

**A COUNTRY DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF (I KINGS 12:1-24):
SOCIAL INJUSTICE AND INSECURITY IN EASTERN
NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This article examines insecurity in Eastern Nigeria in the light of I Kings 12:1-24. In the pericope, social injustice was committed against the people of northern Israel by Rehoboam. Rehoboam supported his southern brothers but neglected the northern inhabitants. The northern inhabitants used diplomacy to drive home their grievances, but Rehoboam was hell-bound on continuing his authoritarian rule and injustices against the northern people. This made the northern Israelites resort to arms struggle. They killed Adoram, who was sent by Rehoboam to them. In fact, Rehoboam narrowly escaped. The situation in Eastern Nigerian is similar to what happened in the pericope. The people of Eastern Nigeria have been calling on the government of Nigeria to amend the arbitrary policies against the region. But all pleas have fallen on deaf ears and the social injustice against the people of Eastern Nigeria has continued to escalate. The situation of things has reached the point where there is the systemic killing of security men of the government in Eastern Nigeria. Literary analysis was used as the research methodology. Findings reveal that it is the blatant and obscene injustice against the Easterners that has led to the increasing insecurity in Eastern Nigeria. It

is believed that the pericope will speak anew to the increasing insecurity situation in Eastern Nigeria.

Keywords: 1 Kings 12, Insecurity, Social injustice, Adoram, Eastern Nigeria

Introduction

Unlimited power is apt to corrupt the minds of those who possess it; and this I know, my lords: that where laws end, tyranny begins.... **William Pitt**

The Igbo people deserve to live in security, safety and dignity. This was the background of the Biafra war. The 1967 Nigeria-Biafra war heralded tough times for the people of Eastern Nigeria. It was a war that lasted for three years (1967-1970). The Nigerian government was on the offensive side, while the Igbo were on the defensive. During this period, the people of Eastern Nigeria suffered social, economic and political neglect. The 30-month (1967–1970) genocidal war launched by the Nigerian federal government against the indigenes of the Eastern part of the country (Biafra) was conducted without any observance of international rules of engagement (Obioma, 2021). It was an agitation by the Igbo against the social injustices and unfair treatment from the Nigerian government. Many Igbo paid the first price for this agitation and they include the death of millions of Biafrans before, during and after the Nigeria-Biafra war (Ugorji, 2017). There was also the destruction of property and other infrastructures, famine and kwashiorkor outbreak (a terrible disease caused by starvation), Igbo political exclusion at the federal executive branch of government, unemployment and poverty, interruption of the education system, forced migration leading to brain drain in the region, underdevelopment and healthcare crisis, among others (Ugorji, 2017). Socially, the people of the east were excluded from other Nigerians. Economically, seaports, land ports, and airports were destroyed and left to this day.

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For seaports, places like River Niger have not been dredged. The dredging would have opened the Eastern region to businesses—nationally and internationally. Politically, Eastern Nigeria has been strongly sidelined in the scheme of things. They have been denied the presidency since the aftermath of the civil war. The people of Eastern Nigeria no longer feel comfortable with the structure of Nigeria. They had to speak the language that the Nigerian government would understand, that is, civil disobedience. This was practicalised in the high rate of destructions of government structures, killing and maiming of security personnel, and the declaration of a memorial day for Biafran fallen heroes of (1967-1970). These were methods the Easterners adopted to show their displeasure with their exclusion from the scheme of things in contemporary Nigerian society. In order to properly analyse this development, a theological response is important. The narrative in I kings 12 is similar to the situation in Nigeria.

I Kings 12 is a narrative on social injustice during the reign of Solomon that came to a climax during the reign of Rehoboam. One of the root causes of the problem was that Solomon had subjected the people to enormous taxes (1 Kings 4:19) to maintain the lifestyle of the palace and the monarchy (Moussa, 2019). The people of the north felt they were greatly humiliated and sidelined by Rehoboam's government. This increased the level of agitations and insecurity in Israel, to the point that one of the servants of king Rehoboam eventually lost his life. This led to agitation and a call for secession that eventually materializes during the reign of Rehoboam. The division of the kingdom following Solomon's death, which severs ten tribes from the domain of the Davidids, constitutes a major transition in Israelite history (Knoppers, 1990:423). This is similar to the current agitations that have materialized into increased insecurity in Eastern Nigeria. This research is believed to speak anew to the rising insecurity in southern Israel.

Understanding I Kings 12:1-24

An example of Israel's failure of leadership occurs when King Rehoboam finds himself in need of advice on a difficult matter (TOW, 2021). The difficult matter was to give a positive answer to the prayer of the people of Israel to reduce the burden that Rehoboam had placed on the people. Instead, Rehoboam insisted on increasing the plight of the people, especially those of northern Israel descent.

Solomon lived a flamboyant lifestyle, which made him take a lot from the people to maintain his status. This came in form of heavy taxation and forced labour. The people of Israel wanted relief from the heavy taxation and forced service of Solomon's reign, and they offered allegiance to Rehoboam if he agreed to this (Guzik, 2021). Instead, Rehoboam, just like leaders with hubris, decided to embrace the arrogance of authoritarian leaders.

I Kings 12 shows that leaders are supposed to listen to the problems submitted by special interest groups (ethnic or tribal or religious), with empathy and respect, to examine the grievances or suggestions as quickly as possible, while paying close attention to the real roots of problems (Moussa, 2019). This is all the more important because "the same causes will always reproduce the same effects as long as we do not tackle the root causes, the real determinants of conflict and crises" (Vettovaglia 2015: 3).

The people of northern Israel came to Rehoboam with great expectations. They thought that Rehoboam would not behave like Solomon. They deemphasised the notion that Rehoboam would borrow wicked traits from his father. The elders knew that Rehoboam was not Solomon, and could not expect the same from the people that Solomon did. Rehoboam had to relate to the people based on who he was, not on who his father was. If he showed kindness and a servant's heart to the people, they would love and serve him forever. This was good advice (Guzik, 2018).

Ackroyd (1997:9) was of the view that when Rehoboam disregarded the counsel of the elders, it constitutes "a turn of events from the Lord for the sake of establishing word which the Lord spoke by the hand of Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam ben Nebat" (1 Kgs 12:15). Thus, God was the one who made it possible for Rehoboam to insist on ensuring the suffering continues for the people of northern Israel.

Selected Themes in I Kings 12:1-24

A close reading provides important themes that will provide a better understanding of the background of insecurity in ancient Israel.

- a. **Deontological leadership team:** Leading by example is the hallmark of deontological leadership. In I Kings 12:6, the elders who Rehoboam consulted, the elders who demonstrated spiritual maturity and wisdom over many years serving King Solomon, and although they had been appointed by Solomon, listened to Jeroboam with an open mind, resulting in their advice to Rehoboam to overturn Solomon's policies (TOW, 2021). However, Rehoboam responded with hubris and narcissism (I Kings 12:8).
- b. **Civil obedience:** The people of northern Israel demonstrated obedience to the government of Rehoboam. They assembled in Shechem to make Rehoboam king (I kings 12:1). This assemblage shows that the people of Israel expected their leaders to be up and doing in everything they do.
- c. **Social injustice:** Because of the oppressive nature of the forced labour, the people's request for relief appears reasonable to the older advisors of the king. But instead, Rehoboam listened to the "young men" (v.10-11), and promptly rejected the simple request of the people of the north. Rehoboam's coterie suggests that the king showed strength by declaring, "My little finger is thicker than my

father's loins"(I Kings 12:10). Although the young men perceive the statement as strong and bold, in actuality, it reveals the king's pettiness and insecurities, qualities attributable to the Pharaoh of the Exodus (Roger, 2015).

- d. **Civil disobedience:** The people responded to Rehoboam's harshness by rebelling against the new king and making Jeroboam king over Israel (I Kings 12:16–20). Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin followed Rehoboam, son of Solomon (Gotquestions, 2021). The other ten tribes sided with Jeroboam. Rehoboam thought that the rebelling regions were joking and he sent Adoram to collect the usual high taxes, and Abiram met his sudden death. He was killed by the rebels and Rehoboam ran away (I Kings 12:18).
- e. **Power and Oppression:** First, it was Solomon who used power to oppress those Israelites that were not from his tribe. Second, his son Rehoboam used his power to harass those persons that were not from his tribe. Third, Rehoboam used his military might to intimidate the northern tribes (I Kings 12:21). I Kings 12:24 revealed that King Rehoboam gathered 180,000 warriors in an attempt to take back the ten tribes, but God prevented it, saying, "This is my doing". So King Rehoboam returned to Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. Jeroboam reigned from Shechem and later from Tirzah in Israel (Got questions, 2021).

Social injustice and Insecurity in Eastern Nigeria

Insecurity is aggravated by biased economic, political and social structures in the society. Pepple (2021) reveals that the issue of insecurity in the nation has invincible social sponsors like poverty and

unemployment; this contributes to frustration and anger that can result in one taking to armed robbery.

Since the beginning of 2021, Eastern Nigeria has continued to wallow in increasing insecurity levels. It has to be mentioned that Eastern Nigeria has Igbo as the dominant language. The people of Eastern Nigeria practise Christianity, with a percentage of the population practising African Traditional Religion and Islam. Eastern Nigeria has five states viz, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. Also, there are Igbo populations in Rivers, Delta, Cross River and Akwa Ibom.

The Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria feel highly marginalised by the government of Nigeria. These marginalisations are strongly believed to be from the economic, political and social spheres. How did the people of Eastern extraction respond to these sad developments? First, it they carried out civil disobedience to the Nigerian government. Second, militant groups arose that carried out attacks on security posts and outfits, such as police units, army posts and even prisons in Eastern Nigeria. Agbo (2021) reported that between February 23 and March 9, 2021, at least 10 police officers were killed and six police stations razed in a wave of attacks targeting security forces in the South-East and South-South regions of Nigeria.

On April 11, 2021, the governors of the five Eastern states and the heads of security agencies, such as the police, army navy, air force and other paramilitary agencies, met in Owerri, the Imo State capital. The reason for the choice of Imo was that it was the centre environment for the escalations in civil disobedience in Nigeria. According to reports, no fewer than 2, 000 inmates at the headquarters of the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCS), Owerri, Imo State were set free by unknown gunmen on April 5, 2021 (SaharaReporters, 2021:1). Ikechukwu (2021) reported that over 50 vehicles were destroyed and the entire police command was demobilised, literally.

The youths of Eastern Nigeria carried out serial agitations against the state and federal authorities. There were protests and calls for secession from Nigeria by the youths. In fact, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) became a prominent force of Igbo nationalism under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu in 2012, and prior to this, its leaders had been involved in pro-Biafran agitations through Radio Biafra, a station in London (Maiangwa, 2021). In further quest to achieve the supposed emancipation of Eastern Nigeria from the oppression, IPOB declared every Monday as work-free day for all Easterners. It was a call for secession for Eastern Nigeria.

Causes and Impacts of Insecurity in Eastern Nigeria

The major causes of the rising insecurity in Eastern Nigeria include the lack of justice, fairness and equity. Injustice is a lack of justice. It is alleged by the Eastern people that gross injustices have been perfected on them. According to Ikechukwu (2021),

. . . agents of the Nigerian state have behaved as if Ndigbo don't matter. They have treated the people with so much contempt and disdain and any attempt to express their frustration was seen as an affront and greater force are used to crush it. They are reminded through acts of omission and commission that they don't have a say in Nigeria. It is so bad that President Muhammadu Buhari asked a journalist who wanted to know why Ndigbo are being treated so disdainfully in his first and only official media chat locally: "What do the Igbo want?"

In a further appraisal, Itua (2021:1) quips that Nigeria has descended into a "depth of insecurity, due to the failure of governance across the country, and particularly because of inequities and injustices of political leadership in Nigeria. . . the perception of unfair and unequal treatment of citizens compounds the insecurity crisis". It is the imbalance or unjust treatment of the Eastern people that has led to this response by violence. Also, when justice is not given to the people of

Eastern Nigeria, the impression is that they are people from a different place (Anigbogu, 2021). Expressing shock, Odiegwu (2021:1) says:

Look at the northernisation policy going on in the country. Appointments are skewed in favour of the north, in total disregard to the feelings of other areas. Key positions in the Ministries, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Customs, Police, you name it, are all given to northerners. There are 17 security arms, 14 of them are headed by northerners. Yet one expects that there shall be national unity. Of course, it will not be possible. There must be dissatisfaction and agitation. For instance, look at what is happening in the South-East today. Our critical national assets are being attacked almost every day. People are killed, maimed. While one is gravely against such a method of expressing grievance, the people are pushed to the wall. The South-East geopolitical zone could rightly be described as the most disadvantaged.

In a twist of events, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, on 7th June, 2021, accused the north of being the brain behind the insecurity in the South-East geopolitical zone (Akpa, 2021). According to a report, the north is busy sending mercenaries to Eastern Nigeria to destroy properties and waste lives. They insisted that the north does not want Eastern Nigeria to be peaceful so that economic and social services will be crippled. In fact, the governor of Imo State stated that those who are doing the destruction in Eastern Nigeria, most of them were brought in from outside Imo State (Timilehin, 2021).

The militarization of Eastern Nigeria has further infuriated the people, especially the youths of the region. Hardly do you pass any highway in the region without seeing the presence of police and army tactically extorting from motorists. It is also alleged that security personnel now pay a high bribe for them to be posted to Eastern Nigeria because it is believed that extortion of civilians is a lucrative business. This has made youths to see security personnel as part of the oppressive structures that the federal government of Nigeria has placed to subdue

and subject the region to an abysmal state. Even after the civil war (massacre) that took the lives of millions of the Igbo people, there seems to be a harsh reality that the war is not over, especially when you see the heavy tribalism, hate, siege of opportunities, and unnecessary militarization of the Eastern part of Nigeria (Ajuzieogu, 2021).

The increasing insecurity levels have caused untold hardship on the people. It has led to loss of revenues due to the disruption of economic activities. Food crops that are usually transported from northern Nigeria to the east were stopped, owing to the increasing insecurity level. For instance, the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) issued a very strong advisory to all northerners who may wish to travel to the South East. The forum advised northerners to weigh the importance and necessity of such travels (AbdulGafar and Duruiheoma, 2021).

Hermeneutic Analysis: 1 Kings 12:1-24 and Eastern Nigeria

Israel came to endorse Rehoboam as king (1 Kings 12:1-3). The pericope reveals that the majority of the citizens in any organized society elect their leaders. Israel was an organized society. They gathered to endorse the kingship of Rehoboam, similar to what is obtainable in Nigeria. Nigeria's president is elected and endorsed by all Nigerians (North, East and West). During elections, all Nigerians, including citizens of Eastern region, go out to elect their leaders. Even after elections, all Nigerians trooped out to witness the coronation of their leader.

Citizens expect much from their leaders. Israelites expected Rehoboam to look into their plights and the social injustices against them by Solomon (1 Kings 12:4). They came to Rehoboam to complain about their predicament. The people thought that Rehoboam would ameliorate their plight, but the reverse was the case. Rehoboam, as with selfish leaders, decided to use delay gratification. He asked them to go back and come back in three days. This is similar to what is happening in Nigeria. Nigeria is immensely in tyrannical

leadership and ethnically inclined policies. The people of Eastern Nigeria have come up to put forward their pains and feeling of injustice by the Nigerian government. But, the Nigerian government has openly come out to defend their maltreatment of the people of Eastern Nigeria.

In I Kings 12:10, Rehoboam aligned with the bad people, whom he was part of. The bad people of his government advised him to continue to rule with oppression and injustices sustained by his predecessor. Rehoboam represents typical Nigerian leaders, who have continued to sustain the injustices meted out against the Igbo man since the end of the civil war. The Igbo man has been denied strategic positions in the scheme of things in Nigeria—army, police, airforce, navy, and the presidency. There is no seaport in Eastern Nigeria. There is total neglect of Eastern Nigeria in terms of good roads, hospitals and federal presence.

In I Kings 12:14, Rehoboam insisted on emphasizing the evil policies against the northern tribes that his government has sustained. He said: “My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.” This is a very disconcerting statement to a human being. Rehoboam did not hide his feelings, but insisted that he would continue to support his tribe, with lesser emphasis on the minority tribes. With respect to Eastern Nigeria, the federal government has continued to make it clear that it will never support the Igbo cause. For instance, the current Nigerian president said: “I hope you have a copy of the election results. The constituents, for example, gave me 97% [of the vote] cannot in all honesty be treated on some issues with constituencies that gave me 5%” (SaharaReporters, 2015). The constituencies that gave him 5% were the people of Eastern Nigeria. The federal government also made it clear that the Igbo man is just a dot in Nigeria, with negligible influence in the scheme of things in Nigeria, thus:

...is just like a dot in a circle. Even if they want to exit, they'll have no access to anywhere. And the way they are spread all over the country, having businesses and properties. I don't think IPOB knows what they are talking about. In any case, we say we'll talk to them in the language that they understand. We'll organise the Police and the military to pursue them.

This was a blatant and obscene threat to the people of Eastern Nigeria. Unfortunately, this has fuelled the hate of Easterners against other regions and made the Easterners continue to agitate for secession from the union called Nigeria.

Furthermore, the northern region felt betrayed by the government of Rehoboam. They finally resorted to secede. They said: "What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse's son? To your tents, Israel! Look after your own house, David!" This was a call for civil disobedience. People of northern Israel felt strongly sidelined in the scheme of things by the people of the north headed by Rehoboam. This is the state of things between the people of Eastern Nigeria and the government of Nigeria headed by Muhammadu Buhari. Instead of the political leaders of Eastern extraction to press home the citizens of Eastern Nigeria, they are busy fighting for a political future that is blunt. Osmund (2021:1) lamented that the only way out is for the region's political leaders to wake up from deep slumber and that they should worry less about their political future and take firm and decisive actions.

Recommendations

The following recommendations would help in resolving the increasing spate of insecurity in Eastern Nigeria.

1. There is the need to call for a national conference where the peace, growth, and development of Nigeria would be discussed. In this conference, the demands of the Igbo people

should be listened to, and where need be, emphasis must be placed on the demands.

2. The Federal Government of Nigeria should see all Nigerians as part and parcel of Nigeria. There should be no segregation between the Igbo person and other Nigerians. This will engender peace, unity and, in the long-run, development.
3. The intimidation of the people of Eastern Nigeria by the presidency is uncalled for. The federal government should stop using hate speech to harass and mentally enslave Easterners.
4. The African values of love, unity and honesty which are the hallmarks of social justice should be emphasised by the Federal Government of Nigeria, rather than the growing nepotism, hubris, and narcissistic lifestyle of the federal government.
5. Social workers should begin serious sensitization of the youths in villages in Eastern Nigeria. Most of these youths are on drugs due to the harsh economic conditions they find themselves in. They are the ones that are mostly involved in the destruction of lives and property. These should be made to know that destruction of lives and property is not good and it is highly at the disadvantage of the citizens of Eastern Nigeria.

Conclusion

No country survives underdevelopment in the midst of social injustice and governance entrenched in nepotism. The insecurity in Eastern Nigeria is just a form of civil disobedience to the escalating social injustices from the federal government to the people of the region. I Kings 12 provides civil ways of resolving conflicts that favour all ethnic groups. It is the authoritarian leadership that resulted in the secession call by the northern tribes. It is also the root cause of the agitation by the northern tribes against Rehoboam's leadership. Nigeria has a lot to benefit from this development in the pericope. Justice, fairness and tranquility should be the watchword of whatever government is in power—at the federal level in Nigeria. This will help

to curb the rising insecurity in Eastern Nigeria. Eastern Nigeria is part and parcel of Nigeria and is needed if Nigeria is to ever attain sustainable development goals.

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