

# THE ROLE OF TRIBALISM AND NEPOTISM IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

One of the biggest problem facing Nigerian politics has always been that of “ Tribalism and Nepotism” which has eating deep into our national fabrics and sense of cultural co-existence as a nation, thinking that these is not an issue to deliberate on, is like thinking that the gods do not exist. We may consider a tribal war as gnat on the toe of a giant, but these petty wars could explode into something greater and un-resolvable , take for example the civil war in Liberia; it all started as a result of tribal conflicts. These could be likened to what is already happening in some parts of the country such as in the Middle-belt. To get a better understanding of what this paper is all about we would need to ask ourselves several questions such as ; What is Tribalism? What is Nepotism? Do they exist? Why do people feel so superior about their tribes over others? On the other hand, why are some high level educated citizens caught in this uncivilized tradition?

The objectives of this article are to show that tribalism and nepotism are first of all serious problems that are being ignored and played around politics both in its Military or Civilian context, in our country which in reality terms has its crude consequences that is facing the unity of the nation at the present moment . looking at the impact of these two concepts, it is important to consider the following stages causes, effects and solutions of these vices; and at the same time look at the ethical and moral point of views.

According to wikipedia.org , Tribalism means a behavior, attitudes that are based on being loyal to a tribe or other social group. It is the very first social system that human beings have lived in. Tribalism can also be referred to as the possession of a strong cultural or ethnic identity that separates a person as a member of one group, from members of another group. The Merriam-Webster dictionary also defines tribalism (among other definitions) as the exaltation of one’s tribe above others. In other words tribalism is the feeling that one’s tribe is superior to some other tribe or all tribes. As a result the tribalists have a disdain and often disrespect for the tribes they think are inferior to their tribe. Such people therefore discourage association in any form be

it marriage, work, or friendship with tribes they deem to be inferior. In most cases they have derogatory names for the tribes they deem to be inferior.

- Nepotism on the other hand is the showing of favoritism for relatives or friends based upon that relationship, rather than on an objective evaluation of ability or suitability, for instance by offering employment to a relative, despite the fact that there are others who are better qualified and willing and able to perform the job. The word nepotism is from the Latin word Nepos meaning “nephew” or “grandchild“. Simply put: We will define Tribalism as the exaltation of one’s tribe over others, and then Nepotism as simply “square pegs in round holes”.

These two concepts are intertwined; you cannot speak of one without mentioning the other. They have been in existence since time immemorial and would continue to be, if nothing is done to check these concepts.

Considering ethical issues we would like to divide the topics into various sectors and look at them in terms of the problems that take place in those areas. Ethical issues or problems are found in areas listed below.

Family (inter-marriages)

Work and employment

News agencies (news houses)

Politics (politicians)

Keep in mind, there cannot be anything ethical unless an issue of doing right or wrong is debated. Within the family, ethical issues arise as to when parents strictly warn their children not to bring any person from a particular tribe home in term of marriage.” you would find similar cases in Ashanti homes, when parents tell their children not to bring people especially “ewe’s “home”. This character is passed onto the children from a very tender age. Hence our serious tribal differences, division of Nigeria – not into regions but rather tribal sectors.

Furthermore, the issue of employment is a really serious one. Nowadays getting a job is

no longer about qualification but rather about “who you know”. i.e. (if someone is from your tribe, you have a higher chance of attaining a job). . First of all tribalism breeds nepotism. Once people feel that their tribesmen are better than people from other tribes they tend to surround themselves with their tribesmen when get into positions of trust. The tribalists are willing to hire people from their tribe who may not otherwise be the best candidate for the given job. Such actions deprive the nation of the right people for the right job. That is square pegs in round holes. (Putting unqualified persons in positions due to tribal relations.)

In addition, let’s take a look at the role new agencies play in propagating ethical division (tribalism & nepotism). Journalists who engage in tribalism. It is the most worrying trend in politics of Ghana today. The media which is the objective fourth arm of government is supposed to be an objective observer of politicians and put them on their toes. The media is the ear of society and it’s work imparts greatly on the national psyche. The media's objective reportage of the news helps the electorate to know the going on in the government and the realms of politics. Therefore it just so sad that some of our journalists have thrown good journalism to the dogs and have chosen to join the tribal bandwagon. It is a pity that our journalists have not learnt from Rwanda and other nations who went down the drain because of their engagement in senseless tribal journalism. Looking back to the election 2008, the media played a role in psyching up the friction that was already brewing within the country. The media in general was leaning heavily towards tribal affiliation; publicly stating, that one political party was geared towards a particular tribe (group), while another faction belonged to another political party. In other sense, one could claim that the news houses (media). Are at the forefront of this ethical issue, nepotism and tribalism.

Last but not the least is the ethical issues raised by Politics. Politicians in general are major contributors to these ethical issues. During elections these politicians tend to rely on the public’s weakness when it’s directed towards their tribal affiliations. Politicians know that they have nothing better to offer when it comes to issues of national development so by playing the tribal card they are able to skip the issues at stake. They fail to recognize that their actions cause more harm to the very state they want to govern thus looking at the same incidence of elections 2008, all the disturbances caused was by

political parties. Another incidence was the rife in Liberia caused by Charles Taylor, in actual fact the wars really started as tribal differences between the Gio tribe, from which Charles Taylor originally was from and the krahan tribe (the ruling party at the time) that were against him, later the mandigo tribe also joined the krahan tribe in pursuit against Charles Taylor. These petty quarrels among tribes lead to the all out war Liberia was plunged into for several decades.

All these and others are some of the ethical issues that arise when the issue of tribalism and nepotism come about.

Stated above are ethical problems in line with tribalism and nepotism. Take note that tribalism and nepotism is tightly woven together, you cannot speak of one concept without mentioning the other. Here I would like to briefly state some possible causes.

Possible causes:

- Bad leadership
- Selfishness by serving personal interests instead of the needs of the people
- Corruption
- Contribution from our political leaders – careless utterances and incitement by politicians
- Polarized political issues.
- Political manipulation.

As long as there are problems, the effects of these problems would be felt in the long run.

Effects such as these:

- Discriminations against members of different tribes which in turn Encourages hatred among people of different tribes, which in turn could lead to all out wars. Contributing to social disintegration, and thus makes the resort to violence more likely-and more deadly.
- Brings corruption –if only tribe members are given certain privileges, people who are even qualified but do not belong the said tribe would resort to paying bribes to attain the said privileges.
- Promotes selfishness.
- Contributes in slowing down the economy, since only people of the same tribe want to help each other as the rest suffer. - Negative growths of the economy as people serve

their own interests and those of their relatives.

- Erodes prospects for development
- Unequal distribution of resources
- Undermines security
- Lead to fight for power because everyone wants to enrich himself by serving his selfish needs and those of his relatives.

As long as we recognize something as a problem, then definitely there is a solution. Since we as a group recognize tribalism and nepotism as a problem, we have outlined certain possible solutions, stated below:

1. Tolerance / peaceful coexistence – the ability to accept another’s faults, view and opinion, without hate or malice.
2. Encourage inter-tribal marriages – this would create a mixed tribe, offspring’s of the union would not have specific tribal alliances.
3. Look for competence not tribe – in employing, employers should look out for competence and not tribal similarities.
4. Fair distribution of resources.-Governmental bodies should not discriminate against certain tribes in sharing resources, but rather give them out, in needed measure.
5. Free and fair selections of employees, applicants into government, private institutions will all help reduce and eventually solve the problem of Tribalism and Nepotism.

Tribalism and Nepotism are issues that our country faces and has to keep up with. Both lower the levels of development as they are the breeding grounds for corruption. Ironically, our leaders who are supposed to show us the right path and lead us to success as they work with us to develop and improve our economy are the biggest participants in it. Doing unto others what we would want done to us and acknowledging that justice emerges when negotiating without social differentiation

We see ourselves as tribal before national...its high time we see ourselves as national before tribal...

With one mind and one accord let’s be one people.

Recommendations:

a) Tribalism:

- Formation of an inter-tribal union: This would seek to address and solve problems between the tribes involved through dialogue.
- Organizing of annual inter-tribal games.
- Love: We should learn to develop the virtue of for one another irrespective of one's tribal association.

b) Nepotism:

- Practice of the “do unto others what you want done unto you” rule.
- Development of patriotism spirit.
- Ensure compliance to standards required in order to be employed by the leaders of organizations.

Tribalism as a social problem

Ethnic relations have three dimensions: the political, the legal, and the socio-psychological.

***The political dimension:*** Politics is the lawful scramble for advantage and resources, which is done in an atmosphere of scarcity and limited seats of advantage, through a complex interplay of human factors. Wherever different ethnic groups live and work together, there must be some form of scramble, a chronic striving by each group to outdo the other.

***The legal dimension:*** Because politics can and does get ugly, a system of strict rules, laws and policies is essential if the different groups in society are not to resort to mischief in trying to gain an edge. In every society, unfortunately, the process of setting the ground rules of the scramble is essentially a political one. In Kenya, the law-making process has never been sober. Retired President Moi puts it best: “*Siasa mbaya, maisha mabaya*” (bad politics translates to a bad life). One of the lamentable achievements of Kenyan politics is that it has consistently dwarfed all other professions that impact on the quality of social life.

***The socio-psychological dimension:*** when it comes to tribalism it is some sort of competition. People are motivated by different things many of which are negative. Some of these motivations are conscious, others are unconscious. Every step of the way, there is struggle among beliefs, needs and desires. Unfortunately, Kenya's version of politics has always succeeded to dismiss the importance of the socio-psychological dimension of ethnicity. Professionals such as psychologists and sociologists are hardly ever considered in the quest for solutions to problems like tribalism. Only during major national crises, such as the wave of school strikes that hit Kenya in mid last year, did we hear our politicians making casual comments like "Our students need guidance and counseling."

**Possible causes:**

- Bad leadership
- Selfishness by serving personal interests instead of the needs of the people
- Corruption
- Contribution from our political leaders – careless utterances and incitement by politicians.
- Easy access to weapons of mass destruction- the availability of these weapons undermines security. The introduction and spread of such sophisticated weapons among these communities has intensified conflict and blurred the line between long-standing ethnic competition-traditionally manifested in cattle theft or rustling-and political violence.
- Strong ethnic divisions.
- Polarized political issues.
- Political manipulation.
- Socio-economic disparities
- Lack of economic opportunity.

### **Effects of tribalism:**

- Encourages hatred among people of different tribes.
- Brings corruption
- Promotes selfishness.
- Leads to discriminations against members of different tribes
- Contributes in slowing down the economy, since only people of the same tribe want to help each other as the rest suffer.
- Creates conflicts among people and may end up being fatal if these conflicts get out of hand.
- Encourages hypocrisy.
- Undermines security – The increasing availability of weapons in Kenya has helped fuel rise insecurity and, in some areas the growing militarization of society.
- Erodes prospects for development.
- Contributes to social disintegration, and makes the resort to violence more likely-and more deadly.

### **Possible solutions:**

- The political leaders should be at the forefront in admitting that tribalism is a problem and they should be giving people guidance on how to deal with it.
- Our leaders both political and religious should be loyal to serve the society wholly without giving into the demands of tribalism. They should remain neutral at whatever cost.
- Acknowledging that God created us equally and that there is no one superior than the other in His sight and so we should treat each other as equals.
- Ensure accountability of local security structures; and strengthen legal controls, particularly those related to the manufacture, possession, and transfer of firearms and ammunition.

- Everyone should embrace Rawl's Veil of Ignorance. "Justice emerges when negotiating without social differentiation" for justice to be served, fairness is fundamental.

## **Nepotism**

Nepotism is the showing of favoritism for relatives or friends upon that relationship, rather than an objective evaluation of ability or suitability e.g. offering a job to a relative despite the fact that there are others who are better qualified and willing. It is a common accusation in our politics when the relative of a man/woman in power ascends to power without proper qualification. At some point nepotism at high levels of government might lead to the creation of effective monarchies in nominal republics. Nepotism got its name after the church practice where some catholic bishops gave their own nephews positions of preference. There are places where nepotism is believed to thrive as much e.g. the civil service.

Now take a look at the different scenarios below and let's attempt to define tribalism in Nigeria:

1. Madam Etteh former speaker is indicted, Late Adedibu (with a large Yoruba following) says her indictment is targeted against Yoruba
2. Yoruba Obas say Nigerians should stop attacking Obasanjo
3. Afenifere says the prosecution of several Yoruba people in recent times is aimed at disgracing Yoruba race
4. Afenifere says the recent demotion of wrongfully promoted policemen is biased towards them.
5. Notable northern leaders (Buhari, IBB, Abubakir) recently told us that Abacha was not a thief. These 3 men are serious opinion moulders in the North with a large followership. Now ask any of their followers if Abacha was a thief. The answer is No. Because our leaders say so.
6. When Obasanjo retired several army officers in 1999, the north cried that it was aimed at them
7. When the Niger Delta (ND) reminded the North that they have not been contributing to the national treasury, northern leaders called ND leaders thieves, but they themselves failed to account for more than 17 trillion naira they received over the last 8 years

8. CBN governor, Soludo, is now in the spotlight for alleged corruption and breach of procedure. Igbo leaders are alleging that the north wants to remove him so as to replace him with a northerner.

9. Igbos are crying wolf whenever there is a demolition exercise in Lagos, PH, Kano etc. They say demolition is anti-Igbo

10. NDs think all the oil belongs to them, so they must have 100% control.

11. Ijaws have appropriated the Niger Delta struggle. Where are the Itsekiris, Ibibios, Ogonis, Urhobos, "Ibos" and other equally legitimate Niger Deltans?

12. Ijaws and Tivs slaughter law enforcement agents protecting the county's "sovereignty". When the FGN retaliates, it become genocide. Don't the killed police and military men come from families who miss them too