

THE ROLE OF ETHNIC CLEAVAGE IN THE BREAKUP OF UNITED ANCIENT ISRAELITE KINGDOM: LESSON FOR NIGERIAN POLITICAL ELITES

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ABSTRACT

The United Kingdom of Israel and Judah was divided into two kingdoms during the reign of Rehoboam, and ten tribes except Judah and Benjamin refused to accept Rehoboam as their king. The proximate cause of the division was not Rehoboam's managerial foolishness but Solomon's earlier decision to locate most of the splendid buildings to the territory of the tribe of Judah. It is normal to pay tax, labour for one's country development but it breeds suspicion, animosity and conflict when proceeds of the communal labour is not evenly or equally shared. Like the Ancient Israel, the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates of 1914 in Nigeria was a union of many regions and multiple tribes. Hence, the further division of Nigeria into six geopolitical zones for even and effective sharing of Nigerian economy, political and educational resources across the zones was a welcome idea. However, In Nigeria today, there is concentration of the country's resources coming majorly from the South/South Geopolitical zone to the Northern part of the country. This study therefore examines Solomon's ethnic cleavage and centralisation policy as precursors to the divided kingdom of Israel with existential Afro-centric interpretation of the lacuna to Nigerian Geopolitical structure and the lesson therein for Nigerian political elites. Narrative Criticism and contextual African Hermeneutical approaches are employed in this study. Nigerian political elites should adopt equality and equity in governance, resource control and, in sharing public funds to avert imminent breakup.

Keywords: Israel, Rehoboam, Division, Resources, Ethnicity, marginalization, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

According to Scheffler (2001:12). one of the reasons for studying history is with the view to learn lessons from it. People who study history for the sake of lessons to be learnt from it believe in the axiom that, "History repeats itself". The United Kingdom of Israel and Judah that is said to have existed from about 1030 BCE became divided at about 930 BCE at the succession of Solomon by his son - Rehoboam. More to this division was Rehoboam's

insensitivity to the tribal politics of the United Ancient Israel being archaeologically immanent since the time of Judges, retracted in David - his grandfather's reign; managed by Solomon—his father and the immediate predecessor. The evidence of this is repeated in the final statement at the division.

And when all Israel saw that the king did not hearken to them, the people answered the king, 'What portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David.' So Israel departed to their tents." 1 Kings 12:16

עמֶשֶׂא יִכְלָאֵר כִּי־הַפֶּל אֶת־בְּנֵי־עָם, וְכִי־יִפְרָאֲלֵכִי אֶשְׁמַע
הַלְחַנְיָא וְדוּדָפ קִאֲתִי־הַפֶּל כְּבֵר וְלֹאֲמַר מֵה־פֶּנֶב חֵלֶק כְּדוּד וְאֶנְחַלָּה
לְכֹ דוּפ תִּיב הָאֵר כְּבֹנֵי־כִי כֹאֲהֵלִי יִפְרָאֵל עֶפֶה רֹאֵה בֵּית כּוּד וְפֶל
וְיִלָּה יִפְרָאֵל לֵאמֹר: 1Kings 12:16

The Hebrew word, חֵלֶק translated as portion in the above passage is also translated as share or distribution of resources. Hence, this cry of war is synonymous to overconcentration of the national resources on a particular tribe.

Like United Kingdom of Israel – a segmented society of 12 tribes - Nigeria is a conglomerate of heterogeneous ethnic group formed into a political unity. Its sustaining ethnic independency framed its geopolitical structure into North-West, North-East, North-Central, South-West, South-East and South-South in other to ensure even distribution. While the South-South dominates the generation of the country's revenue up to about 90%, the sharing principle places the northern zones at the vantage of domination, hence the agitation for resource control and schism.

This paper aims at tracing the history of Israel's tribal independence from origin to the division and lay a credence from it to safe-guard Nigeria against balkanization.

ISRAEL AS A CONFEDERATION OF TWELVE TRIBES

It is a scholarship consensus that, tracing the formation of Israel is a difficult task. However, Dada (2018:181) affirms that, the foundation of Israel as a nation has to a great extent been hinged on the tribal league or confederacy, formed by the twelve tribes in Canaan. The question of its origins and its settlement in Palestine is rated as one of the most difficult problems in respect of Israel's history. In other to solve the problem associated with their settlement, a number of models or various hypothesis had been formulated by the scholars to describe the Israelite tribal society as at the time of Judges. These include:

- i. The occupation theories which transited the phonetic syllables of *Apiru* and *Habiru* to mean “Hebrew”
- ii. The Israelite occupation as Nomads (The Shasu) being a feature of Palestine

society.

- iii. The amphictyony's hypothesis: The model paints the picture of Israel at the time of Judges being made up of 12 tribes, organized on the principle of the amphictyony whose main characteristic is religion. From political angle, the tribe could be said to be a federation. According to Noth (1983:91), the tribal cleavage is felt because while the worship of Yahweh was central, the geographical position of the shrine was not centralized.
- iv. An egalitarian society (Retribalisation): This hypothesis viewed Israel as 'an ethnically and socioeconomically mixed coalition composed of a majority of tribally organized peasant (about 80%) and lesser numbers of pastoral nomads, mercenaries and freebooters, assorted craftsmen and renegade priests.
- v. A Segmented Society: The last verse of the Books of Judges gave a support to this hypothesis. *In those days, Israel had no king; everyone did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.* (Jdg 21:26). The fact that evidence is largely scant towards Israel having a homogeneous entity at this time had led to this claim that Israel was a segmented community. The analyses of what characterized a segmented society according to Scheffler is evident in the tribal Israel hence the conclusion that no unity worth mentioning could have existed between the tribes. According to Okeowo one of the major features which distinguish Israel as a segmented society is major point of unity even in the presence of their tribal diversity. In Israelites' case, Yahwism being their collective religion was the point of unity.

OCCASIONS OF TRIBAL CLEAVAGE IN THE RISE OF MONARCHY IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

According Bright (1960:166), monarchy was an institution that is totally foreign to Israel's tradition. Cundall (1964), Dietrich (2007:100), among many other scholars also share this verdict. To Cundall (1964), the introduction of monarchical system of government, particularly in its early stages¹ was a qualified conception. Qualified because of the power wield by the kings of cities around Israel in protecting the interest of their citizen external forces. Conversely, it is something Israelites shouldn't have settled for when considering their tribal formation and independency, coupled with the burden of investing their power in one person other than tribal league as later warned by Samuel when they requested for a king. Meanwhile, Noth (1983:165), Vaux (1991:93), Bright (1960:158), Robinson (1952:150), Davies (1963) and Moore (1895:229) when interpreting Judges 8:22, 23, where Gideon is invited to become ruler over Israel² argued that Israel has anticipated monarchical government right from the time of Judges for the same purpose.

¹This early stage is what Old Testament Scholars refer to as early monarchy. It covers the reign of Saul, David and Solomon. Against the later monarchy, that is the divided kingdom.

²This office differs markedly from the normal position of a judge in that it is hereditary according Judges, VIII. 22.

Of importance to us in the above assertion is the reason for this anticipation - the power wielded by the kings of cities around Israel in protecting the interest of their citizen. Miller (2010) supports this view that, confederacy was too weak to provide reliable protections for the people of Israel hence they desire a leader. The author of the book of Judges which evaluates the pros and cons of a confederacy of semi-sovereign tribes, constituted by legal obligations and embodied in three institutions – judges, military leaders, and a tribal assembly – argues that, its institutions are not strong enough to reliably deliver the benefits of nationhood that is, justice, security, prosperity, domestic tranquility and fidelity to God. The analysis of confederacy which begins in the Book of Judges winds up with the narratives concerning Eli, the priest of Shiloh who judges Israel at the beginning of the first book of Samuel.

The Books of Samuel and Kings account the history of the monarchy in ancient Israel (Miller 2010). This is also the view of Dietrich (2007:100), Scheffler (2001:12,13), Bright (1960:226-236), Noth (1958:164), Baker, Housman & Mathews (2014). The book of Samuel was agreed to have collapsed the theocratic rule under Eli and Samuel with the epoch of monarchical government. Miller (2010) added that, the book of Samuel's setup allows the author to conclude his analysis of confederacy and also to examine two other forms of government: theocracy and monarchy.

Following the confederacy was the adoption of Deuteronomistic theocratic rule. Eli and Samuel's leadership as theoretic ruler in Israel was a significant step towards monarchy. Though no crisis in Israel's affairs triggers Eli's appointment as judge but Noth (1983:99) gave a clue of his appointment by the whole tribe as a Priest to oversee the amphictyonic central shrine of Yahweh. Eli is a transitional figure between the two forms of government since he combines the offices of judge and priest. The death of Eli necessitated the reappearance of Samuel who by devoting a burnt offering to the Lord defeats the Philistines (1Sam. 7:9-10). But this according to Miller (2010) is “unstable for practical governance.” Whereas the corruption of the children of Samuel culminated the situation that necessitates the demand for monarchy by the tribal assembly at Ramah (1Sam. 8:4).

A Critical look at the work of the scholars quoted above suggested that, the history of the monarchical government in ancient Israel cannot be studied in isolation to their formation as a league state which accords respect to its tribal independence. Hence the monarchical power will have to do more to eradicate the tribal cleavage.

Tribal Cleavage in The Early Monarchy

By early monarchy, scholars refer to the reign of Saul, David and Solomon in the ancient Israel. During this period, despite the power wielded by the kings, the tribal independence of ancient Israel remained un-tainted but managed.

Saul who could be posited as the epochal model of monarchical government in Ancient Israel irrespective of the pro and anti-monarchical literary politics which designated him as מלך (king) or נביא (leader) respectively, managed the tribal cleavage. First, his anointing as the first king of Israel was tribal orchestrated through the elders' monarchical quest at Ramah (cf. I Sam. 8:4-5). Secondly, tribal politics made the Deuteronomists who according to Block (2005:167) are imagined as Levites and the Chronicler even more (cf. I Chron. 10: 1.1-14) depict Saul as a failure while standing in the shadow of David who favoured the Priest. Finally, Saul's intrigues and power play against David in the succession politics was more of tribal interest than personal – Benjamin vs. Judah.

David, though in his tribal sentiment for dynasty had to employ Marxism's macro approach which viewed the tribal Israel as a community resource control and even distribution of resources to manage the Ancient Israel's tribal cleavage. David's choice of Jerusalem was his utmost political savvy because the city did not belong to any Israelite tribe, so he did not take anything away from any tribe in order to found his capital. Therefore, the claim to the city by the Davidic dynasty cannot be contested by any tribe. Second, Jerusalem is strategically located between the southern tribe of Judah - though added to the tribe of Judah. David's tribal sensitivity is further seen in his marriage to Saul's daughter; his messages of commendation to the people of Jabesh-gilead of the northern tribe, showing loyalty to the house of Saul and his gradual infiltration into becoming the king over the ten tribes of the North. Though David made use of both native and foreign armies for his military campaign and personal mercenary troop for his political security yet the immanent tribal cleavage surfaced. David's “bold stroke” policy of re-appointing Amasa his cousin (2Sam.19:13) and the leader of Absalom's rebel army (2Sam.17:25) as replacement for Joab whom David could not forgive for killing Absalom; coupled with the whole army of Judah (being David's tribe) escorting him across Jordan after the Absalom saga with just half of the army of Israel (2Sam.19:39-43), was seen as tribal marginalization and “blatant favouritism leading to the secession cry by Sheba in 2Sam.20:1” (Bright 1960:205).

Solomon's inner transformation and self-colonization through judicious foreign alliances, mostly by marriage (1Kings11:1-3) was his major political strategy that hibernated the Israelites' tribal agitation till the reign of his son Rehoboam. For example, launching an attack against Gezer (a Canaanite city) by Pharaoh for his daughter's dowry to Solomon would serve as a deterrent to the Ten Northern Tribes of Ancient Israel (Bright 1960:208). Though Solomon hush-up tribal confederacy and immanent charismatic leadership that are life line to tribal cleavage yet little was kept alive of this old order – “My House” – through his major projects centralisation policy.

Monarchy in Ancient Israel never escaped tension. As pointed above, neither David nor Solomon in all their brilliancy was able to find a lasting solution to the fundamental problem of tribal cleavage order than finding a political tie to keep the marginal unity.

PROXIMATE CAUSE OF DIVISION IN ANCIENT ISRAEL KINGDOM

Israel under the confederacy political structure - in the time of Judges - the tribes were independent hence we could not talk of division but a modification of structure. However, having attained the status of statehood by the adoption of Monarchy, “these ethnical heterogeneous, culturally indigenous group (sic) of settlers bounded by religious life style” according to Davies (2015:51) can now speak secession language... “to his tent”.

One cannot depict Sheba's battle cry “every man to his tent” in 2 Sam.20:1, being repeated almost literally when the secession takes its course in 1 Kings 12:16 as coincidence. Wein (2013) and Cundall (1973:33-39) posit that, the unity that existed during the reigns of Kings Saul, David and Solomon was artificial, because it depended upon the grandeur of the leader's personality, being sensitive to selfish/marginalized policy. It has earlier been mentioned in the argument of De Vaux (1991:93) that, the Jewish people are fiercely independent and independent-minded (Harvey 1996:164). Noth (1983:165), De Vaux (1991:93), Bright (1960:158), Robinson (1953:150), Davies (1963:151-157) and Moore (1895:229) argue that, the Israelite is ready to do away with any political structure that impairs their independent.

On the factors that led to the divided kingdom of Israel circa 925 B.C.E. scholars like, De Vaux (1991:93), Davies (2015:51), Scheffler (2001:81-87), Dietrich (2007:189-203), Kalimi (2018:47,48), Ogba (2004:67-69) and Ojo & Ojebode (2010:91-92) amidst numerous other scholars argue that, the immediate cause, orchestrated by Rehoboam's managerial foolishness was a reaction of the people to the remote cause being the administrative policies of Solomon. Bright (1960:216) refers to this as 'the burden of the monarchy.'

Solomon over-taxed the people to foot the bill of splendid building projects - the king's palace, the temple, the wall round Jerusalem etc. most of which were located in the tribe of Judah only coupled with his compulsory use of his subjects to accomplish these public works. This aroused internal jealousy against the tribe of Judah by the ten Northern tribes, who felt that they were not directly concerned with whatever magnificence Solomon had invested on the building. These other tribes with immanent disunity were so bitter that they were ready to break any moment. According to Moore, the socio-political structure of Israel only guarantees their unity on purpose (1895:229). Whereas, tribal struggle in Ancient Israel is tantamount to religious unrest. According to Dada (2018:181), bigot fringe prophets were instrument of this social control in Ancient Israel.

NIGERIA IN THE HOOK OF TRIBAL CLEAVAGE AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR THE POLITICAL ELITES

Nigeria, a group of nations is Africa's most populous country and the world's eighth largest oil producer, but its success has been undermined in recent decades by religious conflict, political instability, rampant official corruption, and an ailing economy which largely

hinge on ethnic rivalry heading towards balkanization (Falola and Heaton 2014: iii).

Like Ancient Israel, Nigeria also went through the process of state formation. For example, in the extreme north of what became Nigeria was the Kanem-Bornu Empire under the Saifawa dynasty, as well as the Hausa States under the Habe rulers. In the middle section of the country were Borgu, Nupe and Jukun kingdoms. South of these were Old Oyo Empire and other Yoruba Kingdoms as well as the Kingdom of Benin. Nearest to the coast were the Niger Delta states of which Bonny, Calabar, Itsekiri and Urhobo were among the most important and prominent. There were of course other communities like the Igbo in the South, the Tiv in the middle belt of the country, the Birom and other hill dwellers of the Bauchi plateau, who, by large did not have centralised states but all the same had political organisations at village levels, known as segmentary societies by anthropologists. Again, like the loose confederacy Israel, all these communities were not usually isolated. They had intra and inter-group relations politically, culturally and economically but not religious being a pluralistic society. They all laid the foundation of what later became Nigeria - a conglomerate of assembled tribes (ethnic nations) culminated into a federal republic by the colonizers grouping the heterogeneous political entities into the Northern and Southern protectorates and on January 1, 1914 (Ajayi 2017:9). The further division of the country into 12 states by General Yakubu Gowon in 1967 makes Nigeria typology of Ancient Israel. Importantly, the crack of division in the Israel unity at least from the institution of the state had always been North and South typifying Nigeria situation.

As group of nations, ruled by ethnic representation from six geo-political zones, Nigeria has unresolved quality leadership question that can manage its ethnic cleavage which has lingered for sixty-four years (age of political independent). Even the 2023 general election defined itself on the same ethnic cleavage as the three major candidates for the presidential election represented Nigeria's ethnic diversity: Bola Ahmed Tinubu from the West; Peter Obi from the East and Atiku Abubaka from the North. This is as a result of four factors: the ascendancy and continued dominance of ethnicity as an aggregating tool; the retreat of Nigerian federalism; the perception of an exclusive right to leadership by the Northern political elite, and the backlash of opposition from other ethnic groups (Abubakar 2004:153-166).

What could be regarded as the tie of these heterogeneous nationalities being amalgamated into a whole called Nigeria in 1914? For Israel, it is amphictyonya mutual agreement by the parties involved having religion as its main characteristic (Noth 1983:91). Notably, from political angle, the tribe could be said to be a federation. Isiani & Obi-Ani (2019) posit that the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorate was an administrative fiat of Nigeria by the British colonialist overlord for economic and administrative convenience” hence, the tie excludes the union. The Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria are culturally and religiously apart. Considering the economic success of Nigeria before the 1967 civil war and its downturn failure after the same war, we are forced to consider the cause of the war as the pivotal point of our heterogeneous tie. Though, history reveals that,

the coup and the counter of 1966 was the immediate cause of the war but the proximate cause lies on who hold the ace of controlling the major source of revenue i.e. oil? Deductively, economic gain suggests itself as the tie of the country's diversity hence even distribution of revenue among the geo-political zones becomes the key to a sustainable unity.

Revenue Allocation Formulae in Nigeria

The current vertical allocation³ formula which is based on Executive (Presidential) order is as follows:

- Federal Government - 52.68%
- State Government - 26.72%
- Local Government - 20.60%

While the horizontal allocation formula⁴ which captures factors/principles and percentage is as follows:

- Equality - 40%
- Population - 30%
- Land Mass/Terrain - 10%
- Social Development Factor - 10%, that is, Education (4%), Health (3) and Water (3).

From the afore stated formula, it is clear as day that the Northern part of Nigeria benefits more from the national cake than the other parts of Nigeria. This is because it has Equality, Population and Land Mass/Terrain in abundance. From whatever is available to be shared, the Federal Government which has been dominated and located in the Northern Geopolitical Zones takes 52.68%. Meanwhile, according to the Nigerian Federal Character, every Local Government must have the presence of the Federal Government hence, since the local government in the Northern geopolitical zones are more than that of the south, more of the federal revenue goes towards the North more than the south. Still on the federal character, by the appointment of ministers even under President Buhari's administration, Northern region has more ministers than the South -West, South-East, and South-South put together. This means more revenue to the North than South.

Horizontally, whatever revenue that it is to be shared among the States and Local Governments, North would always take more because they have more land mass, more states, more local governments and even the developmental allocation favours because their area is relatively low in infrastructural and intellectual development. Also, a look at what the Northern part of Nigeria has contributed to the country's economy will further expose us to the over concentration of national resources to the North.

³The Vertical Allocation Formula: This formula shows the percentage allocated to the three tiers of government i.e. federal, states and local governments. This formula is applied vertically to the total volume of disburseable revenue in the Federation Account at a particular point in time.

⁴The Horizontal Allocation Formula: The formula is applicable to States and Local Governments only. It provides the basis for sharing of the volume of revenue already allocated to the 36 States and 774 Local Governments.

THE OVERCONCENTRATION (CENTRALISATION) OF STATES' REVENUE TO THE NORTH

In 2007, an Economic Consultancy from, 'Economic Associates' published the first state by state decomposition of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In that analysis, crop and livestock production, the major economic activities in the North, contribute only 31% of Nigeria's GDP. Oil production in Delta, Rivers and Lagos (South) alone constitutes 36% of Nigeria's GDP. It therefore goes without saying that the North contributes a minute of resources to Nigeria's economy. Why then should the North have most of the country's revenue allocated to them? (Amuwo, et.al 1998:45-47).

To further buttress centralisation policy, let's look at the Federation Allocation Accounts Committee figures for June 2009 as released by the Federal Ministry of Finance. The North alone collected about 40% of the allocation to states, while the other states had to share the rest. This implies that the North is taking in more than it gives out to the country's economy.

This unequal distribution of revenue is further aided by the fact that out of the 14 Presidents Nigeria has had, 8 are from the North, while 3 are from the South-West, 2 from the South-East and only 1 from the South-South - the strength of the country's economy without mentioning Tafawa Balewa from Bauchi– North-East geopolitical zone, who served as Governor. Hence the agitation of the Niger-Delta militant and other militant groups is, “let he who plays the piper dictate the tune”.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Political elites in Nigeria should be sensitive and ensure fair distribution of national resources and at the same time place right over might.
2. The paper recommends the adoption of Marxism's macro approach which under David's choice of Jerusalem viewed the tribal Israel as a community resource control and even distribution of resources to manage its tribal cleavage. Marxism's macro approach adopts equity above equality. Thus, advocating that:
3. All benefits should be distributed by the government as the burdens not as the population as it is in the Federal Character.
4. Leadership should enforce rule of law and ensure that the standards of right and justice are internal to the specific modes of production.
5. Also, the political elites and those at the helms of affairs in Nigeria should enforce the anti-graft policy to curb corruption as any system or government based on exploitation can never be an abode of justice.
6. The Nigerian political elites should view Nigeria at macro-level that is, being made up of group of individuals in different social classes who must compete for social, material, and political resources rather than indivisible entity which tends to vacate its ethnic cleavage.
7. Federal Character in Nigeria should reflect equity rather than equality. Resources should be distributed according to population need and not geographical factor.

Tribal marginalization and blatant favouritism leading to balkanisation should be out rightly avoided.

8. Pivotal point for electing the administrative heads in Nigeria must hinge on economic capacity.
9. Finally, it is unjust to deprive any group of their legitimate share in wealth, income or resources. Hence, the governments at all levels in Nigeria should be fair to all in the distribution and allocation of our common wealth.

CONCLUSION

There are lots of similarities between the united ancient Israel; being a confederation of twelve tribal leagues, headed by a king and the contemporary Nigeria as a conglomerate of ethnic nationalities that was merged into a single political unit under one administrator called the President. Therefore, the scope of the study has been limited to drawing out the similarities between the socio-political struggle of the Israel as a tribal confederation in the Deuteronomistic history which eventually led to the division of the kingdom into North and South and the contemporary Nigeria's six geopolitical struggle of revenue generation, control and distribution. There are lots of bold stroke policy in Nigeria government such as tribal domination in the appointment of key officers at the Federal level and so on which must be addressed and corrected for Nigeria to remain united as a nation. Just like the ten tribes in ancient Israel broke away with political structure that impairs their independent, so also Nigerians, today are ready to do away with political structure that impairs their independent.

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