WOMEN, GOVERNANCE AND NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT IN THE LIGHT OF ESTHER 4:1-17

Anuli Okoli
Department of Religion and Cultural Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
E-mail: anuli.okoli@unn.edu.ng
Phone no: 08063876628
&
Favour . C. Uroko
Department of Religion and Cultural Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
E-mail: favour.uroko@unn.edu.ng
Phone no: 08062369671

Abstract

The paper analyses the contributions of women in time past in the development of Nigeria. Consequently, it examines reasons for the exception of women in contemporary times in political leadership of Nigeria. The paper discovered that the much-needed development that Nigeria seeks could have been attained if the proper environment where women are involved in the policy-making process are in evoke. The story of Queen Esther in the Old Testament was used as the character for the study. Queen Esther was a fearless leader who was prepared to lay down her life for her people, the Jewish race, who were about to be exterminated by Harman and his accomplices. The narrative analysis was used as the methodology in this research work. The paper recommended that women should build up a high self-esteem so as to be able to given their own contribution to the overall growth and development of Nigeria.

Keywords: Good Governance, National Development, Queen Esther, Women, Leadership

Introduction
The place of women in the society cannot be underestimated. Women have played very crucial roles in the family (nuclear and extended) and the society at large. In the society women, hitherto, were the brain behind the success in governance in the monarchies that existed in the various Nigerian communities, with some democratic and others autocratic. In 1957, during the pre-independence era in Nigeria, a couple of women political activists, such as Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, Mrs. Janet Mokelu and Mrs.Young, were members of the Eastern

house of Assembly. This was a commendable feat. The late Mrs. Fumilayo Ransome Kuti, though not a fully fledged politician was a very strong force to reckoned with in politics of the western region. Hajia Gambo Sawaba waged a fierce battle for the political and cultural emancipation of women in the North. These women, not only stood their feet, but they upheld justice, honesty, transparency and accountability, notwithstanding the risks it had to their lives.

However, times have change. There is this sudden withdrawal of the women folk from political activities such as governance. Their place is being conceptualized to be in the kitchen. Jide (2016) explains that women run away from politics because politics in recent times have become a preserve of the plutocrats. One cannot be a successful politician in Nigeria unless one is well heeled or one has backers who are ready to finance one's political career as an investment. In this way, one compromises one's independence and the seed of corruption is sown. This explains why the political terrain has been posed as a dirty game by the men folk. Women, who should have served as checks and balances to abuse of power, have been silenced. Could it be that the exemption of women from power is the reason for the high rate of corruption in Nigeria? How can women contribute their quota to the overall political and all round development of the Nigerian society? These are the problems that this research paper tends to solve.

The study text is Esther 4:1-17. It explains how Queen Esther exhibited political wisdom in taking care of the political brouhaha that was about to the envelope the Jewish nation. Esther, through her political will, was able to proffer a solution to a political problem. The narrative analysis was used in this research piece. According to Berberg (2012, p.78) "narrative analysis attempts to systematically relate the narrative means deployed for the function of laying out and making sense of particular kinds of, if not totally unique, experiences." It helps for a proper communication of experiences of a particular narrative.It was discovered that women in politics would help in sanitizing the Nigerian polity.

Conceptual Clarification

For a better grasping of the thesis of this paper, a definition of terms would be of utmost importance. Hereunder a sketch is given of the operational terms.
   a. **Development**

Development could be defined as the process in which someone or something grows or changes and becomes more advanced (Cambridge Dictionary, 2017). Gboyega (2003) puts that development as an idea embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. Szirmai (n.d) explains that development issues two general approaches: 1. The fight against poverty (This approach focuses on the problems of widespread poverty, hunger and misery in developing countries and on the question of what can be done in order to realise improvements of the situation in the short term), 2. The analysis of long-term economic and social development (This approach concentrates on comparing developments in different countries, regions and historical periods in order to gain a better understanding of the factors that have long-term effects on the dynamics of socio-economic development).

b. Governance

Governance, according to Francis (2003, p.3) is government's ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services, regardless of whether that government is democratic or not. According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (n.d), governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). Since governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented, an analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision-making and implementing the decisions made and the formal and informal structures that have been set in place to arrive at and implement the decision.

c. The book of Esther

The events in the book of Esther occurred from 483 BC to 473 BC, during the first half of the reign of King Xerxes, who chose Esther as his queen. Esther and her Uncle Mordecai, along with many other Jews were in Susa, the capital city of Persia (Swindoll, 2017, Baumgarten, 2007). Sketching more, Maier (1988, p.193) puts that "after the death of Xerxes, the Persian empire passed to his son Ahasuerus, whom the Greeks call Artaxerxes", to whom Queen Esther became a wife. Esther is a Jewish woman living in Persia and reared by her cousin Mordecai. She was taken to the King of the Persian Empire to become a part of his *harem*; but because there was something special about Esther, he made her queen. Mordecai, however, didn't tell the king about a major detail which was Esther's Jewish heritage (Lisa, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

The role theory was used in this research work. This theory was propounded by George Herbert Mead in 1934. The theory emphasizes the inherent nature of the social structure with social status and roles as the major components of social structure. Role refers to a person's organized modes of behavior by the status or function he carries out in relation to one or more persons (Strean, 1971 in Okala & Ijeoma, 2014). Women are thought to have roles which are being misconstrued to end in the kitchen. Their roles are seen as domesticated roles. Hence, going into governance is seen as boycotting the roles that were spelt out to the women folk. Hence, this theory proceeds that the cultural place of women have been an influence on their apathy to societal governance. Mead in his book Mind, Self and Society said that the organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self may be called "the generalized other." This generalized other is the cultural enclave which women have been psychologically placed.

Women and Governance in Nigeria

Women in Nigeria have made strides which helped in the development of the country. In 1957, during the pre-independence era, a couple of women political activists, such as Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, Mrs. Janet Mokelu and Mrs.Young, were members of the Eastern house of Assembly. The late Mrs. Fumilayo Ransome Kuti, though not a fully fledged politician was a very strong force in south-western politics. Also, Hajia Gambo Sawaba waged a fierce battle for the political and cultural emancipation of women in the North. These women, not only stood their feet, they upheld justice, honesty, transparency and accountability, notwithstanding the risks these had to their lives.

Furthermore, the Aba Women's Riot of November/December 1929 is the first major challenge to British authority in Nigeria and West Africa during the colonial period. Thousands of Igbo women organised a massive revolt against the policies imposed by British colonial administrations in southern eastern Nigeria. This "prompted colonial authorities to drop their plans to impose a tax on market women and to curb the power of the warrant chief" (Terry and Abada, 2011, p.39). Also, the Ekiti women in support of democracy in Nigeria protested against the re-run governorship election in Ekiti state in 2009 by appearing half naked in white attires and moved around Ado-Ekiti. The protest spearheaded by Chief Ronke Okunsaya, a former commissioner for women affairs in the state,

comprising about 300 women. The women ended up causing a stir when they performed a rite by appeasing the gods of the land and rain causes on any anti-democratic forces and these disrupting the peace of the state (Egbunu, 2009). Also worthy of mention is the late Dr. Dora Akunyili, former director of the National Agency for Food Administration and Control (NAFDAC); she worked very hard in fighting against illegal and fake drugs in Nigeria. In recognition of her leadership prowess, she won the Transparency International Integrity award and the British Grassroots Human Rights ward. Consequently, the renowned Dr Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Minister of finance, former World Bank boss was the brain behind the removal of subsidy. She proved her patriotism, dedication and loyalty by her contributions to the stabilisation of Nigeria's economy. She played an active role in shaping the country out of its economic woes and getting the nation a debt relief, like the Paris club (Terry and Chika, 2011).

Contemporarily the situation has changed. Women have been sidelined. Ogazi (2011) explains that in the elective positions in Nigeria since 1999, it is evident that women have not reached 10% representation. From 1999 till date, no woman has been vice president of Nigeria and not to talk about president. In 2011, only one woman contested for the post of the president in Nigeria under the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party and she did not survive the primary election. How could she survive the primaries when she got only one vote despite the large number of women that attended the primary election but refused to vote for her even on sympathy basis. In 2015, 5 women out of the 14 persons contested the vice presidential position while 14 men contested the post of president. Out of the 109 senate member in Nigeria senate chambers, women were 7 in 1999, 4 in 2003, 9 in 2007, 7 in 2011 and 7 in 2015. In the house of representative, out of the 360 members of the house in 1999, 7 are women, while in 2003 21 are women, 27 in 2007 and 25 in 2011 and 14 in 2015. No woman governor since 1999 till date apart from when the governor of Anambra state Peter Obi was removed from office for one month and as soon as he won his case through the courts, the women governor stepped down to her deputy position. Furthermore, Ojoma (2014) also observes that women have contested for different positions in the four elections held by the country since its return to democratic rule in 1999 but have had poor results, minimal gains and slow progress. For instance, in 2003, women made up only three percent of elected officials, in 2007 they made seven percent and in 2011 they make up about five percent.

Queen Esther and the Welfare of her People

Queen Esther replaced Queen Vashti as the queen of Persia. Haman, a very close ally of the King due to the fact that Mordecai did not bow down to him decided to annihilate the whole Jews. This was possible because Haman was an Agagite and had been raised to the highest position at King's court. Mordecai, who was the uncle of Esther at this period reported this development to Esther (4:7, 8, 14) and pleaded with her to come to the rescue of the Jews.

Esther means 'hidden' – her Jewish identity was hidden from the King. Esther's Jewish name, *Hadassah,* means 'myrtle' (a tree whose leaves release their fragrance when crushed). She A queen needed more than beauty to navigate the shoals of a corrupt and dangerous court. Esther was a symbol of Jews who lived successfully in an alien culture. (Fletcher, 2006).

In Esther 4, Mordecai, Esther's uncle was saddened by the news of a total annihilation of the Jews. Mordecai told Esther about the plans of Haman. Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" (Esther 4:16). Esther took this bold step and met with the king, which was against the law of the land. Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him. She was able to gain victory and save her people from destruction. This was literally a woman who was prepared to die for the people she is representing. This is what leadership entails. Hughes (2007) puts that the simple fact stands out that here was one who was willing to lay down her life for her people. In v. 16, the Hebrew text reads:

^{16}לֵךְ כְּנוֹס אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוּשָׁן וְצוּמוּ עָלַי וְאַל־תֹּאכְלוּ וְאַל־תִּשְׁתּוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים לַיְלָה וָיוֹם גַּם־אֲנִי וְנַעֲרֹתַי אָצוּם כֵּן וּבְכֵן אָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־כַדָּת וְכַאֲשֶׁר **אָבַדְתִּי** אָבָדְתִּי:

(Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if **I perish, I perish**!")

The word אָבַדְתִּי means "I perish". It is can also mean to lose oneself. It means to totally donate oneself to fate. This is what Queen Esther submitted to. And

(A Publication of the Augustinian Institute)

Esther prayed to God after the manner of her country, by casting herself down upon the earth and putting on her mourning garments and bidding farewell to meat and drink and all delicacies, this she did for three days time as she entreated God to take pity upon her and to make her words seem persuasive to the king and her appearance more beautiful than ever before, that both by her words and her beauty she might succeed in averting the king's anger if he were in some way provoked by her; and to make her a consolation for those of her own country, who were in the utmost danger of perishing; and to excite in the king a hatred toward the enemies of the Jews and he that had contrived their destruction (Goldberg, n.d).

Factors Militating against the Effective Participation of Women in Governance

Several factors fight against the emergence of women in Nigeria's governance. Some of them:

a.   **Discriminatory laws and customs:** The culture of the Nigerian society places women as inferior to men. According to Jean (2005), it seems that Nigeria's male dominated culture has little interest in encouraging self-discovery of the women folk. This self-discovery inculcates the I-can-do-it-spirit into the women folk. Adhiambo-Oduol (2003) corroborates that socio-cultural beliefs, attitudes, biases and stereotypes as major barriers because they emphasize the superiority of men and the inferiority of women.

b.   **Illiteracy:** Most males are educated at the expense of female children. The education of girls and women do not go beyond what she needs to bear children and keep the home. Lack of knowledge can make a woman feel vulnerable and afraid of knowing how the body function. The body function could be politically inclusive. They cannot participate in the decisions concerning their own health (Wolfe and Jones, 1991).

c.   **Low self-esteem:** It seems that women consider themselves inferior to men. They tend to see governance as a preserve for men; hence, they resort to apathy. According to Melanie (2009), self-esteem refers to the overall opinion one has, in this case of herself, how she judges or evaluates herself, and the value women attach to themselves as people (p.7). Melanie further notes that low self-esteem is reflected in how a person acts in everyday situations, low self-esteem has an impact on emotional state (p.10). In relation to men in Nigeria it could be

reconciled that some women in Nigeria have low self-esteem, hence, their melancholic nature in the Nigeria's governance.

Other factors according to Abiola (2013) include: ideology, pre-determined social roles assigned to women, male dominance and control, conflicting demands on the time of women candidates due to their domestic and social responsibilities and women's lack of confidence to run elections. Others include women perception of politics as a dirty game, lack of funds and resources as politics is heavily monetised, poverty and unemployment, illiteracy and limited access to education, the dual burden of domestic task and professional obligation, lack of confidence in other women, lack of access to information and the multiple effect of violence against women.

d. Recommendations

As a way of curbing the way menace of women forced and voluntary exception from governance, the following ways can be used to solve the situation:

a. Women should know that they have a lot to contribute to the scheme of things. Just like Queen Esther women should desire to give in their best when given a leadership position.

b. Mordecai was a man who gave Esther the chance to write her name in gold. Esther as a woman was able to save the Jews from the genocide planned against them. Women in Nigeria could be the ones to solve Nigeria's contemporary problem which the Nation has been struggling to solve since the time of her formation since 1914.

c. Consequently, women in Nigeria need to heighten their self-esteem. They should endeavour to understand that what their male counterpart could do they can also do better. Governance in some countries like Germany, Britain and even Liberia has been positively touched due to the role of women in their political terrain.

d. The male gender could stand solidly behind women just like Mordecai did towards Esther rather than this superiority complex that tends to make the male folk refuse to render any assistance to the women folk

e. The assertion by Abiola (2013) is very important to these recommendations. He says that political parties should have 20% of women in their governance bodies becomes significant. It is believed that

such representation will have a positive effect in engendering party democracy in Nigeria.

Conclusions

Nigeria could be a great nation if women are made to recognize the enormous potential they have in terms of their contributions to societal development. Women tend to give in everything at their disposal to make sure that the society attains her set goals and objectives. From pre-independence to post-independence era, women have shown that they have what it takes to put the society on a sound track. Women could liaise with men, and together, the long-awaited development that Nigeria vies for would be attained.

References

Abiola, Akiyode-Afolabi. (2013). Nigeria's Electoral Reform And the Prospect For Women's Participation In The 2011 Elections. Retrieved from https://ng.boell.org/2013/10/14/nigerias-electoral-reform-and-prospect-womens-participation-2011-elections

Adam, Szirmai. (n.d.).*The Dynamics of Socio-Economic Development: an Introduction.* Retrieved from http://assets.cambridge.org/ 97805218/17639/ excerpt/9780521817639_ excerpt.pdf

Adhiambo-Oduol, J. (2003). "The Women in the New Political Dispensation: A False Start, in Challenges and Opportunities". In Kasomo, D. *International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*, 2012; 2(3): 57-63.

Bamberg, Michael. (2012). "Narrative Analysis". *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology,* Vol. 2. DOI: 10.1037.

Baumgarten, Albert I.; Sperling, S. David; Sabar, Shalom (2007). Skolnik, Fred; Berenbaum, Michael, eds. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. 18 (2nd ed.). Farmington Hills, MI: Macmillan Reference USA. p. 216.

Charles W. Morris.(1934). Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cheryl E. Czuba.(1999). *Empowerment: What Is It?* Retrieved from https://www.joe.org/joe/1999october/comm1.php

Development.(2017). Retrieved from http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/development

Elizabeth, Fletcher. (2006). Esther her story. Retrieved from http://www.womeninthebible.net/women-bible-old-new-testaments/esther-her-story/

Emezi, Terry & Chika, Abada. (2011). "Social Justice, Gender empowerment and Conflict Management in Africa: the Nigerian perspective" in O.U Nnadozie *Social Dynamics in African States* Nsukka: Louis Chumez Printing enterprise.

Fidelis, E.Egbunu. (2009). Religion, Politics and Patriotism in Nigeria: A Christian Perspective. Abuja: Afro Orbis Publishing Co.Ltd.

Francis, Fukuyama. (2013). "What is governance" *Working Paper 314.*

Gboyega, A (2003). Democracy and Development: The Imperative of Local Governance. An Inaugural Lecture, University of Ibadan, pp 6- 7.

Goldberg, G. J. (n.d). Esther: Her Point of View Josephus' Version with Commentary. Retrieved from http://www.josephus.org/Esther.htm

Gray, Jean.(2005). "The Wisdom of Anger: The Path to peace" *Glide Tidings July-August* Toronot: Canadian Church Press.

Jide, Osuntokunon. (2016). "Gender discrimination and marginalisation in politics-2." Retrieved from http://thenationonlineng.net/gender-discrimination-marginalisation-politics-2/

Lisa, Ross.(). "6 Powerful Life Lessons from the Book of Esther". Retrieved from http://www.crosswalk.com/faith/women/6-powerful-life-lessons-from-the-book-of-esther.html

Melanie J. V. (1999). Overcoming Low Self-Esteem A self-help guide using Cognitive Behavioral Techniques. Fulham Palace Road London: Robinson Publishing Ltd

Ogazi ,Christopher. (2011). "Participation of women in governance and politics in Nigeria dec experience." Retrieved From http://decnigeria.com/news.php?view=12

Ojoma, Akor. (2014). "Nigeria: Strengthening Women's Political Participation." Retrieved from http://allafrica.com/stories/201401241058.html

Paul L. Maier (1988). Josephus, the Essential Writings. Aba: E.O Overcomers & Co. Ltd

Strean, H.S. (1971). Social Case Work Theories in Action. New Jersey: The Scarecro Press. In Okala Uche and Ijeoma Uche (2014). "Some Social Work theories and Their Implications in Social Research" in Okechukwu, M.I & Mbah, P.C. An Anthology of Theories for Social Science Research Nsukka, Enugu: University of Nigeria, Press.

Terry, E. & Chika, F.A. (2011). "Social Justice, Gender empowerment and Conflict Managemnt in Africa: The Nigerian Perspective" in O.U Nnadozie Social Dynamics in African States. Nsukka: Louis Chumez Printing Enter.

Tina, Titus. (2006). "Women and Leadership Today" New Nigerian, October 3, P.8.

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (n.d).What is Good Governance? Retrieved from http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/good-governance.pdf

Wolfe, S.M & Jones, R.D. (1991). Women's health Alert. Reading M.A: Addison Wesley.