

FEMALE HISTORIANS AND THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NIGERIA: 1955 - 2017

Stephen Temegha Olali*

*Senior Research Fellow,
Ph.D,
Institute for Niger Delta Studies,
Niger Delta University,
Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria
Email id: voiceofhistory2@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

When the Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN) was founded in 1955, only one expatriate female historian, Jean Margaret Bradshaw, was among the seven signatories to the Memorandum of Association. The first indigenous professional female historian in Nigeria, Professor Bolanle Alake Awe, emerged in 1960. Since then, various Departments of History have been established across Nigerian universities and other tertiary institutions, with female historians and students teaching and studying History. Although there is a relative paucity of female historians in comparison to male historians, majority of the few female historians, as shall be analyzed in this paper, have not been consistently active in the HSN. This accounts for why in sixty-two years of its founding and existence, only a few female historians, prominent amongst who are Professor Egodi Uchendu, Dr Winifred Akoda and Dr Mfon Ekpootu, have served in the Council of the HSN. The paper, using the example of active female historians in the HSN, illustrates how greater participation by female historians in its affairs will contribute to building a more vibrant Historical Society of Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: *Female, Historians, Nigeria, 1955-2017.*

INTRODUCTION

The expatriate female historian, Jean Margaret Bradshaw, was the only woman among the seven signatories to the Memorandum and Articles of Association upon which the HSN was founded on 14 October 1955. An English historian, she was, at the time, a lecturer in the Department of History of the University College, Ibadan, where she taught from 1952 to 1956. This underscores the significant role Bradshaw played despite her relative minority status as the only female historian,¹ and in view of the absence of indigenous professional female historians in Nigeria at the time. The fact that there were no indigenous professional female historians at that time (in the 1950s and earlier) is significant but understandable. Girl-child western (European) education, especially at the tertiary level, was not a priority to most Nigerian peoples and families from the era of the establishment of the first tertiary institutions in Nigeria, at Calabar in the late nineteenth century, and at Yaba and Ibadan respectively, in the twentieth century.² Besides, the few girls that were sent to tertiary schools in the early twentieth century, and afterwards, mostly

opted for courses such as medicine, nursing and teaching that were thought to be very professional and congruent with the feminine gender.

The restricted access of girls to western education especially at the higher levels at the time, is adequately buttressed by the first principal of the premier Nigerian University College of Ibadan, Dr Kenneth Mellanby. In his words: 'Our first 104 students, which included three girls, could academically be divided into four groups. Seventeen were reading Arts, taking three subjects selected from English, Latin, History, Geography, and Mathematics. Thirty-eight were studying science...'³

One of the pioneer female students of the University College, Dr (Mrs.) Grace Olufumilayo Nzegwu (then Miss Grace OlufumilayoYoloye), who studied medicine, reiterates the foregoing observation made by Dr Mellanby, herself being indeed one of the three girls he had referred to in his account. In her own words:

It seems like yesterday, but it was 32 long years ago (as at January 1980) when we three hopeful young girls stepped into one of the log cabins just vacated by the Army in Eleyele, Ibadan, to be part of the nucleus of the University College, Ibadan (UCI). There were one hundred or so others who were male and we all started off in the Higher College, Yaba, which was then an exclusive male club. It was unimaginable that mere girls could dare into the exclusive club of men! Impossible!! Unbelievable!!! Insufferable and didn't our male counterparts make us know and feel it!!!! One would have thought we were from Outer Space. By the grace of God, by the time we arrived at UCI, we had been accepted either because these Lords decided that we had qualified to become 'Lords' or they discovered 'Ladies' can be just as good as Lords in many ways, but believe me, it was by dint of work and determination.⁴

The foregoing notwithstanding, even a cursory survey reveals that certain professions like teaching and nursing have overtime evolved in such a manner in Nigeria that women mostly outnumber their male colleagues. But with regards to History however, a recent comparative survey in the universities in the six Nigerian geopolitical zones reveal that there are more Nigerian professional male historians than females nationwide. Albeit, there are, as we shall subsequently observe, over one hundred female historians in Nigeria at present, most of whom, as evidence show, do not participate actively in the HSN.

Thus, this paper examines the extent of the participation of female historians in the activities of the HSN. It also explores the values that female historians could add to the operations of the Historical Society, and in the promotion of the discipline of History, for which their increased active participation is advocated. Furthermore, the paper highlights the factors inhibiting the active participation of the relatively few Nigerian female historians in the affairs of the Society. In conclusion, the paper proposes the strategies that could be employed to improve the number of female historians in the HSN, and to ensure that ultimately, female historians become much more active and consistent in the affairs of the Society, which is the main vehicle for the sustenance and promotion of the discipline and practice of History in Nigeria. The main thrust of the paper being that the participation of female historians, though largely lukewarm, the example of those who are active, as presented in the paper, illustrates that increased participation by female historians will be positively beneficial to the HSN and the discipline of history in Nigeria.

Available statistics from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria reveal that as at 2017, the North-Central and North-East zones have 209 history lecturers of which 184 are males and 25 are females. The North-West zone has 96 history lecturers out of which 9 are females. The South-South zone has a population of 30 female lecturers of the 90 history lecturers. The South-East zone has a data of 15 female history lecturers of the 75 historians teaching in various institutions of learning within the zone. The South-West zone has a statistic of 71 history lecturers of which 59 are males and 12 are females.

Statistics from some select Departments of History in Nigerian universities, which are amongst others, already part of the foregoing statistics of History lecturers from the respective geopolitical zones, reveal in specific details, the number of female historians vis-à-vis their male counterparts. The Department of History at the University of Ibadan has 1 female lecturer and 10 male lecturers. The History Department at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, has 18 lecturers composed of 2 females and 16 males. At the University of Ilorin, the history department has 3 female lecturers out of 13 history lecturers. For the University of Lagos, there are 21 history lecturers of which 3 are females. The Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, has 17 history lecturers composed of 3 females and 14 males. The University of Port Harcourt has 22 history lecturers of which 2 are females. The Benue State University, Makurdi, has 2 female history lecturers and 16 males. The Bayelsa State-owned Niger Delta University has 11 lecturers in the Department of History, of which 3 are females. The Universities of Uyo and Benin rank higher than others in the population of female history lecturers, with 6 female lecturers out of 23 lecturers; and 5 female lecturers out of 13 lecturers respectively.⁵

Here, we can safely infer, judging from the comprehensive statistics from the geopolitical zones, and from the select statistics of the Departments of History of some Nigerian universities cited above, that although female historians are fewer, they still constitute an average of about 20% of the total number of known professional historians in Nigeria. This amounts to an estimated numerical strength of over 100 professional female historians in Nigeria.⁶ Therefore, the central question in this paper is, how much has the relatively few, but above 100 professional female historians in Nigeria been participating in the activities of the HSN, and in its main objective of promoting historical consciousness and learning in Nigeria? This study reveals that only between five to nine percent of the relatively few female historians have been consistently and actively involved in the affairs of the HSN.

Participation of Female Historians in the Affairs of the HSN

From its inception, the HSN has had its Council, composed of some elected members, as its main policy-making organ. The Council, in performing its leadership functions, is accountable to the General Congress, comprising all registered members. Furthermore, the HSN has had as its main activities, the annual congresses, which it has held virtually every year since its founding. It has also sustained the publication of two journals being the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (JHSN), and *Tarikh*. Besides the Society's journals, its members have also been engaged in various research interests in the last sixty years of its existence.

In what follows then, an attempt is made to examine the extent to which female historians have or have not participated and contributed to the progress of the HSN. Generally, the activities of the HSN include effective membership of the Council; active participation in the annual

congresses of the Society, where ‘active’ implies consistent commitment in sufficiently attending and engaging in Congress activities; and being amply published in the various editions of the Society’s publications over the years.

With regards to their active and consistent participation in the HSN Council, female historians, it is evident, have not been sufficiently involved. This position is predicated upon the fact that, despite the findings that male historians outnumber female historians in essentially all parts of Nigeria, only a minimal average of about 1% of the relatively few female historians have served in the respective Councils of the Historical Society of Nigeria since its founding sixty-two years ago in 1955. Besides, only two female historians, Professor Egodi Uchendu and Dr MfonEkpootu, serve in the current (2017-19) Council of the Historical Society of Nigeria and only Professor Uchendu has risen to the Vice Presidency of the Society since the creation of the zonal vice presidency over ten years ago. She was elected Vice President (South-East Nigeria), in 2012,⁷ when the Society was fifty-seven years old. Professor Egodi is also the first female editor of the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, which is almost as old as the Historical Society itself. Thus, without any ambiguity, the foregoing precedent reveals the paucity of participation of female historians in the Historical Society of Nigeria.

Apart from their participation at the Council level of the Historical Society of Nigeria, it is a fact that only between five to nine percent of the over one hundred known professional female historians in Nigeria have consistently attended the annual congresses of the Historical Society of Nigeria since 2005. Here, the argument that they are relatively few in comparison to their male counterparts does not hold any gain. This is so because though comparatively few, only less than 10% of the few but over 100 of female historians, as stated earlier, have been attending the annual congresses consistently in the last ten years. For instance, of the 101 participants, only 9 female historians attended the 57th Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria at the Ibrahim Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State, in 2012. Virtually the same statistics was recorded in previous congresses and at the 58th/59th congress at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 2014, with only minimal, less than 10% improvements at the 60th, 61st and 62nd congresses of the Society at Abuja, Port Harcourt and Sokoto, in 2015, 2016 and 2017 respectively.⁸

There is also poor participation of female historians in the publications of the Historical Society of Nigeria. The fewness of female historians in comparison to their male counterparts still does not present any strong justification for their lack of participation in the Historical Society’s publication activities. While we recognise the fact that not a few female historians have been visible in publishing seminal articles in learned journals within and outside Nigeria, it is pertinent to note however that with regards to the flagship *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria (JHSN)*, the number of articles written and published by female historians since 2009, for instance, have been infinitesimal compared to the population of over one hundred practicing female historians in Nigeria at present. Indeed, a recent check by this writer reveals that only a minimal number of female historians seem to have been keen about having their articles published in the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*. This certainly accounts for the poor visibility of female writers in what is clearly the most seminal publication of the Historical Society of Nigeria.

The 18th Volume of the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria (JHSN)*, published in 2009, had only one female contribution by Shade Ifamose, out of 8 contributors; Volume 19 of 2010,

had no female contributor out of 10 contributors; Volume 20 of 2011 had only one female contributor, Jacinta C. Nwaka, out of 13 published submissions. Volume 21 of 2012 had no female contributor out of thirteen contributions. Volume 23 of 2014 had only one female entry by Professor Egodi Uchendu.⁹ The same statistic applies to Volume 24 of 2015, while the 25th Volume of 2016 did not fare better.

Certainly, the low visibility of female historians revealed by the above statistics with regards to the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* can also not be justified by the so-called fewness of female historians vis-à-vis their male counterparts. This is so because, as stated earlier there are above one hundred female historians in Nigeria, and besides, some female historians have, before they became withdrawn in this regard, been active in the publishing activities of the Historical Society in the recent past. For instance, the 17th Volume of the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* issued as the 2007/2008 edition, laudably had contributions from 2 female historians namely, Naomi Bot and Winifred E. Akoda.¹⁰

Besides the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Nigerian female historians have not fared any better in publishing articles in the *Tarikh* – which is the journal published mainly for mentoring younger generations of historians. Although the *Tarikh* itself has been slow in being issued by the Historical Society of Nigeria in the last decade and more, female participation in the few editions that have been published in the last ten years, has been abysmal. In the New Series Issues Volume 1 No.1, and Volume 1 No. 2, of 2005 and 2009 respectively, for instance, there were no female entries at all.¹¹

Indeed, the foregoing trend no doubt leaves much more to be desired. Here, we shall turn to the pioneer Nigerian professional female historian – Professor Bolanle Awe – as a role model. Although she became the first indigenous female lecturer in Nigeria in 1960, when it was still virtually prohibitive for a woman to seek western tertiary education, not to speak of becoming a lecturer in the University, or even aspiring to a position of authority in society, she stood tall amongst her male colleagues, and became a champion of documenting the history of Nigerian women and other histories. She was in fact the only Nigerian female historian that contributed to the seminal book – *A Thousand Years of West African History* (1969), written by several members of the Historical Society of Nigeria under the editorship of its President at the time, Professor J.F. Ade-Ajayi. She rose to become the first Nigerian female Professor of History in 1976, and Fellow of the Historical Society of Nigeria in 1992. Her edited book – *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective*, and her chapter in that book entitled ‘Saviors of their Societies,’ has been described by a female historian in North-West Nigeria, Aisha BalarabeBawa, as having done great justice to the role of Nigerian women in society.¹²

Apart from Professor Bolanle Awe, we also remember amongst others Professor Elizabeth Isichei – Nigerian female historian by marriage and specialization. Her cerebral book – *A History of the Igbo People* (1976), became one of the indisputable pacesetters and reference publication even for the entirely male-dominated arguably yet-to-be-rivalled book of the Historical Society of Nigeria – *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (1980), edited by Professor ObaroIkime, in which she was acknowledged.¹³

Clearly, the present recession in female participation in contributing articles to the journals of the Historical Society of Nigeria, which, it is hoped should improve with future editions; and the

lack of sufficient participation in the membership of the Council and in the conferences of the Historical Society of Nigeria discussed earlier, presents a glaring reflection of several factors. Amongst such factors are the laid-back attitude on the part of many of the relatively few female historians in Nigeria towards the Historical Society; sheer ignorance about the Society and its activities; as well as the insufficient awareness or sensitivity about the reclusive attitudes of female historians in Nigeria on the part of their male counterparts. But why is female participation in the activities of the Historical Society of Nigeria important? The answer lies below.

The Significance of Female Participation in the HSN

Scholars, Ebiegberi J. Alagoa, Chabuovie M. Sorgwe, Atei M. Okorobia, Amakivie O.I. Gabriel and other keen observers of cultural trends through the years, with or without any gender sentiments, agree that there are roles that women play better than men in society,¹⁴ as in particular organizations as the Historical Society of Nigeria. But without any intention to instigate the well-known debates of the sexes, we approach this subject with the objectivity that it deserves by rather advocating the complementarity of the sexes. That was what Sharon Alakija, Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women did when she spoke in advocating that women should be as recognized as men. She opined that: ‘no nation, no matter how rich in physical resources can afford to sideline half of its human population’.¹⁵

Overtime, women have shown peculiar abilities by their outstanding performances in various spheres of life, in this instance, in the affairs of the Historical Society of Nigeria and in promoting historical consciousness. Certainly, the importance and ability of women must be what an historian, Dr Emma Onwuzirike, meant to buttress when, in writing about the significance of women in the traditional African society, he stated that ‘the traditional society understood the indispensability of the women-folk, hence both sexes lived on complementary rather than on competitive lines.’ A local priest, he further notes, once remarked that his skepticism about heaven arose from the fact that, he was told, there were no women in heaven, and that all the inhabitants of heaven are either Angelic males or sexless Angels. The local priests’ answer to converts, Onwuzirike further narrates, was that a society without women would be hell rather than heaven.¹⁶ And it is therefore plausible to add, that a society or an organization, (the Historical Society of Nigeria inclusive), without a strong female inclusion, activity and participation, would rather be dismal, uncreative, unattractive and retrogressive. Indeed, there has always been the need for that profound negotiating influence and finesse in virtually every affair that only the feminine gender is, for the most part, endowed with by nature to possess and confer. Hence, the popular saying ‘a woman’s job; a woman’s touch,” which is buttressed by the lines of the eminent British writer, John Fowles, who wrote, “The power of women! I’ve never felt so full of mysterious power.”¹⁷

Besides the influence, creativity and finesse that women bring with them to organizations, the advocacy for increased participation of the female-folk in the affairs of the HSN is necessary for the purpose of historical justice. For in the implied words of the development historian, Atei Mark Okorobia, if historians must tell their own history, which they should of course document, they must strive towards ensuring what would clearly be termed objectivity in relation to the participation and documentation of the activities of both male and females alike. In Okorobia’s words:...and if we must have a clear picture of the past challenges, opportunities, struggles,

triumphs and failures of an individual, group or society, (the Historical Society of Nigeria inclusive), attempts have to be made to ensure that historical justice is done without regard to sex and other subjective criteria. Attempts have to be made to pay equal or adequate attention to both the male and female experiences within the society.¹⁸

Okorobia's treatise proffers one of the vital answers to the question about why increased female-historian participation in the HSN should be advocated at all. It is advocated for the purpose of 'historical justice,' which implies the practice of giving equal attention to the participation of women, as to the participation of men, in the promotion and progress of the HSN and by that, historical consciousness in Nigeria. By 'historical justice' Okorobia simply means that female historians in Nigeria should be given as much attention as their male counterparts. 'Historical justice' as applied here is however not to suggest that the HSN discriminates against women. Rather, it is intended to emphasize the need to motivate the Society to do more in encouraging increased participation of professional female historians in all its affairs, such as towards the promotion of historical awareness in Nigeria, as well as in the documentation of history, including the history of the HSN itself.

Apart from the 'historical justice' stated above, increased female participation is advocated herein for the value they bring in mentoring the younger generation, and in this case, younger historians to the level of professionalism. Certainly, while the following instances may be viewed as a few amongst several examples, the cases of how Nigerian Professors J.F. Ade-Ajayi and E.J. Alagoa became lifelong historians validate the impact of mothers or women in the choice and consolidation of their individual careers. It also poses an example for professional female historians. That is, to be more involved in the activities of the Historical Society of Nigeria as mentors, especially to prospective and practicing female and male historians alike, by bringing with them the unique mentoring ability that is peculiar to women.

When Professor J.F. Ade-Ajayi's mother asked him what he was going to the United Kingdom to study, he replied 'Itan', the Yoruba word for 'story'.¹⁹ According to Professor Ade-Ajayi, his mother was surprised and wondered why he was leaving the shores of Nigeria just to study 'story', as she was herself an effective raconteur – a folklorist and informal native historian. Notwithstanding, he recalls, she gave him her support and encouragement, obviously because of her interest in the native folklore, rich in history and tradition. Indeed, the positive disposition, co-operation and encouragement of Professor Ade-Ajayi's mother, served to motivate him towards becoming the historian of significance and president of the Historical Society of Nigeria that he became. The emphasis here underscores the significance and role of women as mentors and motivators worthy of emulation.

Professor E.J. Alagoa's experience on the mentoring ability of females is even more profound, dating back to his childhood days. His maternal grandmother, Tuamain, was a native healer, midwife and renowned folklorist.²⁰ It was she, he reminisces, who first introduced him to effective narrative skills, which became his earliest history lesson, and would eventually prove vital to his calling as a professional historian. The feats of the mother and grandmother of Professors Ade-Ajayi and Alagoa respectively, are only a few but very reliable examples of how much women, even as the female members of the HSN, could, among other efforts, encourage and inspire the younger generations of History students and graduates to take up professional careers as historians who would promote historical consciousness mainly through the agency of

the Historical Society. Here we have a worthy example in Professor Egodi Uchendu who, in 2009, initiated a prize for the best graduating female history student at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.²¹ Clearly, this motivational and mentoring gesture, many would agree, has the propensity of enhancing female participation in the HSN.

In addition to all the reasons that have been adduced for which increased participation of women in the HSN is advocated, women have been described to have, for the most part, been generally more empathic, emotionally attached, morally stable, disciplined and committed to their vocations or endeavors than most men. This certainly could be attributed to the peculiar composition of women, and the high regards and expectations that society, in Nigeria as elsewhere, naturally bestows on, and demands of them. And it is an established fact in most societies, that certain behavioral traits as indolence or lack of sufficient commitment to a worthy cause that could be excused if manifested by men cannot be condoned when exhibited by women even in similar circumstances. Women in most African societies are expected to be bastions of morality and the very personification of beauty, character and industry. The woman, writes Mojekwu-Chikezie, is usually and enterprisingly, the burden bearer; mother, wife, resource manager, motivator, mobiliser and catalyst.²² Thus, it evidently follows that when they are sufficiently active and visible in any organization, they enhance its growth and effectiveness by bringing the foregoing qualities and virtues to bear on that organization.

This position is buttressed by certain female historians who have been evidently committed, if not more committed than their male counterparts in certain instances. These female historians have, as we had summarily observed elsewhere in this paper, been very active in the Historical Society of Nigeria, and have enhanced the discipline, practice, and consciousness of history through their numerous seminal developmental and mentoring scholarly efforts. They are: Professors Bolanle Awe, Elizabeth Isichei, Gloria Emeagwali, and in more contemporary times, Professors Egodi Uchendu, Stella Effah-Atoe, Winifred Akoda, Sade Ifamose, HannatuAlahira, Husaina Ibrahim, Aisha BalarabeBawa, Drs MfonEkpootu, Zara E. Kwaghe, Nike Ajayi and a few others.

Indeed, the commitments of the female historians mentioned above to the growth of the Historical Society, and by that, to the advancement of historical consciousness in Nigeria, has been adjudged remarkable and worth emulating. They have, by their fervent involvement in the affairs and activities of the HSN; as well as by their respective research interests, publications and teachings, inspired younger generations of female and of course male historians alike, to be more committed to the discipline and practice of History, to ensure the corporate sustenance of the Historical Society of Nigeria. The following details their respective efforts at promoting the Historical Society of Nigeria by every known index through robust historical scholarship in Nigeria and beyond.

Professor Bolanle Awe is, as stated earlier, the first indigenous professional female historian in Nigeria. She became a lecturer at the premier University of Ibadan in 1960, and Professor of Oral History in 1978. She also taught at the University of Lagos from 1966 to 1969.²³ Her works on African, Nigerian, Yoruba, Oral and Feminine history, speak for her as a legendary historical icon that have contributed to the growth of the History discipline and of Nigeria. A Fellow of the Historical Society of Nigeria, she has visibly been an epitome of who a professional female historian should be. Her contributions to the growth of the Institute of African Studies at the

University of Ibadan, where she was Director; and her chairmanship of the Women Research and Development Center of the University of Ibadan were also phenomenal. Professor Bolanle Awe's rare ability to combine public service, academic career and family life, with equal dedication, especially during her tenures following her appointments as Commissioner for Education, and then for Trade, Industries and Co-operatives, is clearly admirable and exemplary of a worthy female historian.

With regards to Elizabeth Isichei,²⁴ she became a Nigerian by marriage but took upon herself the rare vocation clearly worthy of emulation, to know Nigerian history and to make it known for national development. An active member of the Historical Society of Nigeria in her years in Nigeria, she contributed immensely to an understanding of African, Nigerian and Igbo history. That she did by her numerous classical publications which focused, not just on the elites and rulers, but on the less privileged social groups such as peasant farmers, craftsmen and workers, all from an African perspective. Together with Professors Kenneth Dike, Henry Charles Smith, Ade-Ajayi, Bolanle Awe and others, she proved herself as a true Africanist scholar and historian. A Social Historian, she studied in two New Zealand universities, graduating with a first class honours degree. She taught at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, before winning a scholarship to Oxford where she studied and obtained her doctorate degree from Nuffield College, Oxford University. From 1969, Elizabeth began to teach in African Universities. She taught at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and at the University of Jos, Nigeria. Prominent amongst her numerous outstanding publications are: *A History of Nigeria* (1983); *The Igbo People and the Europeans* (1973); *A History of the Igbo People* (1976), etc.

Gloria Emeagwali is another professional female historian who has contributed enormously to the promotion of historical consciousness in Nigeria. A Fellow of the Historical Society of Nigeria, and a recipient of the National Scholar Award of the Society,²⁵ she was the Kenneth Dike memorial lecturer at the 57th Annual Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria held at Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State, Nigeria. A Nigerian by marriage, she taught history at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, from 1979 to 1986. She also taught history at the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria, where she was an Associate Professor, and at the Nigerian Defense Academy, Kaduna, Nigeria, where she was Visiting Associate Professor from 1986 to 1989. A leading scholar on a vast spectrum of research interests ranging from gender studies to indigenous African technology, and to methodology of history, she has contributed to the promotion of historical knowledge and consciousness in Nigeria, Africa, her native Caribbeans and the world at-large. This, she has achieved through her numerous publications and through her website visited by thousands of students and other personalities daily. Currently, a Professor of History at the Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, USA, she has also been a Visiting Professor and Guest Lecturer and Assessor in various institutions around the world. Professor Gloria Emeagwali is the author of several books and articles. Her books include: *Africa and the Academy*. New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2006; *The African Experience*. New York: Whittier, 2006 (co-edited with Walton Brown-Foster); *Women Pay The Price: Structural Adjustment in Africa and the Caribbean*. New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1995 etc.

Professor Egodi Uchendu's contributions to the growth of the discipline of history and by that to national development, and to the advancement of the Historical Society of Nigeria, of which she

became a fellow in 2014, has been clearly noteworthy. She has been a major source of inspiration, many would agree, to female historians in contemporary Nigeria. That is especially by her active involvement in the Historical Society of Nigeria, and by the obviously widespread and incisive worth of her scholarship. Professor Egodi Uchendu is the first woman and professional female historian to be elected to the Vice Presidency of the Historical Society of Nigeria in 2012, in which she evidently served creditably and was thus re-elected to serve another two-year tenure in 2014. Prior to her being elected Vice President, she had served as a member of the Council of the Historical Society of Nigeria representing the South-East zone from 2010 to 2012.²⁶ significantly also; she is the first female historian to the appointed editor of the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*.

Professor Uchendu joined the Department of History of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1997. She rose through the ranks and was promoted Professor in 2012. In her own right, and as head of the History and International Studies Department of the University of Nigeria from 2012 to 2013, she has been actively committed to inspiring the younger generations to be involved in the sustaining historical scholarship and by that, strengthening their chances of eventually becoming members of the Historical Society of Nigeria. Professor Egodi has clearly been a leader in mentoring younger generations of historians, and especially female history students and graduates who certainly look up to her as a role model for women in the History profession. As we had observed earlier in this paper, in 2009, she initiated a prize for the best-graduating female student of the Department of History and International Studies, University of Nigeria. Four female students of the Department have since received the award as at 2015.²⁷

Professor Uchendu is vastly published and serves as review editor to several international journals. She is member of several significant global Associations as the African Studies Association (since 2002), and had also lectured at the Nigerian Defence Academy as part of her several contributions to national development. Her publications include: *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War* (New Jersey, 2007); *Masculinities in Contemporary Africa* (Dakar, 2008); *Dawn for Islam in Eastern Nigeria: A History of the Arrival of Islam in Igboland* (Berlin, 2011; with a special Nigerian edition published 2012); *New Face of Islam in Eastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin: Essays in Honour of Simon Ottenberg* (Makurdi, 2012).

Factors Inhibiting the Participation of Female Historians in the HSN

Although the foregoing reasons and examples explain why the HSN should see more of its available female historians participating sufficiently in its affairs and activities, there is no gainsaying the fact that there have been other factors inhibiting their adequate participation in at least the last ten years and earlier. What then are those factors?

First, there is the issue of the glaringly laidback and unenthusiastic attitudes of most female historians towards the affairs of the HSN. The point has already been made elsewhere in this paper, that although professional male historians outnumber their female counterparts with a ratio of about three males to one female, there are above one hundred professional indigenous female historians in Nigeria, out of whom only less than ten percent participate sufficiently in the affairs of the HSN. This certainly leaves much to be desired with regards to increased female participation in the affairs of the Society.

Second, there is the prevalence of widespread ignorance amongst majority of historians about the nature, programmes and projects of the HSN, even in this era of the internet. Here again, the female historians who are by their number fewer, are evidently more culpable. Clearly, this fact was revealed in a recent encounter of this writer with a female professor and head of a History Department in a Southern Nigerian university. The encounter, which some would argue, was more an exception than the rule, was albeit expository of the fact that there are some professional historians in Nigeria that cannot properly pronounce even the name of the 'Historical Society of Nigeria'. Undoubtedly, such historians lack adequate knowledge of what the HSN is all about; when it was founded; who founded it; what its present programmes are; and what its challenges and triumphs have been. This certainly is again a plausible factor that accounts for why the greater percentages of female historians have not been committed members of the HSN.

Third, the identified lack of sufficient participation of professional female historians in the HSN has been attributed to certain social and religious factors. This is the position of the avid historian, lecturer and member of the HSN, Dr Emmanuel Osewe Akubor, who has been in virtually all the conferences of the Historical Society of Nigeria over the last decade.²⁸ According to him, as women, professional female historians face quite a number of domestic and religious challenges that hinder them from participating maximally in the affairs of the HSN, especially as it relates to attending conferences regularly, and serving on the council of the Society. He posits that not every husband, (especially of married female historians who hail from families with strict extremist religious codes that subsumes the woman entirely to the will of her husband), would permit his wife to travel away from the home for three or four days to attend an academic conference or to serve in the Historical Society Council amidst other men, and at the expense of the welfare of the home.

Fourth, the organisation of the HSN itself has some fundamental operational flaws that allow what could be regarded as indifference in relation to the affairs of the Society. There have never been membership enforcement and compliance rules and procedures since its inception in 1955.²⁹ Hence, many professional historians, females and males alike, could leisurely stay away from the Society's meetings without sanction.

Fifth, up to the present, there is no comprehensive data bank of all members of the HSN. As such, the Society does not yet have direct contact with all her members. This situation certainly hampers adequate information dissemination and responses, which are of course indispensable to effective participation of all female historians. The statistics of over one hundred female lecturers in Nigeria that has been stated above, was, for instance, derived from a reasonably reliable projection based on available data.

Sixth, the Emeritus Professor of History, and two-time president of the HSN, E.J. Alagoa,³⁰ acknowledged the fact that female historians have been much less visible and participatory in the membership and leadership of the HSN over the years. According to him, the leadership of the Historical Society has not been sufficiently gender sensitive.³¹ This is with regards to the enhanced participation of all its female members, even when the number of professional female historians has improved tremendously at least since the last ten years, beginning from the golden jubilee year of 2005, which was clearly a watershed in the history of the HSN.

Enhancing the Participation of Professional Female Historians in the HSN

In the previous segment of this study, we had identified and examined the inhibiting factors that have hindered professional female historians over the years, from participating actively and sufficiently in the affairs and activities of the HSN, especially in its cardinal objective of promoting the practice of history in Nigeria. In this segment therefore, we shall proffer some measures that could be employed to improve their participation in the affairs of the HSN.

Three major suggestions are proposed here as possible solutions to the problem. As a first line charge, it is imperative for the professional Nigerian female historians in Nigeria and in diaspora to enhance their participation by ensuring a systematically organized contact and follow-up system geared towards reaching out to female historians who hardly know about up and coming HSN activities. For this, a comprehensive and regularly updated data bank is indispensable, especially for disseminating information towards enhancing the participation of female historians in the HSN. While this is certainly not an advocacy for the emergence of a movement or association of female historians in Nigeria, there is equally no gainsaying the fact that professional female historians nationwide, need to consciously initiate well-thought-out strategies for motivating and mentoring female history graduates especially after their national youth service year, to take up career as historians and to be active in the HSN.

With regards to the above position, the best female history undergraduate student reward initiative of Professor Egodi Uchendu, cited previously, serves the prime and only known example. Mentoring younger female historians in a sort of 'catch them early' bid, which is definitely complementary to the efforts of the Students' Historical Society of Nigeria, (SHSN), is certainly a step in the right direction. That is, when we consider its potential effect in enhancing female-historians' participation in the HSN. Mentoring in this sense increases continuity and progressive growth of the number of active female historians. It is also significant because at least two prominent institutions of higher learning in Nigeria are already showing signs that the population of female historians could increase with more motivation at the university undergraduate level. In the 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 academic sessions for instance, the history departments of the Universities of Benin and Lagos graduated more female students than males. At Benin, the department graduated 33 females and 14 males; and 44 females and 26 males in the two sessions respectively. The University of Lagos graduated 45 females above 44 males in the 2012/2013 session.³²

While we take the suggested solutions above into cognizance, it is significant to note that in the course of the last decade and onwards, during the HSN presidencies of Professors Yakubu Ochefu, Olayemi Akinwumi and C.B.N. Ogbogbo, there has been some reforms geared towards reviving the Society. Such reforms include the creation and sustenance of the HSN website, its data bank of members, ensuring the regular publication of the JHSN, and very significantly, commencing the process of re-introducing the teaching of history in Nigerian schools in collaboration with the relevant government agencies and institutions, amongst several other initiatives.

While we welcome the stated reforms of the last decade and more, the impact of the reforms is yet to be seen in form of a notable increase in the number of active participating female historians in the HSN. It is therefore incumbent upon the Historical Society to ensure that more professional female historians are motivated and involved in its affairs. This should also be, especially with regards to the negotiation processes of reintroducing history in all strata of the

Nigerian educational system, amongst other engagements, where women are known to have possessed and exhibited comparative advantage by their negotiating abilities, with the expected positive outcomes. Thus, perhaps this significance of women was what the American author and humorist, Mark Twain, observed when he wrote: “What would men be without women?” Scarce Sir... mighty scarce.”³³

CONCLUSION

This study has been an exposition of the paucity of professional Nigerian female-historian participation in the affairs and activities of the HSN, towards the promotion of historical consciousness and learning in Nigeria. The essay highlighted the significance of women and their participation in the HSN as an association, for which their increased involvement in its affairs is advocated. Besides, it identified six reasons why there is the paucity of professional female-historian participation in the Historical Society. It proposes measures to ameliorate and possibly eliminate the factors inhibiting the commitment of professional female historians’ participation in the affairs of the HSN.

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