

Numbers 27:1-11 and Gender Prejudice Against Women in Nigeria

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Abstract

Gender prejudice in history can never be overemphasized. Devastatingly, women over time have been the recipients. They are impoverished of equal right to some economic prospects, decision making, political positions, status and privileges in the society. Gender prejudice against women calls for examination as this study points to the plight of women in the context of critical consideration of Numbers 27:1-11 as a prototype for understanding God's perception of rights justice towards women, especially in Nigerian. The Zelophehad daughter uses their collective voice as a plea for their cause from the patriarch. The study adopts descriptive and exegetical methodology. This study concludes that no society can adequately progress and thrive in the arena of prejudice and marginalization. Thus women prohibition should be discourage in governance because gender impartiality enhances greater productivity.

Keywords: Gender, Nigerian, Numbers, Prejudice, Women.

Introduction

The issue of gender has attracted the attention of scholars from different perspective. Gender is socially fashioned within the context of behavior, attitudes, emotions and activities acceptable to a society from both sex (males and females). Gender prejudice is a major challenge to several women all

over the world. This discrimination confronted by women has different levels as it vary from one country to another. Women in the Ancient Near East were not let off as they were generally victims of gender based rights abuse. The objective of this paper is to examine gender prejudice from various perspectives with a reconstruction of gender outlooks to translate justice and empowerment for women.

This study provides valuable insight for an attitudinal change towards women in Nigeria. Gender disparity remains an observable problem that stimulates injustice in the society. This paper is set out to promote justice for women and correct the negative impression about women that some still holds today. In Nigeria, women have undergone immense discrimination, lack of equal opportunities, rejection and deprivation because of gender prejudice. This discrimination has brought setback to the society and affected dignity as well as their rights as human beings. Gender prejudice on women exists in different phases of life which includes education, politics, industry, religion etc. Apart from the fact that this discrimination is been justified by some cultural standards and practices, we also discover that it marginalize women in full realization of their potentials in the society. In respects to this, the story of the daughters of Zelophehad provides a paradigm to understand women's right in Nigeria.

Analysis of Numbers 27:1-11

Harrison posits that the book of Numbers covers a period of thirty-eight years of Israel's aimless wandering in the desert and their subsequent preparation for the conquest and settlement in the Promised Land. Numbers is the title given to the fourth book of the Pentateuch.⁴⁸⁷ The translators of the Septuagint (LXX) gave it the name "Numbers" apparently to reflect its two censuses; Numbers 1 and 26. It can be divided

⁴⁸⁷ R. K. Harrison, 1969. *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 622.

it into duo unequal parts. Each respective part deals with what he describes as “the death of an old generation and the birth of a new”. In addition, Lasor articulates that the title “Numbers” was passed on through the Latin Vulgate to the European and present-day English versions.⁴⁸⁸

Budd avers that it is notable to say that this section has been identified by many scholars as of a priestly material.⁴⁸⁹ Noth affirms that the priestly material in this pericope was of a later type.⁴⁹⁰ Noth has been followed in his view by others like J. Sturdy and J. de Vaux. Budd is satisfied that a consensus of scholarly opinion ascribes the materials in this section to the Priestly editor.⁴⁹¹ Closely associated with this pericope in Numbers (27: 1-11), are parallel narratives like Numbers 36: 1-12 and Joshua 17:2-6 which deal with the same inheritance issues of the daughters of Zelophehad.

How is the second census important for understanding the plight of the daughters of Zelophehad for which they had to petition Moses? Why did the Priestly editor choose that context for the placement of the Zelophehad narrative? The Priestly editor placed this pericope (Num.27:1-11) against the background of the second census (Num. 26:52-55) to highlight its importance for the subsequent partitioning of the Promise Land based on those listed by name. The Zelophehad daughters anticipated that they would be left out without a

⁴⁸⁸ W. S. Lasor, ed. 1996. *Old Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 100.

⁴⁸⁹ Budd, P. J. 1984. *Numbers: Word Bible Commentary* 5. Waco: Word. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/milieu> Accessed on Jan. 27, 2020.

⁴⁹⁰ Noth, M., 1980. *Numbers - A Commentary*. London: SCM, 210.

⁴⁹¹ Budd, *Numbers: Word Bible Commentary*, 300.

family inheritance and they took action to pre-empt that likelihood (Num. 27: 1-5).⁴⁹²

Vs. 1-2. The opening verse of this passage begins by tracing the ancestry of Zelophehad to Manasseh which give emphasis to the legality of the daughters claim to inheritance, that they were not impersonators to the inheritance they demanded for, but rightful owners of their father's name. Ulrich asserts that their bold and uninvited act of "stood before" the assembly of Moses, Eleazar, and the elders of Israel shows their full dissatisfaction with a legal technicality that was about to bar them from not only inheriting their father's patrimony but also one that could lead to the disappearance of their father's name from the larger family network.⁴⁹³

Vs. 3-4. The request of these daughters that needed to be solved was of a legal nature. Their father Zelophehad had died in the wilderness without a male child or heir that will inherit his possessions. In view of this, the daughters of Zelophehad requested to inherit it. In this passage the Hebrew concepts of "*ahuzzah*" and "*nahalah*" according to Dybdahl posits that both refer to an *inheritance* of land jointly owned within the broader *mishpahah* or kindred.⁴⁹⁴ Brueggemann also asserts that the difference lies in the fact that while *ahuzzah* refers more or less to land ownership on a more personal level, *nahalah* on the other hand, refers to land ownership on a kindred or even tribal level. *Ahuzzah* is the word for possession while *nahalah* is the Hebrew word for inheritance.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹²Levine, B. A., 2000. *Numbers The Anchor Bible* New York: Doubleday. <https://www.lds.org/encyclopedia/entry/ahuzzah> Accessed on Jan. 27, 2020.

⁴⁹³ Dean R. Ulrich, 2008. "The Framing Function of the Narratives about Zelophehad's Daughters," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41, No. 4, 535.

⁴⁹⁴Dybdahl, J. L., 1981. *Israelite Village Land Tenure: Settlement to Exile* Doctoral Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2.

⁴⁹⁵ W. Brueggemann, 1977. *The Land*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, xii.

A possession can be disposed of by the owner at will, but an inheritance can only be passed on to succeeding generations, and disposal is only on a temporary basis. Furthermore, the idea articulated by the daughter to “*give us our inheritance among our father’s relative*” according to Norman Habel is given an incisive differentiation between ancestral family which was the wider tribal grouping and ancestral household to which the daughters belonged.⁴⁹⁶ According to him the ancestral family, the *mšpehat*, refers to a protective association of families or households forming the tribe.

The ancestral household refers to the *bet’ab*, the smallest socio-economic unit in Israel involving several generations of families under a single head, a cluster of dwellings forming a single household and a range of economic activities. They claimed that their demand was necessitated by the desire to perpetuate the clan name of their father who died “for his own sin”. In other words, Zelophehad had died not because of his part in the rebellion of Korah but for the general sin of unfaithfulness which characterized the entire first generation, and therefore, like the rest of the younger generation his descendants deserved to be granted an inheritance as opined by Branch.⁴⁹⁷

Vs. 5-7. The problem of inheritance which the daughters of Zelophehad were concerned with, was not covered in any of the existing law codes in the Torah.⁴⁹⁸ What was the problem of the Zelophehad daughters? Such a request, coming from females was without any precedent so Moses brought their case before the Lord. The word translated “brought” literally means to “draw near with” (*vayyiqareb*) is from the same root

⁴⁹⁶ Habel, Norman C., 1995. *The Land is mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 74.

⁴⁹⁷ Branch, R. G., 2003. *Zelophehad, Daughters of* in T.D.Alexander & D.W.Baker (eds) *Dictionary of Old Testament*, Downers Grove: Inter Varsity, 913.

⁴⁹⁸ Ashley, T. R., 1993. *The Book of Numbers* NICOT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 542.

as the very first word in the narrative (Num.27:1), except that in (27:1) it is a *qat imperfect* showing performance, whereas in Num.27:5 it is a *hiphil imperfect* showing causality.

Hence it is translated this way. The case of the daughters of Zelophehad caused Moses to approach Yahweh for a resolution on their behalf. Milgram has pointed out that during this time in ancient Israel, only Moses was qualified to bring this case before the LORD as implied in Exodus 18:19, exemplified in Leviticus 24:13 and Numbers 9:8-9 and 15:35-36.⁴⁹⁹

The Lord here in the Hebrew word is “Yahweh” which denotes is decisive approval to the demand of the daughters of Zelophehad and rules in that Moses should indeed transfer the inheritance of Zelophehad to his daughters. The Hebrew term used for “right” here is ‘*ken*’ in every day usage the word denotes the affirmation “*yes*.” When used as an adjective, the term may also mean straight, truthful and honesty, which according to Carmichael is a term well-suited to someone expressing a desired remedy for a benefit that goes in an inappropriate way.⁵⁰⁰

Vs. 8-11. Ashley observed that a matter of such importance would have formed part of the Torah in order to provide a general legislation for similar cases in future.⁵⁰¹ The laws enacted as a result of the request of the daughters emphasizes that inheritance in Israel were patrilineal, meaning that inheritance is passed through males through the father’s side.

Firstly, if a man dies without a son, his inheritance is passed on to his daughters (Num.27:8). Beyond that Israel’s

⁴⁹⁹ Milgram, J. 1990. *Numbers. JPS Torah Commentary*. Philadelphia: JPS.

⁵⁰⁰ Carmichael, Calum M., 2008. “Inheritance in Biblical Sources.” *Law and Literature* 20, No.2, 229-242.

⁵⁰¹ Ashley, T. R., 1993. *The Book of Numbers NICOT*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 543.

inheritance traditions were patrilineal. Secondly, if a man without son or daughter dies his inheritance passes on to his brother or brothers (vs.9). Thirdly, if there are no brothers, then the father's brothers would inherit (vs.10), and fourthly, if there were no uncles, then the nearest kinsman of his clan would inherit (vs.11 a).

The request which the daughters of Zelophehad made was finally effected with slight modifications, restricting the marriage options of the heiresses (36:1-12), in Joshua by a land allocation panel headed by Joshua and Eleazar the priest (Jos.17:3-6). Any detailed discussion of the fundamental inheritance issues raised in Numbers is reserved for the fifth chapter. Meanwhile, some observations on the section will be in order here.

This section presents a legal case about women inheriting land through a male line during exceptional cases when there is no male descendant to possess the inheritance. In these verses we also read about the initial ruling given on the case right at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before Moses, Eleazar, the leaders and the entire congregation of Israel. We are also given a family tree in vs.1 of the daughters of Zelophehad which is part of a second census list representing an entirely new generation, and which for that purpose repeats the structure of Manasseh's clan which was outlined in 26: 28- 35.⁵⁰²

Ancient Near East, Israelite and Nigerian Milieus: The Nexus

A common feature of the ANE social and religious ethos is a bias towards patriarchy and patrilineal society. In the subject of 'land' for instance, women generally were not given land as

⁵⁰²Olson, D T., 1996 *Numbers (Interpretation)*. Louisville: John Knox, 162-163.

an inheritance.⁵⁰³ The reason was that women married into other families and so could not inherit land in the same manner as their male counterparts do. Similarly, women were given a dowry when they moved into their matrimonial home. Since land is immovable property, it could not form part of a dowry given to women.⁵⁰⁴

Although, an exception to this rule was found among the royalty of Egypt, where land gifts were occasionally made to daughters who married. Pharaoh's land gift to his daughter who married King Solomon is a case in point (I Kgs 9). The general tendency in the ANE seem to point at land inheritance by males only, and in the exceptional cases where land was given to women such women were not allowed to be married outside of their father's kindred. The possibility of a woman owning land acquired through purchase with her own money was not ruled out (Pro.31:10-17), but at death such land passed into the hands of her sons or brothers. Therefore, the conventional line of inheritance tended to be restored to male descendants.⁵⁰⁵

The ancient Israelites society was highly patriarchal and hierarchical. Their social, cultural and religious context displays a reality of a male dominated society. Other sources apart from the Old Testament also give evidence that the Jewish society from post exilic period was not less patriarchal. Women in the ancient Israel were treated negatively during Temple worship. In fact, women were segregated from men in the temple and synagogues.

⁵⁰³Borgatta, E.F. and Montgomery, R.J.V. 2002. Encyclopedia of sociology 2nd ed. Vol.2 New York: Macmillan reference, USA. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*.

⁵⁰⁴Westbrook, R., 1991. *Property and the Family in Biblical Law*. Sheffield: Academic Press, 147.

⁵⁰⁵Bird, P. A., 1992. *Women or, in D.N. Freedman, The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. New York: Doubleday, 951-957.

However, the Old Testament world which gives the idea of a male dominated society was far from being antagonist against women.⁵⁰⁶ According to Meyer he opined that the role of women in the Old Testament was camouflage under the male-dominated norms and laws of ancient Israel.⁵⁰⁷ Nevertheless, women were marginalized to the root and had to disseminate their roles in subordination to the male counterparts. The general opinion was woman's duty was shifted to keep the house and free men to study the tradition. As some would say, women in ancient Israel were not more than the "property" of men with regards to their sexuality, and at best men's assistants with regards to their social status.⁵⁰⁸

World population review speculates that Nigeria officially known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria is a country that is located on the western coast of Africa. The country features 36 states and its Federal Capital territory, which is known as Abuja. The country of Nigeria features over five hundred different ethnic groups, many different languages, and declared its independence from the United Kingdom on October 1, 1960. As of 2020, the estimated population of the country is over 205,870,154, ranking 7th in the world. ⁵⁰⁹ Having established this, in Nigeria women have been marginalized, stereotyped and trivialized in such a way that whatever men know and do in the society is consider superior to that of women. This discrimination has been reinforced and fuelled under cultural/traditional and religious factors by militating against women's participation in several sectors of the society.

⁵⁰⁶Wright, C. H. J., 1989. *Living As God's People*. England: Inter Varsity Press, 198.

⁵⁰⁷ Meyers, C., 1988. *Discovering Eve Ancient Israelite Women in Context*. London: Oxford Publication, 78.

⁵⁰⁸Makama, G. A., 2013. Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria: The Way Forward. *European Scientific Journal* 9, No. 17, 115-144.

⁵⁰⁹Worldpopulationreview.com/countries/Nigeria-population/ Accessed on Jan. 27, 2020.

Areas of Gender Prejudice in Nigeria

Culture and Tradition: Women status in some culture and tradition are considered only as a wife, mother, housekeeper and their place is believed to be restricted to household duties. The wife was regarded as the husband's property since the man has paid a certain amount as bride price and the women become his. Amadi discovers that in some South Eastern part of Nigeria, a widow suffered much during the period of mourning her late husband which lasted for about a year. She was sometimes restricted from making her hair, washing her clothes or even bathe regularly. She is deprived of inheritance in her father's house as tradition negates that the share of the women is in her husband's house. It is worthy of note to point out that in extreme cases she was buried with her husband.⁵¹⁰

Obviously in Nigeria society, ranging from history to our contemporary times as opined by Haraway has been spotted with peculiar cultural practices that are demeaning women's such as early forced marriage, wife-inheritance and widowhood practices. As daughters self-identify as females with their mother and sisters, and sons as males with their father and brothers, gender stereotyping becomes traditional within the family unit.⁵¹¹

Education: History has it that some social values have contributed immensely to gender discrimination in Nigeria education. Denga observes that one of the noticeable cultural view is that it is better for the woman to stay home and learn, and also attend to her family instead of attending school.⁵¹² In

⁵¹⁰Amadi, B., 1982. *Ethics in Nigerian Culture*. Ibadan: H. E. B. Nigeria Ltd, 72.

⁵¹¹Haraway, D., 1992. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge publisher.

⁵¹²Denga, D.I., 1993. *Education at a Glance: From Cradle to Tomb*. Calabar: Rapid Educational Publishers Ltd, 34.

addition, Alemika and Ogugua asserts that women recorded significantly lower levels in the country's tertiary instructions, and medical profession.⁵¹³ In a similar vein, women suffer prejudiced practices more than men; educating girls is viewed as been less value than educating boys; girls are forced to be dismiss from school if they became pregnant; they are not permitted to further their education after babies are delivered.

There are proportionately more dropouts among girls than boys. The hope that this act of injustice on girls will discourage immorality is void because boys who are usually the main crooks are not reprimanded.⁵¹⁴ In the job-related structure women have also faced severe gender disparity that hinders their social mobility. They are socialized into lower cadres, statuses and more restricted self-images. Based on rewards, women's occupations usually have lower rewards than men's occupation. Women in the workforce are systematically relegated, kept in lower paying jobs, denied equal opportunities for advancement and laid off quicker than the men.⁵¹⁵

Political: Historically, women face discrimination in political sphere, she barely attain the permission to participate in politics as men believe that household duties should be their priority and not how the society is governed. The modus operandi adopted by political parties in Nigeria is one of the issues impeding women's involvement in politics. Most of the political parties hold their meeting at night, which discourages many women particularly the married ones, to play active role in politics. With all sense of reality, it takes a very understanding husband to permit his wife attend nocturnal

⁵¹³ Alemika, E. E. O. & Agugua, A. O., 2001. *Gender Relations and Discrimination in Nigeria Police Force*, Ikeja, Lagos Centre for Law Enforcement Education CLEEN, 13.

⁵¹⁴ Amadi, *Ethics in Nigerian Culture*, 77.

⁵¹⁵ Golthorpe, J. H., 1983. 'Women and Class Analysis in defense of the conventional view' in the journal of British Sociological Association Vol. 17 NO. 4.

political meetings in which significant decisions are taken. The men and women themselves sometimes believe that the women does not have the requisite economic power to indulge in dirty political ideals characterized by money shows, violence, assassinations and other vices.⁵¹⁶

Furthermore, in African context the patriarchal nature promotes the prohibition of women from political sphere which is inferred as a demonstration of their affection and passion to care for their families. On a contrary liberal democracy permits full participation of women politics through voting and holding elective and appointive offices, but women still at the periphery of real politicking.⁵¹⁷

Considering the women's numerical figure in the populace is not reflected in the political life and decision-making processes and structures of the nation. They are less represented at the Senate, national and state legislatures, and the House of Representatives. At the House of Assembly and at the Local Government Area Councils, women are seldom or grossly underrepresented as well as at the highest decision-making levels 'Executive, Legislature and Judiciary' in the nation.⁵¹⁸

Implications of Gender Prejudice in Nigeria Development

Gender divergent treatment is prevalent and it has been an obvious subject in women's history over the centuries and Nigeria is not an exemption. From the ancient world to this contemporary time women are marginalized through subjugation and denial of right in economic, education, social and political development of Nigeria. In view of this, Nigeria is a patriarchal society which their social structure favors men

⁵¹⁶ Branka, Magas, 1971. 'Sex Politics: Class Politics' in New left Review 66 March – April.

⁵¹⁷ Ojo A., 2002. *Social -Economic Situation" in Africa Atlases Nigeria*. France:Les Editions J.A, 126-127.

⁵¹⁸ Alemika, & Agugua, *Gender Relations and Discrimination in Nigeria Police Force*.

over women and women are in subordinate position due to gender prejudice and it has prevented women from contributing immensely and adequately to Nigeria development.

This gender based discrimination is predominant and its implication is as follows: Discrimination against women serves as an impediment to the economic prosperity and growth of Nigeria. Deprivation of women's civil rights, political, economic and social is hindering the achievement of economic growth and development. Disparity of women involvement in inferior obligations has an adverse effect on the general economic situation of the labor market. Limitation of women and their serious constraints to economic governance have limited their influence has some are now irrelevant. The alarming rate of misconduct such as kidnapping, cultism, robbery, prostitution which women participate today in the society is due to the consequence of gender disparity.

Conclusion

No society can progress and thrive in the arena of prejudice, marginalization and discrimination. This imply that, for Nigeria to adequately thrive there is a need to disallow gender relegation and inequality which will promote women's social, economic, political status and full integration into the development process. In addition, this study concludes that gender equality enhances greater productivity. One of the popular sayings in Yoruba is that "*ka fi owo we owo ni owo fin mo*"; meanings washing the hands together will enable the hand to be clean. To accompany the above, women should not view their gender as a hindrance but an advantage to help in getting to the peak in their choice of career as we make Nigeria a better place. Therefore, the study recommends that:

1. Nigeria administration should cease from gender discrimination in both public and private sectors to as to effect economic growth of the nation.

2. Government should take appropriate procedures by ensuring equal access and employment for both men and women to decrease economic loses
3. If women are empowered through educational and skill development programmes to utilize their great potentials the economic will become more progressive in the country.
4. The government should use the party structures to ensure and promote the full involvement of women in politics, provide equal opportunity, same level playing ground and political freedom.
5. Christian scholars should adopt systematic seminars, conference activities to expose women to the basic truth that will help them to be effective and good leaders for maximum productivity in the society.

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