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**Tribalism and its effects in Nigeria**

Tribalism has always been a source of conflict between people, families, and groups in Nigeria. As defined by The New Penguin English Dictionary, tribalism is a “strong loyalty or attachment to a group, often to an excessive degree.” There are pejorative descriptions and connotations of tribes, usually it is regarded as a state of being organized or advocating for a tribe in terms of conformity, ‘thinking and behaving in which people are more loyal to their tribe than to their friends, their country, or any other social group’ a way of being based upon variable combinations of kinship-based organizations, ‘a distinct sense of difference by nature of common culture and descent’. It is as powerful as religion in Africa and in Nigeria (Adeyanju G. Colling). The Origin of Tribalism in Nigeria can be traced back to its founding by the British. Nigeria wasn’t borne out of love and unity but of the selfish interests of the colonial masters. Little wonder she isn’t united today, but is living in the result of the hostility between its native tribes. Unfortunately, Nigeria has been hounded by tribalism since 1960. The politics of our founding fathers were along tribal lines, the first two interventions of the military can be viewed through a tribalistic lens. Not forgetting the Biafran war, which was the saddest and most tragic thing that has ever happened as a nation.

Tribalism has been normalized in Nigeria over years. For years, parents have whispered words that nurtured tribalism to their children. Common examples are: "Do not marry an Igbo man;" "Igbos eat humans and can kill for money;" "Yoruba people are Cowards;" "Yoruba women are prostitutes and don't stay in their husband's home;" "The Hausas want to kill Southerners;" "The Hausas want Nigeria to become an Islamic Republic." These are common words you can hear in many Nigerian homes. I’ve personally heard the first one too many times. The fear and hatred of tribes have lived on for decades with these words. Even in humour, tribalism has seeped in through jokes and punchlines. Yoruba demon, the supposed cold heart of Igbo women, and the rumoured expertise of Calabar women in bed are all derivatives of Nigeria's tribalism culture. It is time for the Nigerian youths to wake up and break the shackles of tribalism. It is time to realize that our collective dream cannot be actualized if we are divided.

People in the political structure have always played the tribal card during elections and it is not enough to say that it is disappointing that young Nigerians who should be wise to their tactics always fall for it. It is clear that most people are being hypocritic when being liberal and aware. As well as when they go online to fight against racism, in which they are not directly involved, ignoring our very own problem, tribalism. It is safe to say we are all by-products of a tribalistic generation, where companies hire employees based on their tribes and not potential and universities offer admission to students based on their tribes and not potential.

The impact of tribalism includes the inability to fight corruption; unemployment; distrust; politics of division; promotion of mediocrity and suppression of justice. Regarding the inability to fight corruption, there is a tradition in Nigeria that forbids citizens from exposing or prosecuting fellow tribesmen for corrupt practices. Corrupt tendencies are exhibited and laws violated, yet such individuals invoke ethnic sentiment to get away from, or prevent prosecution. For example, recently, a private jet belonging to the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) – Bishop Ayo Oritsajafor, was apprehended in South Africa over possession of $9.3 million allegedly meant for purchasing arms. Before the South African government could conclude investigation, his ethnic region and kinsmen were already in the media defending and exonerating him, and declaring war if their son is prosecuted.

The rate of unemployment has been increasing at an alarming rate as a result of the tribalism faced in Nigeria. People are put out of business due to lack of patronization from some tribes; people are left unemployed because no one wants to hire someone from a particular tribe. Guarantee of employment or award of contract in public service is a function of one’s tribesperson in position of authority. The phrase “it is our turn” was coined from this practice. Merit and excellence are sacrificed on the altar of primordial thinking.

Furthermore, a fundamental impact of tribalism in Nigeria is a culture of distrust amongst various ethnic groups in the country. Due to distrust, confidence on objective and legitimate issues of poverty and environmental pollution in the Niger Delta is trivialized as ‘Ijaw’ issues or as ‘Ogoni’ issues.

In addition, tribalism flourishes in Nigeria mainly because it is an effective tool that gives the user an edge in the eternal struggle to gain government patronage (i.e. political appointments). After getting the appointment, tribal sentiment is again used as a cover to abuse the office, and then to escape justice after leaving the office. This promotes mediocrity and suppresses justice.

With all the tribalism going on, the Nigerian human resources will continue to deplete until it is finally exhausted. The political arena will continue to be ruled by the corrupt and incompetent political class. It is therefore imperative for every Nigerian to put aside their differences and embrace harmony to move forward. No tribe is the enemy of Nigeria. Nigeria is her own enemy for not recognizing the real enemy; the ruling elite and the political class. Nigeria 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.