



FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF LAFIA
INAUGURAL LECTURE SERIES NO.14
FACULTY OF ARTS



***HERSTORY* IN THE MAKING OF MODERN NIGERIA:
PATRIARCHY, WOMEN AND THE POLITICS OF
KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION**

ZARA E. KWAGHE, *FHSN*
PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL HISTORY
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

MAY 14, 2024



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DEDICATION

This lecture is dedicated first to my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in Whom I live, move and have my being (Acts 17:28).

Secondly, to all women who put in so much effort to keep the society sane.

THE PRESENTER



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Professor of Social History
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Federal University of Lafia

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Salutations

The Vice Chancellor, Federal University of Lafia
Members of the Governing Council of the Federal
University of Lafia
Principal Officers of our great University
Deans and Directors
Members of Senate
Members of Congregation
Council and Members of the Historical Society of
Nigeria
All Professors present
Royal Fathers
Invited friends and colleagues
Members of my nuclear and extended family
My past and present students
Students' Historical Society of Nigeria
Students of Federal University of Lafia
Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

1. Preliminaries

It is with humility, great honour and gratitude to God Almighty, and my Lord Jesus Christ that I stand before you this day being May 14, 2024 to deliver the fourteenth Inaugural Lecture series of our great University. This lecture is the fifth from the Faculty of Arts and fourth from the Department of History and International Studies. Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, permit me to state at this juncture that I am by the special grace of God the first female inaugural lecturer from the Faculty of Arts and the Department of History and International Studies, Federal University of Lafia. Until today Vice Chancellor Sir, all the previous presenters from the

Faculty and the Department were males, and I do not take this for granted at all, as I return all glory to God.

In agreement with the previous inaugural lecturers, Inaugural Lecture is a significant milestone in the academic profession of a Professor and this provides a platform to share one's academic and research activities and other contributions and services to humanity. It is also an occasion for the University to publicly acknowledge the appointment of a new Professor and formally introduce them to the academic community of the University. The Vice-Chancellor Sir, since you assumed leadership of this great institution, you have not failed to encourage newly conferred Chairs and even the older ones to present their inaugural lecture. In fact, the first time you invited all Associates and full Professors to a meeting (then I was an Associate Professor), you passionately emphasised the need for all the newly appointed Professors to give their inaugural lecture within one year of being promoted.

Sincerely Sir, after that meeting I was a bit apprehensive. My concern then was based on this question 'what will a newly appointed Professor tell the public?' Sir, I had thought (as the tradition in most Universities) that a Professor has to be given enough time to build a 'professorial' curriculum vitae that will 'wow' a lot of people when it is being read, and I also held the assumption that such a Professor should have professed and churned out quite a number of students at the postgraduate supervisory level. My second worry was on the expenses usually incurred at the occasion of

inaugural lecture. However, in order to comfort myself, I went to read more about inaugural lecture and my discovery was that just as the name implies it is not meant to be delayed and that our amiable Vice Chancellor is right on course on his advocacy for early inauguration; and this changed my mind set drastically. I learnt that inaugural lecture is delivered by a tenured academic who has been recently promoted to the rank of a full Professor. The topic of the lecture is chosen by the Professor and typically relates to his/her research expertise. It covers the Professor's research journey, contributions to knowledge, what he/she knows, what is unknown and yet to be known in their field of study.¹ Since then, I began to think and plan mine, even though I was still disturbed by funding. On this note, I will like to thank the Dean of Deans, Prof. Josephine E. Odey, for helping me realise that I did not need so much to entertain my guests at my inaugural. I thank you, Ma for your encouragement and for cheering me on. Today, I am standing before you Sir and these distinguished guests to present the fourteenth Inaugural Lecture of the University and I think this is a victory of the inner self battles I went through to summon the courage to be inaugurated early in the position. Vice-Chancellor Sir, I am incalculably grateful to you for availing me the platform and opportunity to fulfil this rite of passage before I become too old in it to do so. Sir, having said the above, I will like to inform you that my Inaugural Lecture is in two segments. The first is my vocation as a University academic, and the second is based on my research endeavours and contributions to humanity through research.

¹Thompson Rivers University "Inaugural Professorial Lecture"
<https://www.tru.ca>.

2. Introduction

While growing up as a young girl in Calabar, I remember with nostalgia how my father would, every night before bed, make me recite the times-table (not without the whip, though), there after he told my siblings and I some very interesting bed time stories. I enjoyed listening to the stories and would not want anyone to interrupt him in the process. In situations where he failed to end the story due to interruption, I would begin to plead with him to conclude the story. Perhaps that was where my love for history was cultivated. As I advanced in my education, my likeness for history continued and I found myself reading biographies, novels and history books. While in primary and secondary schools, history was one of my favourite subjects and was also my first choice of discipline when I applied to study in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (ABU) after my IJMB programme in the then Borno College of Basic Studies, Maidugiri (BOCOBS).

While I was in ABU, Zaria, I had the privilege to be taught by scholars of great repute who belonged to the *ABU School of History*. Prominent amongst them were the late Dr Bala Usman, late Dr Mahmud Tukur, and Professors Enoch Oyedele, Monday Y. Mangvwat, Alkasum Abba, Abdullahi Mahadi (late), J. Ukwede, Z. Gundu, Boache Ansah (Ghanaian) and others. In Zaria, I was further exposed to another aspect of history which emphasises the rigorous evaluation and assessment of all types of sources for historical reconstruction² and also

²Alkasum Abba “Tribute to Dr. Yusufu Bala Usman” Gamji 2005, p.2.

the Marxist school of thought. At the University of Maidugiri, where I undertook my postgraduate studies in History (Masters and PhD), I had the opportunity of meeting and being taught by the late quintessential Prof. Sa'ad Abubakar, a product of the *ABU School of History* himself. In fact he was the first to be awarded a doctorate degree in ABU and in History by the University.³ Also Professors D.S.M. Koroma, J.P. Dada, Saliba James, Waziri Ibrahim, Mukthar Yakubu and Umar H. Diram, Drs Abubakar Fari, and. Garba Ibrahim to mention a few were my teachers who further enriched my worldview and general knowledge of history.

I joined the services of the Adamawa State University, Mubi (ADSU) as a pioneer staff in 2002. While in ADSU, I taught history and history related courses in the School of Foundation and Remedial Studies (SFRS), Centre for General Studies and the Department of Political Science; this was before the Department of History was established in 2014. I was the pioneer Head, Department of History, ADSU until 2015 when I transferred my services to the Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State. While in ADSU Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, inclusive of teaching, research and community service, I served as an Examination Officer in SFRS and the Department of Political Science, member of Senate Business Committee and several other appointive committees in the University. My engagement in the different sections of the University and my eventual services to the various units added to

³*Daily Trust* "Tribute to Professor Sa'ad Abubakar (1943-2019)"
<https://dailytrust.com/tribute-to-prpfeor-saad-abubakar-1943-2019>

my already cultivated self-discipline, friendly and supportive dispositions. It was with the same mind and attitude that I transferred my services to the Department of History and International Studies, Federal University of Lafia (FULafia), Nasarawa State as a Senior Lecturer in 2015 after Boko Haram invasion of Mubi and attack on many residents there.

Since joining FULafia, I have also been privileged to serve in different committees at the University, Faculty and the Departmental levels. I served as an Academic Adviser, Faculty Examination Officer, Postgraduate Coordinator, Head of the Department of History and International Studies, and currently the pioneer Director of the Centre for Cultural Studies. In FULafia, I got promoted to an Associate Professor under the leadership of Prof. Mohammad Sanusi Liman and to full Professor by our amiable Vice Chancellor, Prof. Shehu Abdul Rahman. In all this, I say thank you to God who availed me the opportunity, sound mind and good health to meet and interact with wonderful colleagues in my Department and in other Departments across the length and breadth of the University.

3. Conceptual Explication

Vice Chancellor Sir, having given a brief history of my University career, I will at this juncture concentrate on the main reason we are gathered here today, which is the Inaugural Lecture proper. Sir, it is pertinent to note that today's inaugural lecture is the first lecture to specifically focus on women since the tradition of Inaugural Lecture began in FULafia. The first fourteen

dwelt on different aspects of human endeavours in the society. The presenters, I must say, all did remarkably well as they thoroughly and brilliantly discussed as well as educate attendees on their different fields. I doff my cap in respect for them Sir. Today, we are here gathered at my instance to listen to another topical issue of concern that affects the way history has been written and understood over the years. The writing of history overtime has concentrated on the spectacular achievements of men and has neglected, or negligibly glossed over the contributions of women in the development of the society in which they live.⁴ Until the 1970s, very little was written on African women's history. Despite the advances made in African historiography, there was no serious attempt made by historians to study and document the role of women in society. Even when authors who were mainly male note the omission of women in their works and offer apology, they still continue to write historical analyses that ignore gender and women's contributions.⁵

The lack of any serious documentation of women in African historiography contributed to the dearth of information on African women who made their marks in the annals of their different societies and times.⁶ Some of

⁴Bolanle Awe (ed) *Nigerian Women A Historical Perspective* (Ibadan: Bookcraft Ltd, 2001)

⁵Kathleen Sheldon "Writing about Women Approaches to a Gendered Perspective" in John Edward Philips (ed) *African History, Writing African History* (University of Rochester Press, 2005), 465-489.

⁶Zara E. Kwaghe and Amin Zaigi Ngharen "Remembering Edimini Kambasa: The First Queen from the Niger Delta" in Chukwuma

these women have been mistaken for men and their achievements conferred to men. Kathleen Sheldon observes that while R.A Sargent was investigating the history of royal women among the Bunyoro-Kitara in Uganda, he discovered that the men's oral histories tended to omit the stories about women who ruled in the past, and where such women were mentioned it was considered "an aberration rather than a real political force."⁷ Besides, the colonial administration as Awe opines, paid very little attention to the role and contribution of women except in times of crisis like the Egba Women Riots, Mau Mau Rebellion and the women's war of 1929, also known as the Aba Women Riot.⁸ The colonialists did everything possible to wipe away the achievements of women from the society. According to Bolanle Awe,

...colonialism helped to obliterate whatever records women's achievements there were by giving little recognition to repositories of such information. Thus, the task of piecing together women's history has been difficult. So acute is the dearth of information, particularly documentary evidence that some of the outstanding women in history have been

C.C. Osakwe and L.E. Odeh *History and the Niger Delta: Oil, Politics and Culture Festschrift in Honour of Professor Samuel Ovuete Aghalino* (Kaduna: Pyla-Mak Publishers Ltd, 2020), 213.

⁷Kathleen Sheldon "Writing about Women Approaches to a Gendered Perspective"

⁸Zara E. Kwaghe and Amin Zaigi Ngharen *The First Queen from the Niger Delta*"

mistaken for men and their achievements, attributed to male rulers.⁹

African historiographers (majority of them were males) continued to imbibe this Eurocentric bias in writing African history and Africanist discourses; thus, creating a documentary gap that partly led to women's history, both past and present, often appearing as anthologies.¹⁰ However, after the United Nations World Conferences on women (1975-1985), as well as several international feminist movements and activism, scholars from different disciplines such as History, Sociology, Political Science and English Language and Literature, etcetera began to populate the academia with works focused on women experiences and contributions to nation-building. Prominent among these scholars are historians like Bolanle Awe, *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective*, Okpéh O. Okpéh jnr and Elijah Terdoo Ikpanor (eds), *Themes on Women Studies in Africa: Perspectives from Nigeria*, Gloria Chuku and Sussie U. Aham –Okoro (eds), *Women and the Nigeria- Biafra War*, Egodi Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War* Nina E. Mba “Heroines of the Women's War”; feminist literary writers like Flora Nwapa, Zulu Sofola, Oyewumi Oyeronke, Buchi Emecheta, Zaynab Alkali, Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and many others who have

⁹Bolanle Awe (ed) *Nigerian Women A Historical Perspective*

¹⁰Zara E. Kwaghe and Amin Zaigi Ngharen; Egodi Uchendu and Zara Emmanuel Kwaghe “Challenges of Writing African Women's Histories” *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women Studies* Ola Jumoke Yacob –Haliso and Toyin Falola.

used the genre of fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry and prose, to document the activities of women in pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence Nigeria. Their contributions have shed more light on the roles, struggles, victories and experiences of women in the maintenance of the wellbeing of their societies.

Mr Vice-Chancellor Sir, it is germane at this point to note that though the aforementioned scholars and many others have written on different aspects of women's history in Nigeria, a lot more are yet to be covered. For instance, the role of Nigerian women in development has not been sufficiently underscored. The more women studies we embark on Sir, the more accurate and enriched history we find. The society is made up of both the male and female genders. In a situation where the study of the history of half of the population is sacrificed, Falola affirms that 'a significant risk is posed that cloisters, misinterprets, and reduces the nuances and complexity of the historical happening in a way that is so substantial that more can be said to have been lost than to have been gained.'¹¹ Thus, it is of necessity to document the monumental roles of women in all aspects of life, from science and technology, to politics and art and to their general involvement in modern day development.

¹¹Toyin Falola "Nigerian Women in History: Past and Present" in Aisha Balarabe Bawa and Yasin Abubakar (eds) *Women and History in Northern Nigeria* (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2020), 1-44.

On the issue of documenting and interrogating women histories Sir, very few women are involved in it in Africa. Several reasons are responsible for this lacuna. Prominent among these reasons are the kind of society these women are in, which is patriarchal, also, cultural differences, poor or lack of education, dearth of information on women, etcetera are other causative factors. The patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society, for example, has made writers (female writers inclusive) to concentrate more on the achievements of the male gender at the expense of the immense contributions of women to societal development.¹² Women should be encouraged to write their story, *herstory* in the way that brings her to the centre of public discourse. It should not be left for men to write. Women are in a better position to tell their story because their feminine perspective of the story in history lends credence to their experiences and activities. It is on this premise that this Inaugural Lecture is titled: ***Herstory in the Making of Modern Nigeria: Patriarchy, Women and the Politics of Knowledge Production.***

Herstory is a story in history written from a feminist perspective, emphasising the role of women or told from a woman's point of view and bringing the women from the margin to the centre. It is a neologism or a pun word from 'history' that is "his story" which stems from

¹²Okpeh O.Okpeh "Gender Research and Women's Studies in Africa: Emergence, Growth and Prospects in Nigeria" in Okpeh, O.O. Jr and Elijah T.I (eds) Themes on Women Studies in Africa. Volume 1 (Abuja: Donafrique Publishers, 2015)

feminist critique of the conventional historiography.¹³ The word history is derived from an ancient Greek word *historia* meaning knowledge obtained by inquiry. From this caveat, it is etymologically unrelated to the possessive noun ‘his’.¹⁴

The word *herstory* which is a conflation of two words her and story has been credited to Robin Morgan who first used the term in print in her 1970 anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful*. During the Second Wave Feminism (1970s and 1980s), feminists saw the study of history as a male dominated intellectual enterprise and presented the term *herstory* as a means of compensation.¹⁵ Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, I chose the term *herstory* instead of history because as an eclectic feminist, I strongly believe that in documenting African women’s histories, African women and not the men should take the lead. This is largely because ‘the majority of male writers narrate history while the female writers relate her-story.’¹⁶ Above all, most male writers portray Nigerian women as weak, helpless and marginalised group. This image has undermined the proper study of the various integral functions that the

¹³Etymology of the Word ‘History’; Jane Mills *Womanwords: A Dictionary of words about Women* (Henry Holt &Co, 1993).

¹⁴Cambridge Dictionary

¹⁵Devony Looser *British Women Writers and the Writing of History* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006)

¹⁶Eyoh Etim and Oliver Nyambi “Herstory versus ‘history’: A Motherist rememory in Akachi Ezeigbo’s *The Last of the Strong Ones* and Chimamanada Adichie’s *Half of the Yellow Sun*” *Cogent Arts & Humanities Volume 7, 2020-Issue 1*.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2020.1728999>.

Nigerian women have accomplished throughout history.¹⁷ Uchendu and Kwaghe posit that:

When every educated woman in Africa (*Nigeria in particular*) begins to write her story and those of her illiterate female relatives..., a knowledge bank would be created and ready for mining in the not-distant time. African women must not continue to leave their futures and their stories for men to write. They should also not abandon their stories for other women from outside the continent to document, but rather show as much agency in their own histories as non-African female scholars have done, whose laudable contributions in writing African women's histories have kept them on the scholarly map. ...As many hands as possible should be enrolled and this can be achieved as accomplished scholars mentor younger ones.¹⁸

4. Herstory in the Making of Modern Nigeria

i. Nigerian Women in the Pre-colonial Period

In this and subsequent sections, I will navigate through history to interrogate the extent to which Nigerian women have contributed to the growth and development of modern Nigeria. According to history pre-colonial Nigerian women played very important roles in their societies and the shaping of what later became known as Nigeria. They participated effectively in the politics and the economies of the different kingdoms, towns, and

¹⁷Toyin Falola "The Role of Nigerian Women" Britannica
<https://www.britannica.com>.

¹⁸Egodi Uchendu and Zara Emmanuel Kwaghe "Challenges of Writing African Women's Histories"

villages they were located in. They were farmers, potters, traders, weavers, healthcare providers, diviners, priestesses, political leaders, warriors, traditional birth attendants and spiritual healers and oftentimes as custodians of sanctuaries for the gods and goddesses.¹⁹

Nigerian women in the pre-colonial period were not inferior to men neither were they second class citizens. They rather enjoyed equal status with their male counterparts, playing their assigned roles in the society without discrimination.²⁰ Most African societies in the pre-colonial period as Saidi asserts tended to be heterarchical in nature with several centres of authority aspiring to establish communities where gender relations between women and men were equitable.²¹ Men and women may have had their different roles and tasks but what they did frequently had a similar status within their communities. These roles and tasks were complementary; having both women and men working together to keep the society together. At that time, women were respected and their position and roles in the family and the community at large were not viewed as inferior to that of men. Saidi maintains that:

¹⁹ Stella Effah- Attoe “Women in the Development of Nigeria since Pre-Colonial Times”

<http://www.onlinenigeria.com/nigerianwoman/?blurb=150>.

²⁰Zara E. Kwaghe and Amin Zaigi Ngharen The First Queen from the Niger Delta”

²¹Christine Saidi “Women in Precolonial Africa”<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.259>²⁷
October 2020.

What really defined African gender concepts was that women were not, as a result of their biological sex, assumed to be inferior and conversely men, based on their biological sex, were not innately superior. The result was that African women had greater respect, standing, and authority than previously assumed, and they were given a particular status, especially as grandmothers, mothers, sisters, potters, farmers, healers, and religious leaders. Seniority, life stage, family, and ability—and not gender—determined status and authority in Africa prior to 1900.²²

In the different communities that later became Nigeria, the above statement delineates the status of women. In northern Nigeria, for instance, women were adequately engaged in building the economy and politics of the north. In relation to the economy, women had contributed hugely to the regional economy. They were involved in textile industry of the time. In the Sokoto region for example, women spun and wove cotton, they were also dyers, farmers and kept livestock.²³ They were very prosperous until the incursion of Islam brought about restrictions to their life style and public life. Consequently, women were barred from activities that exposed them to the general public. They were hindered from getting skills as tailors and garment embroiders;

²²Christine Saidi “Women in Precolonial Africa”<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.259>27 October 2020.

²³ Toyin Falola “Nigerian Women in History: Past and Present”...12

and also restricted to only spinning where they received lesser pay than men.²⁴

Also in the field of politics, pre-colonial northern women were similarly very active. The history and the exploits of queens Amina of Zazzau, Daurama of Daura, Bakwa Turunku, Borno women officials (Ya Gumsu, Ya Magira and Ya Magara) have been documented to a large extent in history books. Queen Amina, for example, was described by Afigbo as a powerful woman whose “political and military exploits dazzled all Hausaland in the sixteenth century”.²⁵ Her resounding prowess is well documented in Sultan Bello’s *Infaq al-Maisuri* and the Kano Chronicles. Be that as it may, there were other pre-colonial women that contributed immensely to the growth and development of Hausaland alongside their male counterparts. Women functioned as market administrators, tax collectors, and religious leaders in the Bori cult which was once the State religion.²⁶ Nana Asma’u, the daughter of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio was an Islamic scholar, poet, and an educator of women.

Considering the pre-colonial northern society, women played complimentary roles to men even though they still had specific roles reserved for them. It was not a society where the men had it all and the women were made to obey all without questioning. Women held administrative, spiritual and legal positions. Women could go to war on behalf of the king or could become

²⁴ Toyin Falola “Nigerian Women in History: Past and Present”..12

²⁵ Toyin Falola “Nigerian Women in History: Past and Present”

²⁶ Toyin Falola “Nigerian Women in History: Past and Present”

regent if the king had to travel or was too young to rule like was the case of Borno, during the reign of Magira Aisa as a regent. Also the legendry Daura kingdom had 45 names in its kings list out of which 17 were females, confirming that before the incursion of Islam and colonialism, northern women were not entirely repressed or relegated solely to domestic affairs²⁷ or ‘*the other room*’ in the Nigerian parlance.

The North Central was also not bereft of outstanding women that changed the tide of history in the pre-colonial period. Prominent amongst them were princesses Inikpi and Oma-Idoko of Igala land who gave themselves up to be sacrificed at different periods in Igala history to preserve their father land. In 1515-1516 and 1834, Inikpi and Oma-Idoko offered themselves as sacrifice to save the Igala kingdom from destruction during the Igala-Benin and Igala –Jukun wars respectively. In the same vein, pre-colonial women in the south–eastern and western regions of Nigeria played prominent roles in the economy and politics of their provinces. Women were involved in long-distance trade, agriculture, pottery, weaving of clothes such as the *akwete* and mats for everyday use. Many women were involved in the production and sale of oil-palm and palm-kernel, processing and distribution of food items and commodities.²⁸ Women in the coastal regions of Calabar, Oron, and the Niger Delta were involved in fish

²⁷ Dierk Lange “The Bayajida Legend and Hausa History in Africa” in Toyin Falola “Nigerian Women in History: Past and Present”. 12

²⁸Zara E. Kwaghe and Amin Zaigi Ngharen The First Queen from the Niger Delta”

drying and sale of sea food; while women from Yala, Okposi and Uburu were known for salt production. Afikpo women were known for their exquisite pottery and weaving, so also were the Akwete or Ndoki women who produced the well-known *akwete* clothe. Also, personalities like Omu Okwei of Osomari was not only a political figure but an astute business woman ‘whose field of operation covered trade in palm produce and foodstuff, retail business centred mainly on textiles, tobacco and hardware...’²⁹ In fact Omu Okwei rose from being a petty-trader along River Niger to becoming one of the few Nigerian women to be merchant princesses and eventually *Omu*, the queen of Osomari.³⁰

In the political domain, pre-colonial eastern women interacted freely and served along with the men. Though men were predominantly in charge of the political sphere, women still served as rulers, agents, sat on the king’s council, served as go-betweens in diplomatic relations and safeguarded their towns and villages in different ways.³¹ Igbo women, for example, had several women organisations that transcended family alliances. Prominent among the organisations was the Association of the Wives of the Village. This association, according to Mba, ‘provided a very effective clear-cut and

²⁹Felicia Ifeoma Ekejiuba “Omu Okwei of Osomari” in Bolanle Awe (ed) *Nigerian Women: A Historical Perspective* (Ibadan: Bookcraft Ltd; 2001), 113.

³⁰Felicia Ifeoma Ekejiuba “Omu Okwei of Osomari”

³¹Gloria Chuku “Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900-1960” in Toyin Falola “*Nigerian Women in History: Past and Present*”...16.

authoritative organisation in which all wives were involved'.³² They acted as judicial body for dispute among the women and also intervened in marital disputes. Likewise, the women had a powerful weapon they used in checking men's idiosyncrasies called 'sitting on a man'.³³ Saidi noted:

If men did something that the women thought was inappropriate, such as hitting a pregnant woman, these women would come together, sing obscene songs, force the offender on the ground, and sit on him. The humiliation was extreme, and men rarely would commit the offence again. Later, under British colonialism Igbo women used their organization and the tactic of "sitting on a man" to fight the attempt to tax women in the colony of Nigeria (Women's War of 1929).³⁴

Queen Kambasa was another pre-colonial Nigerian woman to have ruled Bonny. She was the first woman to rule Bonny and also the first and only woman to have ruled in all the neighbouring kingdoms of the Niger Delta. Queen Kambasa believed in the equality of all humans. She did not believe that certain roles or positions were reserved for men.³⁵ Queen Kambasa's reign was a glorious one. Having come to the throne

³²Nina E. Mba "Heroines of the Women's War" in Bolanle Awe (ed) *Nigerian Women A Historical Perspective*, 88.

³³Christine Saidi "Women in Precolonial Africa"

³⁴Christine Saidi "Women in Precolonial Africa"

³⁵E. J. Alagoa "Queen Kambasa of Bonny" in *Nigerian Women A Historical Perspective*,

when Bonny was still in its formative stages, she succeeded in building the institutions of the new kingdom by succeeding her father and handing over the throne to her son Kumalu, thereby strengthening the tradition of succession in a royal line.³⁶

Similarly, in the South west the Yoruba women were involved in the political, economic and social advancement of their kingdoms. Yoruba women held important titles alongside their male counterparts. Iya Oba acted as the queen mother, Erelu was a female member of the Ogboni cult, Iyakere was next in rank to the king's mother and responsible for the king's treasury. Others were the Iyalode, Iyaloja and Iyalagbo. Yoruba women just like women in other parts of Nigeria were not restricted from achieving their purpose in the land. They controlled their own affairs, influenced policies and decision making in the kingdom. Women in Yoruba land did not only occupy sensitive positions but have also ruled as queens. Falola and Genova confirm that around the 16th century when the throne of Oyo empire became vacant and there was no male heir to occupy it, Orompoto, the sister of late Alaafin, became the queen and was such a strong personality that led men to war on horses.³⁷ Also, women like the brave queen Moremi Ajasoro, saved Ile-Ife around the 12th century. In

³⁶E.J. Alagoa "Queen Kambasa of Bonny"

³⁷Toyin Falola and Ann Genova, *The Yoruba in Transition History, Values and Modernity* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2006) in Toyin Falola "Nigerian Women in History: Past and Present", 14

recognition of her prowess in the 21st century, her statue was erected in the palace of the Ooni of Ile Ife in 2017.³⁸

In fact time and space will not permit me to recognise other outstanding pre-colonial women that made impact in their societies. Many were from a humble background but left remarkable foot prints on the sands of time. This was made possible because of the way women were valued in the pre-colonial times. However, the above discourse does not suggest that women in pre-colonial period had all the power and that Africa was a utopia of gender equality. In spite of the value placed on women, gender differentiation still existed in most African societies; patriarchy and male hegemonic behaviours existed too and men still played certain reserved roles. However, women were valued in ways not seen in most places outside of Africa.³⁹ Agaba writing on women in Nigeria in the pre-colonial era asserts:

In pre-colonial days no state law inputting certain disabilities on women existed in Africa and the society was equalitarian. African, including Nigerian women were thus powerful in the economic and socio-political sectors of the pre-colonial and colonial eras. They accumulated fabulous riches from genuine commerce and slave trade and ruled vast kingdoms.⁴⁰

³⁸Toyin Falola “Nigerian Women in History: Past and Present”,15

³⁹Zara E. Kwaghe and Amin Zaigi Ngharen “The First Queen from the Niger Delta”, 214.

⁴⁰John Ebute Agaba “Nigerian Women and Politics”

ii. **Nigerian Women in Colonial Era**

Colonialism, as we know, is the domination of a people or an area by a foreign state or a nation. In the case of Nigeria, it was the domination and the occupation of the area known today as Nigeria by the British. Colonialism changed the course of history in Nigeria. It introduced western cultures and values which affected and modified the culture and values of Nigerians. In the process women lost their position and value in the society. The British introduced Victorian values that believe that women are inferior to men. The European ideology that 'women are to be seen and not be heard' was highly promoted by the Europeans and that contributed in stripping women of their political and economic power and consequently redefining gender roles.

To further entrench the Victorian values and encourage European style of patriarchy in Nigeria, policies designed to discriminate against women and promote gender inequality were made by the Europeans. The idea that men were to control the public sphere while women were to take care of the domestic front was popularised by the Europeans and the missionaries who taught Nigerian children in schools. Gradually, women economic and political roles were changed from being active to passive. Economically, women who hitherto were farmers and traders were forced to transfer farmlands that were formally under their control to men; thus, depriving women from participating in the cash crop incentives, technology and innovations. As the economy became increasingly geared toward the production of cash crops such as cocoa, rubber,

groundnuts and palm oil for export, Nigerian men and the European traders dominated the economic scene, forcing women to shift to the production of subsistence crops. Likewise, land which was communally owned and women had access to it through their husbands or parents was commercialised, favouring those with access to money gained from the sale of cash crops.⁴¹In spite of the new policy many women in the south still traded as middle women in the palm oil and kernel trade with the Europeans.

The imposition of colonial taxation was another European economic policy that affected the status of women in Nigeria. Colonial taxation was required that payment should be in coinage currency and not the usual cowry, manila or salt. This affected many women especially in the eastern region who had to pay tax for their husbands, sons and male relatives to avoid their being drafted to railway, tin and coal mining camps. The later imposition of taxation on women by the Europeans led to women resisting the policy and fighting for their freedom. In order to check against the high handedness of the colonial government, women from the eastern region embarked on protests and strike actions. Some of the active protests were:

⁴¹ Kwaghe, Z.E “An Overview of Women and Poverty in Africa: A case Study of Mubi Area of Adamawa State” International Journal of Development and Policy Studies, Vol.1 No.1 2006; Zara E. Kwaghe and Amin Zaigi Ngharen “The First Queen from the Niger Delta”, 214.

- i. Demonstration over the colonial control of marketplaces in 1916
- ii. Nwaobiala Movement to restore societal order and preserve Igbo heritage, 1925.
- iii. Water Rate Demonstrations, 1929
- iv. Women's War (popularly known as the Aba Women's Riot), 1929
- v. Anti-Tax Demonstration of the 1930s
- vi. Price Control and Produce Inspection Protests and
- vii. Pioneer Oil Mill Demonstrations between 1940 and 1950.⁴²

Women in the southwest also revolted against colonial policies and its effect on women in general. The Egba Market Women led by Mrs Funmilayo Ransome Kuti resisted colonial policies and in the process forced the Alake of Abeokuta, Oba Ademola II, to abdicate his throne. It is true that under colonialism, Nigerian women lost their socio-political rights, but it is equally true that they did not fold their hands and watch the Europeans deprive them of such rights. They fought to be educated and be included in the political and economic spheres once more. Women like Margaret Ekpo in the east, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti in the west and Gambo Sawaba in the north did not relent in leading other grass root women to fight for their freedom irrespective of what they might experience. It was their doggedness on insisting to feature where they were not welcomed that

⁴² Gloria Chuku "Igbo women and Political Participation in Nigeria, 1800-2005" in Toyin Falola "Nigerian Women in History: Past and Present", 20.

contributed to the relative freedom Nigerian women are enjoying today and also in shaping the political system of the nation.

Despite not being welcomed in a male dominated circle, Margaret Ekpo used to be the only woman in political gatherings in the East at one point in history. This was because the Western gender stereotypes and traditional patriarchal institutions all combined to deprive women of political legitimacy.⁴³ Nevertheless, Margaret Ekpo did not relent in encouraging other women to participate in politics. She used the ‘no participation, no salt’ tactic after the end of the Second World War to compel the husbands to release their wives to join her in politics. Using the platform of the Aba Women Association which she formed, she went round the big companies like John Holt and United African Company (UAC) to purchase and hoard all the available bags of salt. Any woman who was not registered as a member of the Association was denied salt. This continued until when their husbands could no longer eat without salt, they released their wives to register.⁴⁴

Margaret Ekpo’s contribution to Nigeria’s independence struggle, emancipation and uplift of women in the Eastern region in particular, and Nigeria in general, was

⁴³Donald O. Omagu “Feminism as Prowess: Margaret Ekpo, A Nigerian Nationalist and an Icon of Women Politics” in Toyin Falola and Bridget Teboh *The Power of Gender The Gender of Power: Women Labour, Rights and Responsibilities in Africa* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2013), 202-219.

⁴⁴Donald O. Omagu “Feminism as Prowess: Margaret Ekpo,

extraordinary. Women participate in voting today because women like Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Ransome Kuit, Elizabeth Adegoke, Senator Wuraola Esan, Hajiya Gambo Sawaba and Malama Ladi Shehu and some male supporters like Mazi Mbonu Ojike and Prof. Eyo Ita, took up the fight and continuously kept the matter of women's voting rights on the public agenda until it was achieved. Similarly, while Ekpo was in the Eastern House of Chiefs in Enugu, she raised a strong motion calling on the House to put pressure on the police authorities to employ women into the Police Force. She kept putting pressure on the members until the motion was passed. Subsequently, women got employed into the force in Enugu, later Lagos and other parts of the country.⁴⁵

Gambo Sawaba's story in the making of modern northern Nigeria cannot be overlooked in this Lecture Mr Vice –Chancellor. In the North, the seclusion and stifling of the women's voice was already a part of the institution even before colonialism.⁴⁶ Women were no longer allowed to publicly participate in socio-political activities as it was before in the pre-colonial period. At this time, many northern women followed the practice of purdah, a form of social seclusion. Also, the ruling Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) did not see anything wrong in restricting northern women's freedom.

⁴⁵Donald O. Omagu "Feminism as Prowess: Margaret Ekpo,

⁴⁶Tayo Agunbiade "Hajiya Gambo Sawaba: The most jailed Nigerian female Politician"

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/2/15/hajiya-gambo-sawaba-the-most-jailed-nigerian-female-politician>

By this time in the history of Nigeria, there were already calls for women's voting rights in other parts of Nigeria by women like Margaret Ekpo and Funmilayo Kuti. The newly formed political party, Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) by Malam Aminu Kano gave Gambo Sawaba the platform to fight for northern women's rights. NEPU unlike the NPC supported women's education in both religious and secular spheres and their being given enough space politically and economically.⁴⁷ Gambo was pleased with NEPU's philosophy and she became one of the early members of the political party.

In the process of discharging her duty as a party member and Northern women's advocate just like Margaret Ekpo in the east, Gambo openly advocated against child marriage, forced and unpaid labour and discriminating taxes, and campaigned for jobs for women, education for northern girls and voting rights for women. She went from house-to-house in Kano, talking to and drawing out women who were in purdah.⁴⁸ As we may be aware, her campaigns were not welcomed by both the ruling Native Authority in Kano and many northern men who believed that women were not meant for politics and public functions. She was arrested and charged to the Alkali

⁴⁷ Tayo Agunbiade "Hajiya Gambo Sawaba: The most jailed Nigerian female Politician"
<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/2/15/hajiya-gambo-sawaba-the-most-jailed-nigerian-female-politician>.

⁴⁸ Tayo Agunbiade "Hajiya Gambo Sawaba: The most jailed Nigerian female Politician"
<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/2/15/hajiya-gambo-sawaba-the-most-jailed-nigerian-female-politician>

Court and the court sentenced her to three months imprisonment.

The punishment did not deter Gambo from continuing her campaign for women enfranchisement. In order to discourage her, she was constantly arrested, beaten and dehumanised. She was sentenced to jail sixteen times during her life time. On two occasions, she was stripped naked and given eighty lashes in Zaria Central Prison. She, among other NEPU women were beaten and their hairs shaved with a piece of broken bottle. She was beaten up by six men and left to die in the bush; as a result of the numerous tortures she endured in prison in 1957, she was forced to remove her womb to save her life. According to her; ‘there is no opening in my body-mouth, nostrils, eyes, or anywhere else from which blood did not gush out from because of torture. My front teeth are artificial. The originals were broken and pulled out’.⁴⁹ Her struggle and determination eventually paid off. Northern girls were gradually released by their parents to go to school and women were finally allowed to vote and be voted for the first time in Northern Nigeria in the 1979 general elections; several years after their counterparts in the East and West had done so. Due to the setback experienced by northern women, they were way behind in formal education and participation in politics compared to their counterparts in the south. In the South, during and after colonialism, education was

⁴⁹ Tayo Agunbiade “Hajiya Gambo Sawaba: The most jailed Nigerian female Politician”
<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/2/15/hajiya-gambo-sawaba-the-most-jailed-nigerian-female-politician>

open to both genders but enrolment varied across regions due to various ethnic, religious and social opinions in relation to the woman's place in society.⁵⁰ But in the north, it was different. Education was scarcely open to the female gender. Most families in the north preferred sending their male children to school than the females.

iii. Women in Post-Independence Nigeria

The position of Nigerian women immediately after independence did not change much despite the struggle they had to put up with during colonialism. Colonialism as noted earlier did not prepare women to take up leadership positions after independence. Their role was to take care of the domestic sphere of the society. For the above reason, women were not given the opportunity to be educated and be at par with their male counterparts. Thus, by the time the Europeans were leaving Nigeria, they had successfully indoctrinated the men to believe that they are superior to women and convinced the women that they are inferior to men. To make matters worse, patriarchal policies mixed with culture and religion tend to affirm male dominance across the country. This affected the status of women in all ramifications in Nigeria. Not many were educated enough to participate in politics and decision making, and economically, they were not buoyant enough. For the above reasons, men dominated both the political and economic domains of the Nigerian society. Only very few women were economically empowered to participate in politics and decision making.

⁵⁰Toyin Falola "Nigerian Women in History: Past and Present",

In spite of the many setbacks women faced after independence, many struggled to be educated after years of gender disparity in education. Female education has an impact in the development and prosperity of the nation. Educating girls enhances the rapid development of the nation and also encourages the independence of girls. But at independence in 1960, girls enrolment figures were very low not only in Nigeria but in Africa. In order to check against this, in a conference held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in May 1961, the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UNESCO educational plans for Nigeria were announced. A target was set to achieve 100% Universal Primary Education in Nigeria by 1980.⁵¹

In line with the above target, Nigeria embarked on the Universal Free Primary Education scheme to encourage the enrolment of both boys and girls in school. With deliberate plan of action intervention from government and non-governmental organisations, parents began to send and keep their girls in school. Gradually, the enrolment of girls in primary education soared even though more boys than girls enrolled. From 1970 to 1994, for example, the enrolment of girls in primary education steadily increased from 30% to as high as 80%.⁵² Despite the increase in enrolment, differences

⁵¹Universal Declaration of Human Rights Amnesty International
“What is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Why was it Created?” <https://www.amnesty.org/en>

⁵²Aromolaran, B. Adebayo “Female Schooling, Non- Market Productivity, and Labour Market Participation in Nigeria” Economic Growth Centre, Yale University, January 2004.

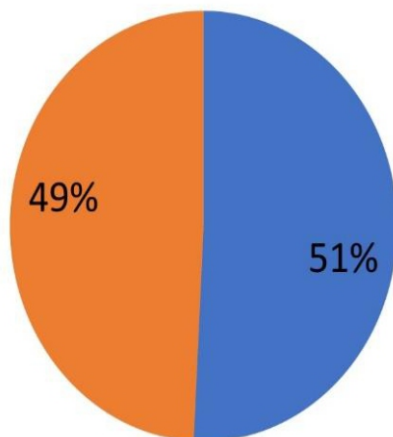
still exist in all levels of education and the attrition rate of girls was higher than that of the boys. Also the participation of girls in STEM was lower than that of the boys. From available statistics on female enrolment, in 2002, the combined gross enrolment for primary, secondary and tertiary schools in Nigeria for females was 57% compared to 71% for males.⁵³ According to Statista, in the 2017/2018 school year, around 28million children were enrolled in both private and public primary education in Nigeria. There were considerably more pupils enrolled in public schools than in private schools. In total, public schools accounted for 22.7million, while private schools were put at 5.4million. Out of the gross total enrolment (28 million), 49% was female while 51% was male.⁵⁴

⁵³ Ojo, A “Socio-Economic Situation” *Africa Atlases (Nigeria)* Paris, France: Les Editions J.A, 126-127.

⁵⁴<https://www.statista.com/statistics/711128/qatar-enrolled-university-students-by-gender>.

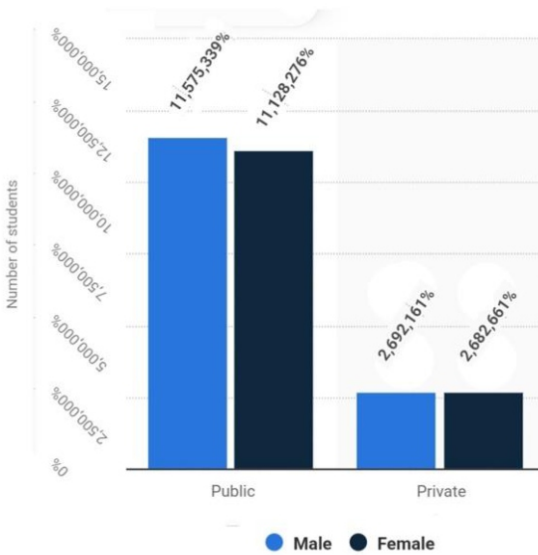
Number of children enrolled in public and private primary schools in Nigeria as of 2017/2018, by gender.

■ MALE ■ FEMALE



Source: Author, 31/3/2024 as adapted from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/711128/qatar-enrolled-university-students-by-gender/>

Number of children enrolled in public and private primary schools in Nigeria as of 2017/2018, by gender



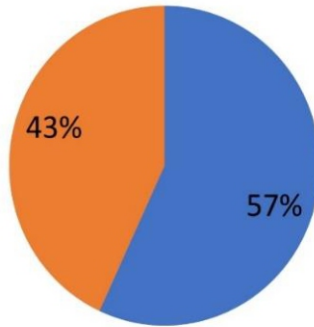
Source: Author, 31/3/2024 as adapted from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/711128/qatar-enrolled-university-students-by-gender/>

Likewise, in the 2018/2019 academic year, 1.8million undergraduate students and 242 thousand postgraduate students enrolled in Nigerian Universities. Among the postgraduate and undergraduate students that enrolled, women accounted for 38% and 44% of the population respectively. In the gross enrolment (1.8million +242,000) male accounted for 57% while female 43%.⁵⁵

⁵⁵<https://www.statista.com/statistics/711128/qatar-enrolled-university-students-by-gender/>.

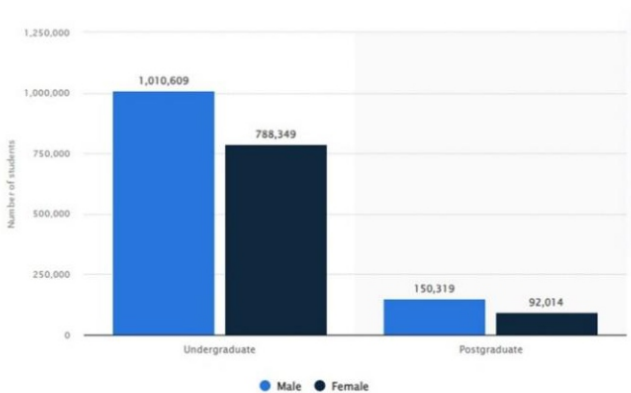
Number of university students in Nigeria in the 2018/2019 academic session, by gender and course of study.

MALE FEMALE



Source: Author, 31/3/2024 as adapted from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1130794/number-of-university-students-in-nigeria/>

Number of university students in Nigeria in the 2018/2019 academic session, by gender and course of study.

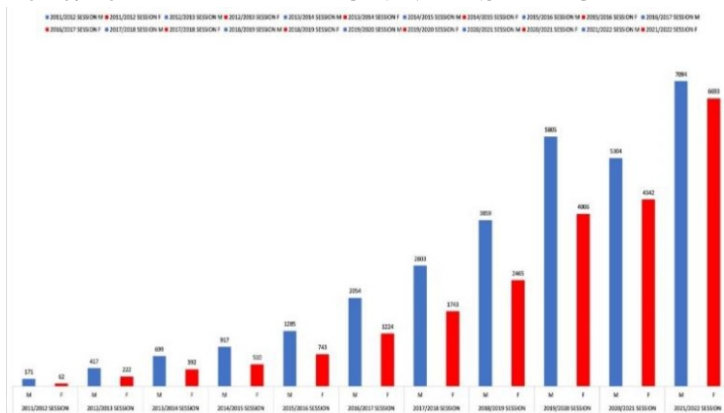


Source: Author, 31/3/2024 as adapted from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1130794/number-of-university-students-in-nigeria/>

The above statistics on university enrolment indicates that males enrol more than females; although with a

slight differentiation. This simply means that Nigerian women have continued to push themselves forward in the field of education in order to close the gap and also take up the responsibility of nation-building as much as the men.⁵⁶ Bringing the study back home to Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State, The Vice Chancellor Sir, women enrolment since the school began has been very impressive. So far, out of the gross total enrolment from 2011 to 2021 (52,810), 42% (22,402) were females while 58% (30,408) were males. Below are the statistics of students' enrolment in the University since inception as acquired from the Academic Affairs Unit, FULafia.

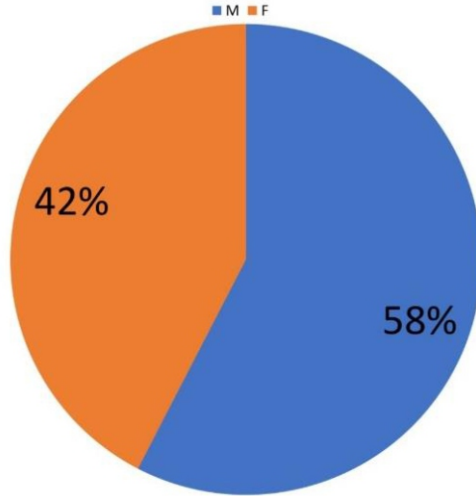
GRAND TOTAL OF MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS' ENROLMENT FROM 2011/2012 TO 2020/2021 FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF LAFIA



Source: Chart created by author from data gotten from Academic Affairs, Federal University of Lafia, 28/3/2024

⁵⁶ ToyinFalola “Nigerian Women in History: Past and Present”...

GRAND TOTAL OF MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS' ENROLMENT FROM 2011/2012 TO 2020/2021 FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF LAFIA IN PERCENTAGE



Source: Chart created by author from data gotten from Academic Affairs, Federal University of Lafia, 28/3/2024

The Vice Chancellor Sir, you will agree with me that women have come a long way since the era of colonialism irrespective of the challenges they have faced and are still facing. Although they are yet to close the gap but they are gradually getting more active in previously male dominated professions. Today, outstanding Nigerian women from the different regions of the country who have contributed in one way or the other to the growth and development of Nigeria have continued to multiply even when they are still branded as the weaker sex and their contributions are lost in the annals of time. In the field of education, women have by

their contributions and achievements influenced the sector positively. Examples include but not limited to Prof. Chinwe Obaji, the female Minister of Education under the former President Olusegun Obasanjo, Chief Elizabeth Afadzwana Ivase, the first woman from northern Nigeria to be appointed Minister of State for Education, 1982-1983. She was one of the champions and ideologues for girl-child education and women's right. There is also Prof. Felicia Adetoun Ogunsheye, a professor of Library and Information Science, University of Ibadan, who was the first female Professor in Nigeria. She was also the first female student to study in and graduate from Yaba College of Technology in 1948, first woman to become a Dean in any Nigerian university. We also have Grace Alele-Williams was the first Nigeria's female Vice-Chancellor, first Nigerian female to receive a doctorate degree and first female Professor of Mathematics. Prof. Bolanle Awe was the first female lecturer in the Department of History, University of Ibadan and first female academic staff in a Nigerian university and Prof. Jadesola Olayinka Akande, first Nigeria's female professor of Law and second Vice Chancellor of Lagos State University in 1989.

In the field of medicine which is equally dominated by the male gender, women have been able to carve their niche too. Since the first female to practice as a physician in Nigeria, Elizabeth Abimbola Awoliyi⁵⁷ in

⁵⁷Elizabeth Abimbola Awoliyi was the first Nigerian woman to practice as a physician in Nigeria. She was also the first West African woman to earn a license of Royal Surgeon in Dublin and the

1938, women have not stopped venturing into the field of medicine and breaking the jinx in the all-important sector. Statistics, on the number of doctors in Nigeria from 2017 to 2019 by gender, reveals that out of a gross total of 108,573, 70,917 are males while 37,656 are females – representing 65% and 35% respectively.⁵⁸ Some of the female doctors in Nigeria include; late Ameyo Adadevoh, who played a key role in curbing the spread of the Ebola virus in Nigeria by quarantining the index case, Patrick Sawyer, despite pressure from the Liberian government. She later died of Ebola in August 4, 2014. Others are: Dr Abimbola Abolarinwa, first female urologist in Nigeria; Dr Stella Adepero Adeoba became the first female surgeon, Dr Nene Obiany, first female Professor of Surgery in Nigeria and first female Emeritus Professor of Paediatric Surgery in West Africa, Dr Mary Dija Ogebe, first female medical doctor in northern Nigeria; Dr Halima Yalwa Adamu, the second female medical doctor from northern Nigeria; Dr. Ola Orekunrin, the founder and managing director of Flying Doctors Nigeria, West Africa’s first Air Ambulance Service. She is a medical doctor, helicopter pilot and an entrepreneur.

The Vice Chancellor Sir, we cannot talk about women medical practitioners without remembering women like Dora Akunyili who during her time as the Director-General of the National Agency for Food and Drug

second West African woman to qualify as an orthodox medicine trained physician after Agnes Yewande Savage.

⁵⁸ Statista “Number of Doctors in Nigeria 2017-2019, by gender” <https://www.statista.com>. November 16, 2022.

Administration and Control (NAFDAC) put together a team of female pharmacists and inspectors and declared war on counterfeit drug dealership and counterfeit drugs in the country. Her action led to the closure of many open-air medicine markets in the country and garnered her over 900 awards during her career which is reportedly the highest number of awards ever received by any Nigerian.⁵⁹ There are many other female entrepreneurs in Nigeria today that time and space would not permit to mention. Their number keeps growing day by day. Women are similarly not lacking in the military sector. The first woman to join the military in Nigeria (the army precisely) was Capt. Josephine Okwuekeleke Tolefe in 1961. She was granted Short Service Commission as Second Lieutenant in February 7, 1961. She served in the medical section as a nurse until her voluntary retirement in 1967 as a captain. Since then, women have served and are still serving in different capacities in the military. Many are presently carrying out extraordinary feats beyond the expectations of the Nigerian society.

Outstanding amongst these female military personnel are late Major General Aderonke Kale of the Nigerian Army, the first woman to become a Major General; late Flying Officer Titilope Arotile of the Nigerian Air Force; the first female combat helicopter pilot in Nigeria, Rear Admiral Itunu Hotonu of the Nigerian Navy; the first female Rear Admiral in Africa, Lt. Col. Susan Dibal (rtd) of the Nigerian Army; the first woman to

⁵⁹Vanessa Onyema “At the Helm: Nigeria’s Female Ministers”
<https://documentwomen.com/nigeria-female-ministers>.

coordinate a battalion in the Nigerian Army (Women Special Operations Battalion –WSOB) and best female marksman in NA, Air Warrant Officer Grace Garba of the Nigerian Air Force; the first female Senior Non-Commissioned Officer, Blessing Liman of the Nigerian Air Force; the first female military pilot, Flying Officer Kafayat Sanni; the first female Fighter Pilot, Group Captain Idowu Folashade Gbadebo of the Nigerian Air Force; the first female cadet to command a parade in the NDA, Col. AT Bamigboye, first female officer to command Nigerian Level II Hospital in Timbuktu, Mali (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali) and Group Capt. Akpasa, the first female Commandant of the Zero 36 NAF Hospital, Air Force Base, Abuja. There are many other outstanding female soldiers/officers not mentioned here that have performed incredibly well and even laid down their lives in the course of carrying out their national assignment.⁶⁰ The performance of these women refutes the gender stereotype that women ‘lack the physical ability to withstand the strains of war and extreme violence associated with it.’⁶¹

Mr Chairman Sir, Nigerian women entrepreneurs are other unsung *sheroes* (a term used by feminist to depict female heroes) of Nigeria’s economic landscape that are

⁶⁰ Zara E. Kwaghe “Gender and National Security in Nigeria: The Role of Female Military Personnel” a paper presented at Monthly Seminar of the Nigerian Army Resource Centre, Abuja on January 30,2024.

⁶¹Preye B. Fakrogha *Women in Military Service in Nigeria* (Lafia: Mosuf Enterprises, 2023).

shepherding the dreams and aspirations of over 130 million young Nigerians.⁶² A study on Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) has revealed that SMEs contribute 48% of the Nigeria's Gross Development Product (GDP) and women account for 41% of ownership of these businesses.⁶³ This connotes that women are a major driving force in economic development in Nigeria "Women entrepreneurs are not merely contributing to the growth of the economy, they are catalysts for change, reshaping industries, fostering innovation, and inspiring other women to follow suit".⁶⁴

Nigerian women are found in different businesses such as oil and gas, fashion, banking, technology, agriculture, import and export, etcetera. They contribute to job creation and add value to the nation's economy. Among the leading Nigerian female entrepreneurs is Folorunsho Alakija, the Vice-Chairman of FAMFA Oil Limited who is an oil and gas mogul. Others are: Funke Opeke – Founder/CEO of Main One, a leading communication services and network solutions provider in West Africa; Mo Abudu – creative entrepreneur and founder of Ebony

⁶²Ifeoma Udoh "Elevating Women's Entrepreneurship in Nigeria: Policy Strategies for the future." *Business Day*, December 10, 2023.

⁶³Ifeoma Udoh "Elevating Women's Entrepreneurship in Nigeria: Onyebuchi Ezigbo "MSMEs Contribute 48% of Nigeria's GDP, says ILO", ThisDayLive <https://www.thisdaylive.com> ; The Cable "How the private sector can improve women-owned businesses in Nigeria" March 31, 2023 <https://www.thecable.ng>.

⁶⁴"Empowering the Female Economy: The Impact of the Nigerian female Entrepreneurs on the economy"<https://www.fsdhmerchantbank.com/>.

Live; Audrey Joe-Ezigbo- Deputy Managing Director and co-founder of Falcon Corporation; Olamide Brown-founder of the Flying Doctors Healthcare Investment Group and many more scattered in the different regions of the nation.

Politically, Nigerian women have slowly progressed since independence, even though they have not been able to break through the ceiling to properly influence decision making in a consistent manner especially in the First and Second Republics. In the First Republic, men dominated the nation's politics and only very few women had the temerity to join politics full time and contest elections. From 1960 to 1966, very few women were elected into leadership positions. Margaret Ekpo was elected into the Aba Urban North Constituency in 1962 and a member of the Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly on the platform of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens' (NCNC). Others were Chief (Mrs) Wurola Esan and Mrs Beatrice Kwango. Senator Wurola was the first woman in pre-and post- independence Nigeria to become a member of Senate. She was appointed in January 8, 1960 to represent Ibadan West.

In the Second Republic under the leadership of President Shehu Shagari for the first time in the political history of Nigeria, women were appointed to ministerial positions. They were five in number from different States of the country. Below are their names and portfolios.

Table 1 Women Appointed into Political Positions during the Second Republic - 1979-1983

S/No.	Name	State	Designation
1	Mrs. Elizabeth A. Ivase	Benue	Minister of State for Education
2.	Dr.Simisola Johnson	Lagos	Minister for Youth and Social Development
3.	Miss. Elizabeth Ogbon	Delta	Ambassador to Botswana and Zimbabwe
4.	Chief Janet Akinriande	Oyo	Minister of State for Internal Affairs
5.	Mrs. Egun Oyagbola	Ogun	Minister of National Planning

Source: Aisha Balarabe Bawa *Women in the Corridors of Power: Nigerian First Ladies in Governance* (Kaduna: Joyce Publishers, 2019)

Apart from the recognition given to women by appointing them, there was also slight increase in the number of women elected into various positions in the country. At the federal level, one female senator, Princess Franca Afegbua was elected out of the 95 members and 11 females in House of Representatives out of 450 members. Although the number was insignificant compared to the number of males elected, this indicated the tenacity and doggedness of Nigerian women. They refused to give up their fight to participate in politics despite all the challenges and threats from the menfolk.

The Babangida administration was friendlier to women than the previous administrations before him. Under his regime, the first woman Vice –Chancellor, Prof. Grace Alele-Williams was appointed. To buttress his

administration's desire for gender inclusiveness, in his congratulatory message to Prof. Alele-Williams, Babangida stated that he saw the 'appointment as part of the crusade of his administration to guarantee equal opportunity to all Nigerians irrespective of their sex, class, religion or ethnicity'.⁶⁵ In Babangida's administration, several women won election into various posts in the 1987 local government elections. Also, women like Chief (Mrs) Titi Ajanaku, Mrs Oluremi Adiukwu, and Mrs Hannatu Chollom were gubernatorial candidates during this period.

Babangida's regime also made it a matter of policy that women should be appointed into strategic policy making positions of corporate bodies as chief executives and heads of ministerial divisions in government.⁶⁶ His wife, Maryam Babangida, used her office as the First Lady to also improve the position of rural women in the society. She introduced the Better Life for Rural Women Programme (BLRWP) which helped alleviate women's poverty. In 1990, Babangida created the National Commission for Women (NCW), with Prof. Bolanle Awe heading it.

The first eight years of the Fourth Republic saw a slight increase in the election and appointment of women into key positions in the country. In the 1999 general elections, out of the available 109 seats in the senate, 5

⁶⁵Aisha Balarabe Bawa *Women in the Corridors of Power: Nigerian First Ladies in Governance*

⁶⁶Aisha Balarabe Bawa *Women in the Corridors of Power: Nigerian First Ladies in Governance*

women contested, 3 women were elected as senators, 13 for House of Representatives out of 360 seats, and 1 elected as Deputy Governor. In State Houses of Assembly, out of the 990 seats in the country, 39 women contested and 12 women were elected. Out of 774 local government chairman/deputy seats, 46 women nationwide contested and 9 were elected. Similarly, out of 8,800 councillorship positions, 510 women contested and 143 were elected. In all, 181 women were elected into various positions in the 1999 general elections.⁶⁷In 2003 and 2007, 41 and 94 women were elected into the Senate, House Representative, Deputy Governor and State House of Assembly. Also in 2011 out of 109 senators 7 were women and out of 360 members of House of Representatives 26 were women. The 2015 general elections garnered 7 female Senators and 22 female members of House of Representatives.⁶⁸

In order not to bore you with figures, below is a table showing the statistics on the extent of women's involvement in politics in the Fourth Republic so far.

⁶⁷Aisha Balarabe Bawa *Women in the Corridors of Power: Nigerian First Ladies in Governance*

⁶⁸Aisha Balarabe Bawa *Women in the Corridors of Power: Nigerian First Ladies in Governance*

Table 2: Number of Women in National/State Assembly and Deputy Governors in the Fourth Republic (1999-2023)

Year	Senate	House of Representatives	Deputy Governor	State House of Assembly
1999	3	13	1	12
2003	3	13	2	23
2007	9	27	6	52
2011	7	19	3	N/A
2015	7	22	4	N/A
2019	7	11	3	N/A
2023	3	17	8	48

Source: Data derived from Aisha Balarabe Bawa and modified by author

Aside being elected, women also enjoyed appointive positions. Obasanjo’s support of 30% Affirmative Action encouraged the appointment of women into different ministerial positions as demonstrated by the subsequent Presidents. For instance, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was appointed Minister of Finance. She was the first woman to serve two terms as Finance Minister in Nigeria; initially, under President Olusegun Obasanjo from 2003-2006; and secondly under President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan from 2011-2015. Since March 2021, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala has been serving as the Director-General of the World Trade Organisation. She is the first woman and first African to lead the World Trade Organisation as Director-General.⁶⁹ Mrs Kema

⁶⁹ Kunle Falayi “Ngozi Okonjo- Iweala Makes History at the WTO” BBC News, Lagos, March 1,2021

Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, the above statistics reveals a lot on the effect of patriarchy and male dominance in Nigeria. Women are greatly discriminated against in seeking political and leadership positions in Nigeria as compared to other nations of the world. Overtime, women have been considered as not competent enough to hold political office, but we have also seen that many women, just like the men, have excelled in their various positions while others have also failed. The challenges women face in their struggle to be elevated are many, but the effort they have made and are still making should not be ignored or subsumed in the ‘marginalisation’ theory which this lecture is not denying.

5. Empowering Women and Advancing Gender Equality

The marginalisation of women world-wide has led to the introduction of different programmes and declaration by the United Nations (UN) and governments of nations to improve women’s standard in society. Prior to the UN declaration of the “Decade for Women” (1975-1985), the Nigerian government was not deliberate at embarking on programmes that would elevate the position of women in the society because women were seen as just part of the rest of the members of the society. It was not until the regime of Ibrahim Babangida which coincided with the end of the UN “Decade for Women” that set up a Political Bureau in 1986, to chart a new political future for the country.

The Bureau on recognising that women were highly excluded from public affairs and the

industrial sector, recommended that 5% of the legislative seats be reserved for women in all the three tiers of government.⁷⁰ The Bureau also recommended that the federal government should formulate a National Policy on Women and Development. Even though Babangida did not fully accept recommendations of the Bureau, his government did try to enhance the status of women in Nigeria. He appointed the first female Vice Chancellor in Nigeria in 1985 and in 1990, established the National Commission for Women (NCW) under Decree 30 of 1989. The Commission was to see to the welfare and integration of women into all levels of the decision-making process of government.⁷¹ This step taken by the then military government was in response to the activities of the First Lady of Nigeria, Maryam Babangida who had earlier launched the Better Life for Rural Women in 1987. Similarly, in 1997, the National Centre for Women Development (NCWD) was established. It was modelled after the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). The key areas of focus of the Centre are training, research, gender advocacy and development. The Centre has trained so many women in different skills. The Centre also has a Hall of Fame that celebrates the achievements of prominent Nigerian women with their names etched in marble on the wall.⁷²

⁷⁰ Aisha Balarabe Bawa *Women in the Corridors of Power:*

⁷¹ Aisha Balarabe Bawa *Women in the Corridors of Power:*

⁷²National Centre or Women Development Abuja

<https://ncwd.org.ng/>

Nigerian government has also signed several international laws on gender issues since signing the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in April 23, 1984 and ratified it without any reservation in June 13, 1985, and the Beijing Platform of Action in a bid to promote gender equality, bridge gender gap and eliminate all forms of gender discrimination in Nigeria. As earlier noted, the National Gender Policy of 35% Affirmative Action demands that 35% of women be involved in all governance processes in Nigeria, yet this is not fully practiced in Nigeria as we have seen on the charts above. In fact, one year ago (April 6, 2022), in a law suit filed by nine civil societies against the Nigerian government in August 24, 2020, the Federal High Court in Abuja ordered the federal government to enforce the National Gender Policy by allotting 35% of appointments in the public sector to women.⁷³ But up until now the order is yet to be obeyed by the federal government. As a matter of fact, Buhari's government through the Federal Ministry of Justice appealed the matter in July 2022. There are many factors that are responsible for the Nigerian women's plight which I will like to address in the segment that follows.

⁷³Ameh Ejekwonyilo "Affirmative Action: Court orders Nigerian government to reserve 35% of public offices for women"
<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/522195-affirmative-action-court-orders-nigeria-government-reserve-35%-of-public-offices-for-women/>

6. Challenges Faced by Women in Nigeria

i. Patriarchy and Other Socio-cultural Practices

Women are faced with diverse challenges that have impinged on both their ability to tell their stories and taking up their position in the society. One of these challenges is patriarchy, which is at the vanguard of the Nigerian women's bane. Patriarchy as earlier mentioned is perpetuated through different socio-cultural practices such as female restrictions, child marriage, widowhood rites, gender stereotypes, discrimination, subjugation, suppression and inequity, among others. The popular belief of domesticating the women as a wife, mother and care giver affects the upbringing of the girl child/women and also restricts her desire and ambition to excel. Society, especially African society, often views men, no matter their position and status, as superior while women are subordinate and inferior to them. This view about women has contributed a lot in the poor education of young girls especially in the northern part of Nigeria where religion, cultural beliefs and in more recent times terrorism and kidnapping are hindering parents from sending their female children to school.

Also, in Nigeria, gender-stereotype has indicated that some men in authority usually exhibit scratchy behaviours with women, especially those women who have distinguished themselves in career building and contributing immensely to the development of society. To them such women are either too assertive, and so are branded loose, prostitutes, and sometimes are considered rude. Some even believe that women are too emotional

and erratic in nature, entrusting sensitive positions to them would spell ‘danger’. However, Mr Vice-Chancellor Sir, these impressions about women have been proven wrong by so many outstanding Nigerian women who have held positions and contributed to the development of the society. Need I go far from here, Mr Vice Chancellor, to remind us that the pioneer Vice Chancellor of our great University, the Federal University of Lafia is a woman, Emeriti Professor Ekanem Ikpi Braide, who was also the first female Vice Chancellor of the then Cross River University of Technology (CRUTech) now University of Cross River (UniCross). Without any doubt, Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, we are here today building on the legacy the Emeriti Prof Braide laid, and as your Vice Chancellor colleague then, you can bear witness to her great achievements. Others, the Vice Chancellor Sir, are Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, late Prof. Dora Akunyili, Amina Jane Mohammed, Hon. Justice Amina Adamu Augie, Chief Justice Aloma Mariam Mukhtar and our own very dear Prof. Aleruchi Chuku, who is the first female Deputy Vice Chancellor, Federal University of Lafia.

ii. Education

Lack of education /limited education also contributes to the problems women in Nigeria face. Education is a process that enables individual to achieve all-round development. Education impacts skills and proficiencies that are central to human development and enhanced quality of life.⁷⁴ Educating the female child as earlier

⁷⁴Women’s Economic Empowerment in Nigeria FACT SHEET
<https://drpcngr.org>

noted is of high importance to the development of the society because it yields exceptionally high economic and social returns. It is the same female child that transforms to a mother and a leader who exerts great deal of influence on her immediate and extended family and the society in general. An educated woman plays better role in the upbringing of her children and will contribute more in decision making and the development of the society.⁷⁵

According to UNICEF report, 7.6 million girls are out of school (OOS) in Nigeria. 3.9 million of them are at the junior secondary level and more than 50% are not attending school at the basic education level. Also, one million girls drop out between the first and last year of primary school and 0.6 million between primary 6 and JSS1. In recent times due to the activities of terrorists and armed bandits in Northern Nigeria, 48% of OOS girls are in Northwest and Northeast.⁷⁶ This has impacted on girls' right to education and increased the risk of child marriage, early child bearing, gender-based violence, discrimination and poor health outcomes for both the girls and their children.⁷⁷

iii. Gender Based Violence

Another factor that affects women in Nigeria is gender based violence (GBV). GBV is experienced by men

⁷⁵Kwaghe, Z.E “An Overview of Women and Poverty in Africa... 223

⁷⁶UNICEF “Education opportunities for Girls in Nigeria: Girls at a Glance” (June 2022) <https://www.unicef.org>.

⁷⁷UNICEF “Education opportunities for Girls in Nigeria:

/boys and women/girls, however, statistics have shown that women suffer it more than men/boys. In Nigeria, violent against women is perpetrated in different forms, including domestic violence, rape and sexual assault, genital mutilation, acid baths, verbal and physical abuse, forced marriages and even outright killing. Many women and girls in Nigeria today are suffering from the consequence of GBV such as depression, low self-esteem, homelessness, madness and many more. For cultural and religious reasons, sexual and domestic violence is under reported in Nigeria. Many women cannot speak out on constant abuse because of fear of being blamed, stigmatised and harassed. They endure increasing trauma, self-blame, pressure from family members, reprisal attacks, economic dependence on the *batterer*, ignorance of rights, and many more.⁷⁸ Ngharen avers that:

When survivors/victims speak or open up on their experiences, the tendency is for the society to feel that whatever ordeals or challenges they are experiencing are their family problems. Society and religious teachings have supported domestic violence particularly against women... Stigma and rejection can be especially severe when survivor/victim speaks out or reports the incident.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Amin Zaigi Ngharen “Violence against Women in Nigeria” in Okpkeh Ochayi Okpkeh and Elijah Terdoo Ikpanor (eds) *Themes on Women Studies in Africa: Perspectives from Nigeria Vol. 1*, 376

⁷⁹ Amin Zaigi Ngharen “Violence against Women in Nigeria”

iv. Financial Inclusion/Access to Finance

Furthermore, lack of access to finance hinders women's economic potentials as well as their ability to make decisions in their day-to-day businesses.⁸⁰ Some had to depend on their husbands or other male relatives to come to their aid financially and like it is said 'the piper dictates the tune'. Similarly, some who are academically qualified have been prevented from seeking white collar jobs and even engaging in business ventures by their husbands and other male relatives for reasons best known to the men. When women have access to finance, they can provide better education for their children; afford the best possible healthcare and housing for their family.⁸¹

7. Patriarchy, Women and the Politics of Knowledge Production

I have discussed above how patriarchy affects many aspects of women's life in Nigeria. In this section, I will briefly explain how patriarchy affects women knowledge production.

i. Bias and Marginalisation

Knowledge production refers to how knowledge is created through research, experimentation, science, humanities, information technology, etcetera and the dissemination of findings to contribute to the development of society. The patriarchal setting of the

⁸⁰Women's Economic Empowerment in Nigeria FACT SHEET
<https://drpcngr.org>

⁸¹Women's Economic Empowerment in Nigeria FACT SHEET
<https://drpcngr.org>

Nigerian society often prioritises the experiences and contributions of men over those of women. Men dominate leadership positions and decision making in almost all aspects of the Nigerian society. Cultural and social norms affect women whose experiences and perspectives are valued and included in the knowledge production. Such prejudice leads to the exclusion and marginalisation of the knowledge produced by women resulting to their voices being stifled or silenced in society.

ii. Limited Access and Representation

The unequal access to resources, education and opportunities women experience in Nigeria limits to a large extent, their ability to participate in knowledge production. This could be seen in the prioritising of boys' education over girls especially in Northern Nigeria and the limited number of women in STEM fields and the high percentage of women who do not practice after undergoing years of education and training.

iii. Socio-cultural Biases

Prevailing cultural and religious beliefs about women roles and capabilities can affect women's ability to engage in knowledge production. Cultural and religious beliefs encourage women to prioritise domestic duties over public life. Thus, society regard women who are career minded as aggressive and sometimes wayward. This has led to some women in Nigeria withdrawing from rigorous academic research and endeavours and even participating in public life.

iv. Gender – Based Violence

Recent kidnaping and raping of young girls in schools in Nigeria can negatively impact their ability to engage in knowledge production ventures and academic pursuit. If this continues, parents, husbands and guardians may be tempted to keep their female children at home or marry them out instead.⁸²

8. Concluding Remarks

Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, I will like to reiterate that from the pre-colonial times to the 21st century, the role and status of women in Nigeria have continuously evolved and therefore should be carefully and properly studied. This lecture interrogated the invaluable contributions the Nigerian women have made from the pre-colonial period to present in building and developing the Nigerian society despite all odds. This lecture is appropriate at this time when many Nigerians are bereft of the knowledge of the long-time contributions of women to the development and survival of the Nigerian society. The lecture has also helped to correct the impression in most male –written works which relegates the woman’s contributions to the periphery or do not discuss it all.⁸³

⁸² Zara Emmanuel Kwaghe, Blossom Shimayam Otttoh-Agede and Esther Likita-Ogba “Insecurity and the Future of Girls’ Formal Education in Northern –Nigeria” in Okpeh O. Okpeh Jr., Patrick I. Ukase and Bem J. Audu Military Leadership, Service and National Development. Festschrift in Honour of Major General SHUAIBU IBRAHIM (Kaduna: Pay-Lak Press and Publishers Limited, 2022), 767.

⁸³Eyoh Etim and Oliver Nyambi “Herstory versus ‘history’:

In spite of the challenges of marginalisation, women have contributed significantly to the development of the Nigerian society across different fields such as education, science and technology, politics, social reforms, healthcare, military, aviation, arts and culture and many more. Their contributions among others highlight their indispensable role in the development and progress of the Nigerian society.

In order for the society to continue to make positive progress, male and female must complement each other's role. God has bequeathed both men and women the necessary potentials to fulfil their roles in the society and develop the nation. No role is inferior to the other and also no gender is superior to the other. Both men and women are placed in the society to multiply and dominate the world (Genesis 1:26) and not to dominate each other. Thus, neglecting or undermining the roles of women and emphasising male dominance and authority would amount to counter progressive and underdeveloped society. Complementing each other's strength and ability rather than emphasising male superiority is the answer to growth and development. Sir, we should never forget that in a drowning scenario, it does not really matter who saves the person drowning, whether man or woman.

9. Towards a Way Forward

- i.** The woman should be encouraged to write *herstory*; knowing that in every history there is the female perspective, in which telling it her way (*herstory*) is pertinent and only fair

to the woman. Women are in a better position to tell their experiences. No one can tell it better than the one who experiences it. Balarabe Ramat Yakubu is a good example of a woman who has written her life stories which is a statement against child marriage and as well as a plea for girls education.⁸⁴ As women continue to write their experiences and that of other women, like I said earlier, in no distant time a knowledge bank would be created and ready for harvest.

- ii.** Women scholars should write more about women that challenge stereotypes and sexism or demonstrate the strength of women especially in our present day Nigeria. There are some extraordinary female role models that history is largely silent on. These women die without their stories being recorded.
- iii.** It is not enough to just write, women should tell their children, especially the male child at home, stories of both outstanding and the ordinary every day women whose invaluable contributions keep the society moving. That way they will learn to appreciate the roles and contributions of women in the society.
- iv.** Social and gender norms that place a low value on education of girls and promote boys' preference should be discouraged.
- v.** Insecurity, including attacks on schools and abduction of school children as well as

⁸⁴“From Illiterate Child Bride to Famous Nigerian Novelist”
<https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/features>

gender based violence at school should be discouraged in order to avoid attrition of girls and early marriage.

- vi.** Government, at all levels, should encourage the passing of bills that promote women's right in order to bridge the existing gender gap. Also, provisions against child marriage should be incorporated into State laws and loopholes permitting child marriage should be discouraged.
- vii.** Women studies emphasising women contributions in the society should be encouraged at all levels of our education.
- viii.** Also, at the home front, that is here in our great University, with the "change begins with you" mantra of the Buhari's administration, Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, I would like to thank you for considering women to be viable and competent enough to serve as a DVC (Academic Affairs), Dean of Education (Prof Josephine Odey), Directors, Heads of Department and Units, and like Oliver Twist, Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, we are asking for more. We appeal to you to adequately employ the services of the women population in the FULafia community, and history will be fair to remember your immense support for the women.

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