

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF TRIBALISM AND RELIGIOUS DISHARMONY ON ANCIENT ISRAEL AND CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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Abstract

Tribalism and religious disharmony have emerged as significant challenges in contemporary Nigeria, contributing to underdevelopment, insecurity, political instability, and ineffective governance. These pressing issues necessitate a thorough investigation into the historical and sociocultural dynamics underlying these phenomena. Despite research highlighting the negative impacts of tribalism and religion on national cohesion, a notable gap remains in understanding the historical evolution and religious patterns of ancient Israel concerning tribal relations. While scholars have explored ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, few have drawn parallels with ancient societies, particularly Israel, hindering a comprehensive understanding of tribalism's societal impact. This study aims to investigate the historical evolution of tribalism and religious relations in ancient Israel while drawing parallels to contemporary Nigerian society. By doing so, the research seeks to propose frameworks for mitigating tribalism and enhancing national unity. The focus will be on the tribal dynamics of ancient Israel, analysing relevant Old Testament texts and contextualizing these findings within Nigeria's sociopolitical landscape. An exegetical methodology will be employed to analyse biblical texts, alongside qualitative methods utilizing primary and secondary sources, including library resources, oral interviews, and personal observations. The study uncovered similarities between the roles and effects of tribalism in the political, social, and religious spheres of both ancient Israel and contemporary Nigeria. It will also highlight ongoing inequalities in tribal representation within Nigeria that violate the constitutional national character designed to protect diverse tribal interests. Ultimately, this research posits that understanding tribal relations in ancient Israel offers valuable insights for addressing Nigeria's current challenges with tribalism and religious disharmony. Leaders and citizens should embrace peaceful inter-tribal relations and prioritize national development.

Keywords: Nigeria, Tribalism, Religious Bias, Peace, Development.

Introduction

Tribalism and religious disharmony have become critical challenges in contemporary Nigeria, significantly contributing to underdevelopment, insecurity,

political instability, and ineffective governance.¹ Archaeological evidence indicates that distinct societies have existed in Nigeria for over 2,500 years prior to European colonization, with various ethnic groups developing their own identities and histories.² The borders of modern Nigeria were not defined until the British amalgamated these diverse groups in 1914 (Smith, 2004). The name "Nigeria" was suggested by British journalist Flora Shaw in the 1890s,³ derived from the Niger River, which dominates much of the landscape. However, the Latin word "niger," meaning black, may have also influenced her choice, reflecting the region's demographic diversity.⁴

Present-day Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic tribes, with the Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo as the three largest and most dominant groups.⁵ These ethnic groups, previously independent kingdoms and empires, had distinct governance structures and cultural practices. Every ethnic group in Nigeria has its own stories of where its ancestors came from to settle in Nigeria. These vary from tales of people descending from the sky to stories of migration from far-off places. Based on archaeological evidence, the Neolithic humans inhabited what is now known as Nigeria as far back as 12,000 B.C.E.⁶ In the south, the Oyo Empire grew to become the most powerful Yoruba society during the sixteenth century.⁷ The imposition of a singular national identity by colonial powers has hindered the development of Nigerian nationalism, resulting in persistent ethnic conflicts and a devastating civil war.⁸ The lack of cohesive national identity, combined with ethnically biased leadership, has led to ongoing violent confrontations among different groups.⁹ While previous studies have extensively explored the impacts of tribalism and religion on national cohesion, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding the historical evolution and religious patterns of ancient Israel in relation to tribal relations.^{10, 11} This research seeks to address this gap by examining how the historical context of tribalism in ancient Israel can inform contemporary issues in Nigeria. By investigating these parallels, the study aims to propose frameworks for mitigating tribalism and enhancing national unity.

This research focuses specifically on the tribal dynamics of ancient Israel, analyzing relevant Old Testament texts while contextualizing these findings within the sociopolitical landscape of Nigeria. The study will highlight the historical interactions of Nigeria's major tribes, tracing their relationships from colonial times to the present. The significance of this research lies in its potential to provide insights into the historical and sociocultural factors contributing to tribalism in Nigeria, emphasizing the importance of fostering peaceful coexistence among diverse ethnic groups.¹²

To achieve these objectives, an exegetical methodology will be employed to analyze biblical texts, alongside qualitative methods that utilize primary and secondary sources. Library resources, oral interviews, and personal observations will play a crucial role in contextualizing the effects of tribalism in Nigeria. Ultimately, this study posits that understanding the tribal relations of ancient Israel offers valuable insights into addressing Nigeria's current challenges with tribalism and religious disharmony. It aims to recommend that Nigeria's political leaders and

citizens embrace peaceful inter-tribal relations, cease tribal expansionism, and prioritize collaborative national development.¹³

Tribalism in Nigeria's Political History and its effects

Ethnicity had played manifesting roles in Nigerian politics since the pre-colonial era and is arguably one of the important causes of conflict and an overall obstacle to economic development of the country. Sadly, the foundation of Nigeria's party politics was tribally-oriented as portrayed in the First until the Fourth Republics. For example, shortly after the independence from the British Colonial rule, the political scene of the First Republic transmitted a pure picture of Nigeria's ethno-religious division; (i) The Action Group (AG) was dominant only in the Western region (mainly the Yoruba-speaking group) and was headed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. (ii) The National Council of Nigerian Citizen (NCNC), formerly National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons) allied with the Igbos tribe and was dominant only in the Eastern Nigeria. (iii) While the Northern People's Congress (NPC) was formed by the Jammaa Arewa – Hausa/Fulani ethnic group and dominated only in Northern Nigeria.

All the parties were formed along ethnic lines. Apparently, the British colonial administrators' ethnic policy and the regional autonomy reinforced the division of the three regions: a factor which contributed to the ethno-regional character of governance in Nigeria.¹⁴ By 1914, for ease of governance, the British amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates and one political Nigeria was born. However, as soon as they left in 1960, inter-tribal suspicion re-surfaced. Several coups and countercoups motivated by ethnic sentiments culminated in the 30-month (1967 – 1970) civil war which claimed the lives of more than 2 million people. Incidentally, more than 90% of those killed belong to an ethnic extraction which further exacerbated distrust among one another. The 2011 general elections in Nigeria gave a clear view. The outcome of the presidential election showed a pattern of vote that was deeply ethnic and religious-oriented. Both candidates had more than 95% of the votes cast in their regions. This trend is one of the early warning signs of political crisis and must be addressed in time. Several analysts have argued that the political behaviour of some Nigerians is influenced heavily by the hyperbolic assumption that one's destiny is intrinsically and exclusively linked with one's ethnic, linguistic and religious identities.

First Republic

At independence, Nigeria had all the trappings of a democratic state and was indeed regarded as a beacon of hope for democracy. It had a federal constitution that guaranteed a large measure of autonomy for three and (later four) regions; it operated a parliamentary democracy modelled along the British lines that emphasised majority rule; the constitution included an elaborate bill of rights; and, unlike other African states that adopted one-party systems immediately after independence, the country had a functional, albeit regionally based, multi-party system.

These democratic trappings were not enough to guarantee the survival of the republic because of certain fundamental and structural weaknesses. Perhaps the most significant weakness was the dis-proportionate power of the north in the federation. The departing colonial authority had hoped that the development of national politics would forestall any sectional domination of power, but it underestimated the effects of a regionalized party system in a country where political power depended on population. The major political parties in the republic had emerged in the late 1940s and early 1950s as regional parties whose main aim was to control power in their regions. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the Action Group (AG), which controlled the Northern Region and the Western Region, respectively, clearly emerged in this way. The National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC),¹⁵ which controlled the Eastern Region and the Midwestern Region (created in 1963), began as a nationalist party but was forced by the pressures of regionalism to become primarily an eastern party, albeit with strong pockets of support elsewhere in the federation. These regional parties were based upon, and derived their main support from, the major groups in their regions: NPC (Hausa/Fulani), AG (Yoruba), and NCNC (Igbo). A notable and more ideologically-based political party that never achieved significant power was Aminu Kano's radical Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), which opposed the NPC in the north from its Kano base.

There were also several political movements formed by minority groups to press their demands for separate states. These minority parties also doubled as opposition parties in the regions and usually aligned themselves with the party in power in another region that supported their demands for a separate state. Ethnic minorities therefore enabled the regional parties to extend their influence beyond their regions. In the general election of 1959 to determine which parties would rule in the immediate post-colonial period, the major ones won a majority of seats in their regions, but none emerged powerful enough to constitute a national government. A coalition government was formed by the NPC and NCNC, the former having been greatly favoured by the departing colonial authority. The coalition provided a measure of north-south consensus that would not have been the case if the NCNC and AG had formed a coalition. Nnamdi Azikiwe (NCNC) became the governor general (and president after the country became a republic in 1963), Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (NPC) was named prime minister, and Obafemi Awolowo (AG) had to settle for the post of opposition leader. The regional premiers were Ahmadu Bello (Northern Region, NPC), Samuel Akintola (Western Region, AG), Michael Okpara (Eastern Region, NCNC), and Dennis Osadebey.¹⁶

Among the difficulties of the republic were efforts of the NPC, the senior partner in the coalition government, to use the federal government's increasing power in favour of the Northern Region. The balance rested on the premise that the Northern Region had the political advantage deriving from its preponderant size and population, and the two southern regions (initially the Eastern Region and the Western Region) had the economic advantage as sources of most of the exported agricultural products, in addition to their control of the federal bureaucracy. The

NPC sought to redress northern economic and bureaucratic disadvantages. Under the First National Development Plan, many of the federal government's projects and military establishments were allocated to the north. There was an "affirmative action" program by the government to recruit and train northerners, resulting in the appointment of less qualified northerners to federal public service positions, many replacing more qualified southerners. Actions such as these served to estrange the NCNC from its coalition partner. The reactions to the fear of northern dominance, and especially the steps taken by the NCNC to counter the political dominance of the north, accelerated the collapse of the young republic.

The southern parties, especially the embittered NCNC, had hoped that the regional power balance could be shifted if the 1962 census favoured the south. Population determined the allocation of parliamentary seats on which the power of every region was based. Because population figures were also used in allocating revenue to the regions and in determining the viability of any proposed new region, the 1962 census was approached by all regions as a key contest for the control of the federation. This contest led to various illegalities: inflated figures, electoral violence, and falsification of results, manipulation of population figures, and the like. Although the chief census officer found evidence of more inflated figures in the southern regions, the northern region retained its numerical superiority. As could be expected, southern leaders rejected the results, leading to a cancellation of the census and to the holding of a fresh census in 1963. This population count was finally accepted after a protracted legal battle by the NCNC, and it gave the Northern Region a population of 29,758,975 out of the total of 55,620,268.¹⁷ These figures eliminated whatever hope the southerners had of ruling the federation.

Since the 1962-63 exercise, the size and distribution of the population have remained volatile political issues. In fact, the importance and sensitivity of a census count have increased because of the expanded use of population figures for revenue allocations,¹⁸ constituency delineation, allocations under the quota system of admissions into schools and employment, and the siting of industries and social amenities such as schools, hospitals, and post offices. Another census in 1973 failed, even though it was conducted by a military government that was less politicized than its civilian predecessor. What made the 1973 census particularly volatile was the fact that it was part of a transition plan by the military to hand over power to civilians. The provisional figures showed an increase for the states that were carved out of the former Northern Region with a combined 51.4 million people out of a total 79.8 million people.¹⁹ Old fears of domination were resurrected, and the stability of the federation was again seriously threatened. The provisional results were finally cancelled in 1975. As of late 1990, no other census had been undertaken, although one was scheduled for 1991 as part of the transition to civilian rule. In the interim, Nigeria has relied on population projections based on 1963 census figures.

Other events also contributed to the collapse of the First Republic. In 1962, after a split in the leadership of the AG that led to a crisis in the Western Region, a state of emergency was declared in the region, and the federal government invoked its

emergency powers to administer the region directly. These actions resulted in removing the AG from regional power. Awolowo, its leader, along with other AG leaders, was convicted of treasonable felony. Awolowo's former deputy and premier of the Western Region formed a new party - the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) - that took over the government. The federal coalition government also supported agitation of minority groups for a separate state to be excised from the Western Region. In 1963 the Midwestern Region was created.²⁰ By the time of the 1964 general elections, the first to be conducted solely by Nigerians, the country's politics had become polarized into a competition between two opposing alliances. One was the Nigerian National Alliance made up of the NPC and NNDC; the other was the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) composed of the NCNC, the AG, and their allies. Each of the regional parties openly intimidated its opponents in the campaigns. When it became clear that the neutrality of the Federal Electoral Commission could not be guaranteed, calls were made for the army to supervise the elections. The UPGA resolved to boycott the elections. When elections were finally held under conditions that were not free and were unfair to opponents of the regional parties, the NCNC was returned to power in the east and Midwest, while the NPC kept control of the north and was also in a position to form a federal government on its own. The Western Region became the "theatre of war" between the NNDP (and the NPC) and the AG-UPGA. The rescheduled regional elections late in 1965 were violent. The federal government refused to declare a state of emergency, and the military seized power on January 15, 1966. The First Republic had collapsed.²¹

Scholars have made several attempts to explain the collapse. Some attribute it to the inappropriateness of the political institutions and processes and to their not being adequately entrenched under colonial rule, whereas others hold the elite responsible. Lacking a political culture to sustain democracy, politicians failed to play the political game according to established rules. The failure of the elite appears to have been a symptom rather than the cause of the problem. Because members of the elite lacked a material base for their aspirations, they resorted to control of state offices and resources. At the same time, the uneven rates of development among the various groups and regions invested the struggle for state power with a group character. These factors gave importance to group, ethnic, and regional conflicts that eventually contributed to the collapse of the republic.

The final explanation is closely related to all the foregoing. It holds that the regionalization of politics and, in particular, of party politics made the stability of the republic dependent on each party retaining control of its regional base.²² As long as this was so, there was a rough balance between the parties, as well as their respective regions. Once the federal government invoked its emergency powers in 1962 and removed the AG from power in the Western Region, the fragile balance on which the federation rested was disturbed. Attempts by the AG and NCNC to create a new equilibrium, or at least to return the status quo ante, only generated stronger opposition and hastened the collapse of the republic.

Military Era

The military ruled Nigeria for thirty (34) years out of 64 years of Independence. Quantitatively, many Nigerians especially the youths had lived military than civilian rule. The implications of these extensive years of military rule on democratic practices, is of course the display of military tendencies in a democratic arena. The military rulership affects the executive, legislature, the judiciary and the civil society. The values and norms imbibed manifests in the practice of the current democracy. This explicates the use of force rather than dialogue in the suppression of the dissent as is evident in ‘Odi’, and ‘Zaki-biam’,²³ disobedience of the court orders, closure of media houses, the arrest of journalists and militancy, as in the Niger-Delta. The military displayed recklessness in Nigeria for decades. However, some analysts argued that the most free and fairest election ever conducted in Nigeria was during the Military era in 1993 by the then Head of State General Ibrahim Babangida.

The Nigeria military have had enormous influence in all aspects of the Nigerian state. The ‘quota system’ in the recruitment of the men of the Nigerian Army is another issue of discourse. It was used to make the Nigerian Army a viable organisation and very representative; however, in recent times the quota system has been bastardized giving room for ethnic chauvinism, religious bias and political influence to take the center stage. Today, ‘federal character’ or ‘quota system’ derived from the military is a principle in the administration of public policy in Nigeria. Indeed the military have had impact in Nigeria.

Contemporary Democratic Era

In Nigeria today, tribalism has been elevated to dominate national discourse. It controls how people think and talk, and determines what they oppose or support. It is promoted by the political elites, embraced by the young and the old, passed from generation to generation, and it even has a base in the constitution. This explains the assumption that conflicts in Nigeria is motivated by ethnic competition. Nigerians must have a re-think on how we get here and what is the root-cause of our predicament. Why are other countries (India, Indonesia, Brazil, United States, Switzerland, Belgium, China, etc.), different ethnic diversity of Nigeria has more or less been a threat rather than a source of national pride and development as countries above have experienced.²⁴

Tribalism has flourished and affected governance in contemporary Nigeria because the Nigerian elites who inherited the colonial state have conceptualised development as transferring resources from civil public to primordial public. It is in this view that Cletus Umezina as quoted by Collins G. Adeyanju argued that “Nigeria is a failed state”,²⁵ backing his opinion up with a number of factors that included cultural and value decadence, fragile political structure, poor leadership and frequent ethno-religious crisis. Conflicts in Nigeria as earlier mentioned are most often linked with religious bias or ethnicity, which are mostly deplored to settle economic and political imbalances, breeding the evolution of ethnic militias such as the Miyetti Allah Kyauta Hore, Bakkasi Boys; Movement for Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB); Odua People’s Congress (OPC) amongst

others just to mention but a few. Benjamin opined that “some of the major violent conflicts include the post-sharia crisis in some parts of the north that cumulated to full blown conflicts in areas like Kaduna and Jos”. The above scenario makes governance in contemporary Nigeria difficult because the tribalistic thinking has overshadowed patriotism. The diversity in Nigeria is judged upon the lines of first class and second class citizens, and even aliens.

Quota System in Political Appointments as Enshrined In Federal Character Policy of Public and Civil Services

The federal character principle was incorporated as an employment policy having taken into cognizance the impervious and insistence demand by each ethnic group, no matter how small numerically, or how poor materially, or how backward educationally for a fair and dignified place in the Nigeria sum.²⁶ For some time now, the Federal Civil Service has come under criticism because its performance and productivity left much to be desired. Many attribute its unproductive and inefficiency to the adoption of the Federal Character Principle which they believe negates the administrative ethics of merit system –skills, qualifications, and experience through training which the basic criteria for efficiency are. The problem of imbalance in the national life has encompassed all sectors of the economy, education not being an exception. The problem of imbalance is due to tribalism and has affected the allocation of educationally based positions among the federating units to federal character principle which means that all the geo-political zones will be given equal opportunity for the appointment and output-efficiency as it relates to observation of federal character principle. However, where such institutions are sited the dominant tribe tends to monopolize the appointments leaving the rest at the mercy of highly placed individuals in the society like members of the Senate, House of Representatives, Ministers etc.

Consequently, there has been gross misconduct in the area of employment due to sectional consciences and nepotism from those in authority in the Ministries and Parastatals. Federal institutions seem to recruit on nepotism and favouritism without minding the effects of such practices to the productivity, efficiency of service delivery and quality of output to the nation. Even when the federal character principle is observed, the institution will not consider efficiency of the candidate, hence the panel may jettison quality all in the name of quota system. This explains the rationale behind the production of half-baked graduates in the nation’s tertiary institutions and the instances of constant collapse of buildings, silly mistakes in the hospitals and graduates that are not employable.²⁷

Tribalism, Security and Fiscal Allocation

The spate of insecurity bedeviling Nigeria has continued unabated because of stark hypocrisy within the political class. Consider, for instance, the speech by Enyinnaya Abaribe, the former minority leader of the Senate, calling on President Muhammadu Buhari to resign for failing to secure the lives and properties of the Nigerian people in the year 2021. Perhaps such outburst is in order. The political responsibility of a good opposition leader is to constantly alert the public of the failures of government. However, instead of tendering a rational response, the

Buhari presidency chose to muddle the matter with tribal innuendoes. Long years of military rule and the centralized nature of the military hierarchical structure created the financial hegemony enjoyed by the federal government over the thirty six states (36) and seven hundred and seventy four (774) local governments.²⁸ This has created disaffection in the Nigerian federation. Thus, the worry over the development of a national and functional fiscal federalism for Nigeria is well founded. The 36 states together with the Federal Capital Territory which make up the federation of Nigeria have been reduced to beggars,²⁹ because of their representative gathering every month at Abuja for monthly federal allocations. Only two states – Lagos and Rivers – can pay their workers without the federal intervention. Oklobia, succinctly considers the twin concepts of true federalism and resource control. For him, the two concepts mutually complement each other. A true federal state practices resource control while resource control functions vibrantly in a true federal state.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The constant reference to tribal animosities and differences affects the youth's psyche and has created a pattern or legacy of hate and suspicion which the successive generation carries like a mantle. Ethnic and religious intolerance has exposed the nation to bizarre conflict experiences with loss of lives and properties, creating uncertainties in the polity. Boko Haram insurgent group is a classic example of the outcome of a long stretch of ethnic distrust and rivalry. It is surprising that Nigeria has not gone the way of Sudan, Central Africa Republic, Mali, Somalia, etc. This could be a testimony of resilience and the fact that, even though there are so many distrust and suspicion, the people still believe in the indivisibility of the country.

It is therefore imperative for every Nigerian to put aside their differences and embrace harmony to move forward. There is need to re-educate or re-orientate the political elites on the constant danger of using the ethno-religious card to acquire electoral offices or leadership positions. This trend must not be allowed to continue in the 21st century. However, the failure of successive political leadership to address the common yearnings and aspirations of the citizenry for good governance is considered the biggest factor for the endemic loyalty of citizens to their ethnic origin rather than to the Nigerian state. The greatness of United States lies in her diversity. People from across the world converge in the United States, with diverse and unique talents, and pushes the development envelope every day. Nigeria should not be different, it must bring her unique talents and gifts to the amalgam, and must be guided by the principles of 'united we stand, divided we fall'. Her diversity should be a blessing rather than a tool for exploitation by elites for political gains.

This paper recommends that the way out of tribalism in Nigeria should be considered using mainly dual facet approaches drawn from two schools of thought. One of the directions of this discussion is a structural solution, which advocates for further degree of autonomy to component ethnic groups. The second recommendation is the human behaviour and attitude school that jettisons

primordial instincts and focus on an individual person's characteristics, irrespective of places of origin or ethnicity.

There is enough evidence of the devastating effects of ethnic nationalism to convince most people that it would be a monumental mistake for Nigeria to ignore the damage ethnic nationalists are doing to her dreams of building a country united by civil values, equality and rule of law. The way out therefore, is that Nigerians need to be well-enlightened about the values that make for peaceful coexistence. The way out of tribalism in Nigeria, besides the above-mentioned, includes cultural reorientation on the beauty of diversity. The researcher calls on Nigerians, the government, and the African communities to focus on addressing the human factors that are contributing to conflicts, underdevelopment and bad governance as against vilifying the beauty of their diversities. The current experience of South Sudan following her cessation from Sudan had created more internal conflicts along ethnic lines than she had anticipated. It is further recommended that a Constitutional amendment is needed to adequately address clauses that abrogate powers to ethnic or regional structures. For example, the constitutional provision (Section 147, subsection 3 of the 1999 constitution) mandates the appointment of at least a minister per state. This has unleashed mini tribal wars in many states. There is need for a fairer resources management formula that would be acceptable to those who pay the human and environmental prize for Nigeria's oil-powered economy.

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