from early morning to late night. That is called 'DOESN'T WORK'??!!

Yes, Being Housewives do not need Certificate of Study, even High Position, but their ROLE/PART is very important!

Appreciate your wives because their sacrifices are uncountable. This should be a reminder and reflection for all of us to understand and appreciate each other's roles.

Message circulated by whatsapp (a message application used on smart phones), Received 16/11/13. A similar version of this analogy can be found at [upikke's blog](#), "Renungan Jumat 19/13"

2 May 2013, < <http://upikke.staff.ipb.ac.id/2013/05/02/renungan-jumat-1913/> > accessed 15 February 2014

Appendix B

Organisation	Year of Establishment
1. Federation of Women's Institutes of Southern Rhodesia (FWISR)	1927
2. National Council of Women of Southern Rhodesia (NCWSR) (Below are the affiliated societies - 1950)	1945
a) Bulawayo Caledonian Society	
b) Catholic Women's Association	
c) Girl Guide Association	
d) Jewish Women's Communal League	
e) Union of Jewish Women	
f) Matabeleland Irish Association	
g) Methodist Women's Association	
h) Presbyterian Women's Association	
NB. Some of the organisations mentioned independently also became affiliated to NCWSR after 1950	
3. National Housewives Register (NHR)	1971
4. Women's National Service League (WNSL)	1939
5. Women of Peace	
6. International Women's Association	
7. Women's Voluntary Services of Central Africa (WVS)	
8. Salisbury Women's International Society	
9. National Federation of Business and Professional Women of Rhodesia (B &PW)	1940
10. Association of University Women of Rhodesia & Nyasaland (<i>Rhodesian Association of University Women - RAUW</i>)	1958?
11. Loyal Women's Guild	1907
12. Rhodesian Women's League	
13. National Organisation for Women	
14. Mothers Club	

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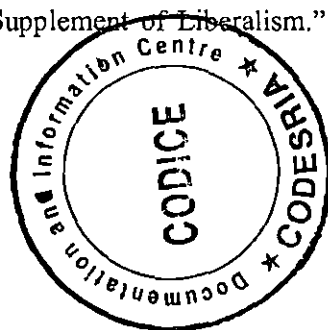
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