

Toxic Tribalism and Democratic Erosion in Sierra Leone

Lamin Manley

*Part Time Lecturer at the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM)
Faculty of Leadership and Governance- University of Sierra Leone
AJ Momoh Street Tower Hill Freetown, Sierra Leone
manleylamin11@gmail.com*

Abstract: Tribalism has been the fundamental nightmare since the genesis of the Sierra Leone independent from 27th April, 1961. Recently, scholars have questioned the viability of tribalism in diminishing our democratic system in Sierra Leone. Tribalism is a pattern of attitude and behavior we tend to adopt when we come to identify with our tribes. Tribalism in Sierra Leone has taken many forms, one of such example of it, is individuals' strong affiliations with party politics. These affiliations are often built on party colours through the use of party symbols (Red and Green). We frequently see deep bonding between supporters of a particular political party who identifies strongly with each other and against supporters of opposing party. Our political foes are acting out of hate and a desire to harm us by dividing us as a nation. While political tribalism has been evident throughout history, today we are witnessing increased polarization due to lack of trust and civil discourse across parties.

Keywords: Us and them, Political Extremism, Dividing rules, Kitchen Cabinet.

Introduction

Tribe can be defined as a division of people; family; race. Or a group of people in a traditional society that are linked by blood, religion, similar culture. These group of people share same ancestors or common leaders and they have similar customs and traditions. Tribalism depicts exclusivity, clan-based. When a particular ethnic group pays no regard to another ethnic group, it portrays that it is deep-rooted and innate and this connotes tribalism. Tribalism is a behaviour that shows that people are extremely loyal to their group than other groups or their country. Tribalism in Sierra Leone determines how people act, think, react and who they oppose or compete against as a result of their political culture.

Tribalism and Democracy are the two popular words used in the Sierra Leone society. A good political life calls for peace, right action and life sustaining necessities. Tribalism is a dividing role strategy, as I defined democracy as "A society based on equal opportunity and individual merit or "A system of rule by the poor and disadvantage"

The constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 Chapter (2) Fundamental Principal of state policy. The state shall promote National Integration and Unity and Discourage Discrimination on the ground of place of origin, circumstance of birth, sex, religion, status, ethic or linguistic association. Do we practice these values in the constitution which is the parent law in Sierra Leone?

In all there are 16 ethnic groups in Sierra Leone. These are the Mende, found in the Southern and Eastern Provinces, and the Temne in the North. The Limba also found in the Northern Province, followed by the Kono in the Eastern Province. There is also the Koranko in the North as well as Yalunka, Loko, Soso, Madingo and Fula. On the Coast, North and South are the Bullom and Sherbro followed by the much smaller groups of Krim, Vai, Gola, with the Kissi further inland in the Eastern Province. The Western Area, including Freetown, is more mixed in population, but is basically the home of the Krio.

Sierra Leone is divided into four (4) geographical regions, sub-divided into sixteen administrative districts, which have their own elected local governments. The four regions are Northern, North-Western, Eastern, Southern and Western Province (Western Rural and Western Urban). Emerging political realities- the way we choose our leaders, the way we govern ourselves, the way we treat each other as Sierra Leonean inside and outside our country. Let's stop attacking personalities, let's attack issue that are affecting us as a nation.

Political Parties Stronghold Result 2018

The Metric below is a classic example delineating that Sierra Leone is divided along stronghold ethnic tribal politics. The 2018 Presidential Run- off indicative Results per district; shows it clearly. The 7 March 2018 elections were the fourth elections since the end of the Civil War in Sierra Leone. The country has moved from a period of post-conflict elections to the beginning of democratic consolidation. The national legal instrument for election management in Sierra Leone consists of the following: The 1991 Sierra Leone Constitution, Public Elections Arts 2012, Local Government Act and Political Parties Act 2002.

Eu Election Observation Mission- Sierra Leone 2018 Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Council Elections 2018

31 March 2018, Presidential Election

Region	District	Number of Registered Voters	Kamara APC	Bio SLPP	Total Votes Cast	% Turnout
EAST	Kailahun	165 753	13 343	119502	134 064	80,9%
	Kenama	280 141	27 308	211232	240 466	85,8%
	Kono	186 095	34 636	91823	128 983	69,3%
NORTH	Bombali	187 664	144 056	14807	160 466	85,5%
	Falaba	65 761	22 562	16862	40 598	61, 7%
	Koinadugu	84 293	40 210	19004	60 835	72,2%
	Tonkolili	204 231	143 500	22748	168 137	65,7%
NORTH WEST	Kambia	155 484	69 542	30155	102 174	65,7%
	Karena	101 160	73 514	9146	83 769	82,8%
	Port Loko	233 962	153 608	27084	183 421	78,4%
SOUTH	Bo	284 348	26 145	219131	246 985	86,9%
	Bonthe	92 183	3 804	76119	80 594	87,4%
	Moyamba	147 041	21 045	96456	119 496	81,3%
	Pujehun	101 250	6 701	73121	80 574	79,6%
WEST	WA Rural	282 358	131 433	90170	224 824	79,6%
	WA Urban	606 939	315 764	202046	522 923	86,2%
	Total	3178663	1227 171	1319406		
	Total		48,2%	51,8%		

Table 1: Stronghold Result of Political Parties by district 2018 General Election

DISTRICTS	KAMARA -APC	BIO - SLPP
Kailahun	10.5%	89.5%
Kenema	11.7%	88.3%
Bombali	92.2%	7.8%
Kono	27.9%	72.1%
Falaba	57.2%	42.8%
Koinadugu	74.5%	25.5%
Tonkolili	86.5%	13.5%
Kambia	63.8%	36.2%
Kerene	83.6%	16.4%
Port Loko	86.0%	14.0%
Bo	8.6%	91.4%
Bonthe	4.1%	95.9%
Moyamba	19.5%	80.5%
Pujehun	6.4%	93.6%
Western Area Rural	57.5%	42.5%
Western Area Urban	60.2%	39.8%

Who is a Tribalist Person?

Giving good jobs to only members of their tribes. Jobs here are resources; the type of job given to a particular person can instantaneously change the status of that individual.

Endogamic attitude by marrying only members of their own tribe, strongly opinionate that people from other tribes are not worthy of help, fixed stereotypes against them.

Give more privileges to members of his or her own tribe and protecting their interest.

Seeking the interest of a particular political party than national interest.

Tribal Endogamy

A tribe can be termed as a social group, in which people live together, have the same aspirations, speak the same language, and share the same history. People in such a tribe can be related or not. Tribal endogamy means marriage within the tribe. For example, a male member and female member belonging to specific tribe

shall only marry among themselves and not any individual of other tribes. Exogamy is exactly the opposite of endogamous marriage. The exogamy form of marriage can be defined as the solemnization of marriage outside of the particular community, tribe, social group, etc. The object of exogamy marriages is to prevent the marriages of all close relatives, i.e., those who are related to each other by blood or genetics. Over the period of time, endogamous marriage has gone through various dynamic changes in Sierra Leone society. Today, in contemporary Sierra Leone, the concept of endogamy is practiced but not with the same rigidity and limitations it had in earlier times. In Sierra Leone society, exogamous marriages are preferred over endogamous marriages but are not completely ridiculed by the family members of an individual. Although there are still some old notions and practices of endogamy in rural areas, relaxation can be found in the urban side of Sierra Leone.

Tribalism can be interpreted as superiority complex among specific tribal groups, which makes them prejudiced towards their neighbors. The existence of tribalism traces back to the era of party politics in 1964. However, in the modern days of Sierra Leone, tribalism is hypertonic and prevents so many people from getting along and uniting to combat more relevant issues in Sierra Leone as a whole. Tribalism influences many spheres of social life – for instance, quite often competent workers are overlooked because of their tribal identity. That is to say, in the Sierra Leone society, is not about what you know but is about whom you know ‘‘connectocracy’’.

‘‘When it is free and fair it is democratic and when it is unfree and unfair it is undemocratic’’.

Democracy can be used as a ‘‘NOUN or as an ADJECTIVE.’’ When it is used as a noun, it is a lip service- an idea of how a country ought to be governed. To make the idea of democracy concrete, it must be related to the state institutions of the state. The central institutions by which a state exercises its authority are called a REGIME. Regimes can come and go while the state remains, that is why democracy is been referred to as popular choices or majority rule- Chapter 2 of the 1991 constitution – Government and the people ‘‘sovereignty belongs to the people of Sierra Leone from whom Government through this Constitution derives all its powers, authority and legitimacy’’. We the people are supreme, not the government and we should not be afraid of our government, the government should be afraid of its citizenry in the technical sense.

Principles of Democratic Rule

The principles of modern democratic rule – these are sometimes referred to the pillars, tenets, or principles of democratic rule. Any democracy around the world can be evaluated on the basis of these principles. They include:

Citizen Participation: the citizens are part of the decision – making process on matters what affect them. Communication is a two-way consultative process, i.e. bottom-up as well as top-bottom before any decision is reached. Individual participation in democratic processes and public life at all levels must be regulated fairly and impartially and must avoid any discrimination, as well as the risk of intimidation by State and non-State actors.

Economic Freedom: Democratic processes are fostered by a favourable economic environment; therefore, in its overall effort for development, society must be committed to satisfying the basic economic needs of the most disadvantaged, thus ensuring their full integration in the democratic process.

Neutrality of State Institutions: Judicial institutions and independent, impartial and effective oversight mechanisms are the guarantors for the rule of law on which democracy is founded. In order for these institutions and mechanisms fully to ensure respect for the rules, improve the fairness of the processes and redress, injustices, there must be access by all to administrative and judicial remedies on the basis of equality as well as respect for administrative and judicial decisions.

Human Rights: They are rights that International Institutions such as the United Nations have declared that all human beings possess, simply by virtue of being human. Although we cannot see, touch, feel or smell these rights, we know that they should be recognized everywhere. Human Rights have three characteristics:

1. They are inherent. (We are born with them.)
2. They are universal. (We are all born with them.)
3. They are inalienable. (We cannot give them away, either for ourselves or for other people. We cannot, for example, voluntarily sell ourselves into slavery in order to be fed.)

Equality: the achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences.

Rule of Law: democracy is founded on the primacy of the law and the exercise of human rights. In a democratic

State, no one is above the law and all are equal before the law.

Political Tolerance: Democracy is founded on the right of everyone to take part in the management of public affairs; it therefore requires the existence of representative institutions at all levels and in particular, a Parliament in which all components of society are represented and which has the requisite powers and means to express the will of the people by legislating and overseeing government action.

Regular Free and Fair Elections: The key element in the exercise of democracy is the holding of free and fair elections at regular intervals enabling the people's will to be expressed. These elections must be held on the basis of universal, equal and secret suffrage so that all voters can choose their representatives in conditions of equality, openness and transparency that stimulate political competition. To that end, civil and political rights are essential, and more particularly among them, the rights to vote and to be elected, the rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

Accountability: which is essential to democracy, applies to all those who hold public authority, whether elected or non-elected, and to all bodies of public authority without exception. Accountability entails a public right of access to information about the activities of government, the right to petition government and to seek redress through impartial administrative and judicial mechanisms.

Transparency: Democracy thus goes hand in hand with an effective, honest and transparent government, freely chosen and accountable for its management of public affairs.

Historical experience reveals that democracy cannot be attained without a system of government which divides power among three co-equal branches each with certain prerogatives of power, and where the role of the judiciary is to channel power-related conflicts through a legal process which uses agreed legal reasoning to interpret and apply pre-existing law".

If you don't understanding the political history of your country you won't understand it politics' 'Intellectual Democracy and Democracy by birth right- Establish Democracy and Diminish Democracy". Democracy is a noun in Sierra Leone rather it's been as an adjective - Without political participation, democracy is meaningless - political participation goes beyond voting. The central institution by which a state exercises its authority is called REGIME. Regime can come and go while the state remains. Sierra Leone is bigger than any TRIBE! Civil Service is the center that holds administration from one Government to another- there comes in Transformational Leadership in the Public Sector- when you are in control of State Resources and State Power.

Unity, Freedom and Justice- Sierra Leonean are we united? The ideology of tribalism is often fueled by hate speeches, propaganda, preaching tribal massages and political intolerance:

Tribalism as an organized crime, this is when we use normative judgment by US and THEM. And our moral psychology is groupie when it comes to tribalism in Sierra Leone. Our tribal psychology is both MORAL and EPISTEMIC tribalism.

US	THEM
Educated	Uneducated
Lawful	Lawless
Peaceful	Arrogant
Professional	Unprofessional
Ethical	Unethical
Good	Bad
Rational	Irrational
Right	Wrong
Authentic	Unauthentic
True	False

These tribes are known for a particular behavior and the other tribe for another behavior. Stereotype mentality- when people asked for your surname, they want to know which tribe you belong to - political clientelism. We should not use Tribal politicking to gain political power -Not all SLPP supporters are Menda-Sherbors & Not all Temin -Limba are APC Supporters, Why the dividing rule strategy?

Job here is resources! Sierra Leone job market is not about what you know is about whom you know. Equal employment and affirmative action, the same qualifications but difference salaries- economy inequality is too much in the Civil Service.

Sierra Leoneans should restart their political ideologies - SLPP as a South-Eastern Party and APC as a

Northerner Party. Sir Milton Party's philosophy was "One Country, one people" He was a consensus builder. We still have good number of SLPP supporters that are from the North and huge number of South-Eastern supporter that are APC -Why the Game Theory Politics?

We still have South Easterners that are living destitute life even when their fellow Tribal men are in Governance as well Northerners that were suffering when APC was in Governance- Why the Game Theory Politics?

History, Politics and Institutional Settings

In order to understand the nature of tribalism in Sierra Leone it is first necessary to understand the turbulent history of the country. Indeed, the country only gained full independence in 1961 under the leadership of late Sir Milton Margai of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) This was in line with his party's philosophy of "one country, one people". The SLPP ruled until 1967 when the electoral victory of the opposition All Peoples Congress (APC) was cut short by the country's first military coup. The military handed over power to the APC and its leader Siaka Stevens in 1968. He turned the country into one party State in 1978 and after retiring in 1985 handed over to his deputy, General Joseph Saidu Momoh. One-party rule was ended in 1991, and a new constitution providing for a return to multi-party politics was approved in August of that year. Elections were scheduled for 1992. But, by this stage, Sierra Leone's institutions had collapsed, mismanagement and corruption had ruined the economy and rising youth unemployment became a serious problem. Taking advantage of the collapse, a rebel movement, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) emerged, and led a rebellion against the APC Government in 1991. The Government was unable to cope with the insurrection, and was overthrown by junior officers' through mutiny, forming The National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) in April 1992. Its leader, Captain Valentine Strasser, was however unable to defeat the RUF. They found it difficult to deal with the too many violence and looting by the rebels.

Valentine Strasser was deposed in January 1996 by his NPRC compatriots. His replacement, Major Maada Bio agreed to organize elections in February 1996. The RUF refused to take part in the Elections and continued the conflict. The elections were won by Tejan Kabbah and the SLPP. The new Government signed a peace agreement with the RUF in Abidjan in 1996 but it failed to stop the rebellion. Kabbah's Government was subsequently overthrown in a further coup in 1997 and took refuge in neighboring Guinea. The military junta, headed by Major Johnny Paul Koroma, invited the RUF to join government. But the junta was characterized by looting and violence, often in association with the RUF, and was unable to consolidate its position. It was eventually overthrown and the Kabbah's Government was re-instated in 1998 with the help of troops from Nigeria and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The war was officially declared over in February 2002.

The Genesis of Tribalism in Sierra Leone-The Colony and the Protectorate

According to the TRC Report, Sierra Leone was divided right from that point, the colonial government created what seemed like two [2] nations in the same land. The Colonial Capital Freetown, known as the Colony and the larger of Provincial Territory, known as the protectorate, were developed separately and unequally. The Colonial Government formalized the Common Law practiced in the Colony yet neglected the development of Customary law in the Protectorate, presenting two [2] separate legal systems in the same country. People in the Colony enjoyed much social, political and economic development and access to vital resources such as sound education. The division between the Colony and Protectorate caused deep ethnic differences and the disfigurement of Sierra Leone.

The Aftermath of Ethnicity and Regionalism

Some time, certain government pays much attention on one tribe to be educated so that they can have access to basic facilities as against the other. They further went on to side them and bring them into the governance system. The United Nation General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which went into force in 1948. Genocide is defined as any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group as such:

1. Killing members of the group;
2. Causing either bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
3. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
4. Imposing measures intended to prevent birth within the group.

The Genocide Convention makes a number of actions punishable: genocide itself, the conspiracy to commit it, incitement to commit, the attempt to commit it, and complicity in it. Genocide is held to be a matter of international concern, a crime under International Law. Moreover, by interpretation or amendment, the anti-genocide convention should also clearly protect political groups or economic classes from genocidal killing. For instance, the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda was as a result of these factors. The Tutsi who were in the minority were given much attention as against the Hutus in the majority, thereby giving an easy rife to the conflict which claim lives of many innocent Rwandans. Note, it does not only limit the tribe but also extends to regional level. If a system decides to give more attention to one region as against the other, conflict will also occur as a result of looming situation.

If we think as a tribe and not as a country, we will continue to create more problems when we should be finding solutions to our existing and emerging threats. If we see each other as distance tribes, seeking only the welfare of those who speak like us, we are building a dark and dangerous future for ourselves. It is time for a new thinking and a new economic order that must leave us from the cycle of poverty and social deprivation. We need to develop Sierra Leone with a two (2) prong approach: To distinguish between State Resources and Political Party Resources, to think as Sierra Leoneans not as a tribe.

Recommendations:

A Law should be developed as a legal Framework to punish those that are Tribalistic.

We should also developed Tribalism and Corruption as Curriculum in Sierra Leone educational system- De-tribalism for the fight against corruption.

In order to mitigate tribalism in Sierra Leone, Peace Commission Acts should not only be a noun but an adjective to achieve it mandate.

Political leaders are to be dissuaded from according unmerited privileges to people of the same ethnic group with them.

The Constitutional provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of ethnic group is not sufficient. The derogation of right to freedom from discrimination on the basis of tribe should be properly defined and exemplified.

The enactment of more and better laws on discrimination will assist people whose rights have been violated as a result of heightened tribalism in Sierra Leone.

Tribalism as an Organized Crime

There is a deep relationship between Tribalism and Corruption and Tribalism is a subset to corruption - we can use them interchangeably. Tribalism has affected our democracy, people we now vote for their tribal men instead of voting for development. Development means many things to different people. For my purpose here, development means any effort to improve the living conditions of Sierra Leoneans, partly by supplying them with a good and suitable infrastructure of roads, functioning state institutions, well-equipped schools and medical facilities. Development can also be partly met through the supply of amenities such as electricity and clean water, a healthy environment and recreation facilities. It also means giving Sierra Leoneans sound education, so that they can become enlightened, and be able to appreciate the facilities provided for them. Development also means more employment opportunities for the people, in government, the private sector or through self-employment. When the above infrastructure and social amenities are spread proportionately throughout the state, then it can be said that there is equal development. Conversely, i.e. when they are unevenly spread, then there is unequal development.

To distinguish between State Resources and Party Resources.

To think as nation not on tribe lines.

Effects of Unequal Development in Sierra Leone

The state of affairs encourages regionalism and tribalism in politics in Sierra Leone. Unequal development it seen as an injustice. Those who are adversely affected feel bitter and frustrated. Sometimes they ask for a decentralization of state institutions, to enable them to develop their neglected areas. On the other hand, those whose areas are better developed tend to be less disposed to supporting measures that could lead to uneven development. It ultimate result is permanent mistrust and instability in Sierra Leon.

Unequal development also leads people whose areas are underdeveloped to move to the more developed areas. This is one major cause of the rural-urban drift in Sierra Leone. Urban centers like Freetown, Makeni, Bo, Kenema, Kono and many more others attract millions of all categories of migrants. Those in the less developed areas of their districts move to these cities. Many go there to get jobs or attend schools, Universities since the best of those are concentrated there. Other people drift to the cities, simply to enjoy facilities which they are denied in their localities. The result is that the urban centers become over-populated, the amenities insufficient.

Another kind of inequality often emerges within the same urban center. The quarters where the rich and the powerful stay have uninterrupted water-supply, electricity, as well as good roads, whereas the less privileged suffer utility rationing etc. This encourages frustration and therefore agitation and, sometimes riots.

Many of the youths normally migrate to the urban center. This leaves only the old and the weak as the majority population in the neglected areas. These people are not able to produce enough to feed themselves. Life becomes difficult, and this adds to frustration and loss of confidence in the government.

In addition, movement from the less developed to the more developed areas in Sierra Leone could encourage crime. Since many of those who move to the more developed areas do not get the jobs or the wealth they expect, they sometimes turn to crime. Thus, there is more prostitution, theft, burglary, fraud and many other crimes in developed areas in Sierra Leone. On a whole, inequality in development within a state encourages bitterness, frustration, political and social agitation. This ultimately leads to tribal politics.

The ugly fact is that, we are futureless in terms of politics in Sierra Leone. Students of Politics are faced with the task of assessing and understanding past, present and emerging political realities. Keeping abreast of the changing and challenging nature of politics is clearly an imperative of a realistic political science. Political Science is concerned with the search for meaningful knowledge of the interrelated ethical, empirical, and prudential components of that community concerned with the public life.

References

- [1]. Abdullah, Ibrahim (1998), "Bush path to destruction: the origin and character of the Revolutionary United Front/ Sierra Leone", *The Journal of Modern Africa Studies*, 36, 2, 1998, pp.208-235.
- [2]. Alie, Joe A.D. *A New History of Sierra Leone*: Macmillan, 1990.
- [3]. Rogers, J. D. *Anarchy in Sierra Leone*, Freetown: Mount Everest Publishing House (forthcoming).
- [4]. *Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Act*, 2000.
- [5]. See the text of the United Nation Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in Neal Riemer, ed., *Protection against Genocide: Mission Impossible?* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2000), appendix 1, 161-164.
- [6]. *Sierra Leone Presidential- Parliamentary- Local –Election 7 March 2018 EU-EOM report*.
- [7]. *The 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone*.
- [8]. *The Home Office (1997) Rights Brought Home: The Human Rights Bill*, The Stationery Office, Norwich
- [9]. Lerner, M(ed) (1961) *On Liberty in Essential works of John Stuart Mill*, Bantam Books London
- [10]. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/endogamy>

About the Author



Lamin Manley, hold a Master's Degree in Governance and Leadership from Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM) –University of Sierra Leone. He also holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science and History from Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Diploma in Peace and Conflict Studies from Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. Lamin Manley is presently an Assistant Secretary attached at the Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources Youyi Building Freetown, Sierra Leone. And a Part Time Lecturer at the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM) Faculty of Leadership and Governance, University of Sierra Leone. He has also worked for the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) – Sierra Leone.