

## **Women in the Colonial Economy of the Cross River Area of Nigeria, 1900-1950**

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**ABSTRACT** The presence and role of women in the economy of the Cross River area during the colonial period has remained largely unstudied by historians. This is despite the fact that both in terms of their numerical strength and economic importance, women's role in the Cross River area deserves attention. The present paper argues that through their collective and individual activities, the women as mothers, farmers, traders, manufacturers and contractors built enough economic power to contribute significantly to community, state and national developments. This was despite the fact that during the colonial period, the people's efforts and resources were not used for the development of their area but, rather, exported to the metropolitan country, thanks to those government policies that were designed to further the cause of colonialism. And since it was reasoned that a woman's place in the society was the home, the colonial government never thought in terms of encouraging the women to develop their potentials through its administrative and economic systems. Nor was it deemed expedient by government to integrate the women into the development process of their fatherland. The women's reaction took diverse forms, including acts of violence and self-help development efforts, in order to face the challenges of the period. With their economic power, the women were well placed to actively participate in the development of the area now called Cross River State, and the country, Nigeria.