© IIJP 2026 | Volume 2, Issue 3, pp. 1453-1461| ISSN: 2636-4484

LITERARY AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS AND MEDIATIONS OF NEIGHBOURLINESS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

Ven. Samuel Ayodele Ibimodi, PhD
Department of Christian Religious Studies, Federal University Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria.
samuelibimodi85@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO
Article No.: 0525
Accepted Date: 01/08/2026
Published Date: 02/09/2026
Type: Research

ABSTRACT
The term "neighbour" can be explained as a person who lives near or next to you. This can also mean a nearby object, a bordering country or any fellow human being. In the Old Testament, the term means a fellow Israelite, a member of the same covenant community or a compatriot rather than someone just living nearby. It implies a bond of kinship, shared faith, and covenant responsibility extending to resident foreigners but distinct from distant hostile nations. The term, "neighbour" is derived from the Hebrew word *rea,* it implies more than just physical proximity and denotes a close associate, friend or relative. In the Old Testament, "neighbourliness" acts as a foundational covenant ethic that mediates communal survival, requiring fair trade, resource sharing, and the protection of vulnerable groups. For contemporary Nigerians, these ancient literary and cultural paradigms offer profound models to bridge ethnic divides, combat corruption and foster social cohesion in a pluralistic society. Old Testament neighbourliness was highly ethnocentric and bound by purity laws. These texts present others (foreigners) with inherent bias. For contemporary Nigerians, this challenges inter-ethnic and inter-religious coexistence, necessitating critical re-interpretation to promote inclusive national unity over tribal division. This inter-ethnic and inter-religious coexistence has posed lots of threat to lives and properties emanating from insecurity in some parts of the country and this is the area that this paper opines to investigate using historical-critical and theological methods, and findings are derived from the exegetical study of Leviticus 19:9 – 18.

Keywords: Neighbour, Literary, Cultural, Mediation, Israelites and Nigerians

Introduction

The topic of this paper, "literary and cultural representations and mediations of neighbourliness in the Old Testament, implications for contemporary Nigeria," appears apt, deeper, timely and thoughtful considering the daily adverse happenings in Nigeria where the term "neighbourliness" also appears to be meaningless in the context. It is therefore wise that we get the meaning of the various concepts right just by a few explanations of "Literary Representation of Neighbourliness," "Cultural Representations of Neighbourliness," and the "Mediations of Neighbourliness."

a. **Literary Representation of Neighbourliness:** By literary representations of neighbourliness, the paper meant that literature is capable of representing neighbourliness not just as physical proximity, but as an ethical requirement and a connection across cultural, religious and socioeconomic divides. Here, neighbour is often seen as a mirror for the self, exploring how shared humanity triumphs over prejudice and misunderstanding.
b. **Cultural Representations of Neighbourliness:** The cultural representation of neighbourliness includes the social norms, moral obligations, and practices of peaceful coexistences that characterize how people in close relationships interact. This therefore is seen as a model for human relationship, enquiring into societal prioritization of close interdependence or personal privacy and boundaries.
c. **The Mediations of Neighbourliness:** Here, Neighbour mediation is seen as a voluntary, confidential process where a trained, impartial third party helps neighbour resolve conflicts without assigning blame. It focuses on improving communication and creating mutually agreeable solutions to restore long-term peace.

Neighbourliness in this context is seen as a strong term and weapon that is capable of destroying the barrier of marginalization, sectionalism, hatred, acrimony, religious and ethnic divides so that the country can enjoy peaceful ethnic, interracial and inter-religious coexistences in Nigeria, not minding the widely abuses that are experienced daily. Ibimodi (2024, 30) in his reflection on neighbourliness, seeing how the brothers of Joseph treated him therefore asserts that, "Joseph least expected that his brothers from the same father would, for whatever reason hate him, but it became a reality when they started demonstrating their hatred for him. Though the brothers of Joseph were excessively jealous and hated him the more, but they forgot that nothing can change destiny. They forgot that what will be, will be and that, destiny can be delayed, but it can never be denied. God revealed the destiny of Joseph to him through the dreams that he had. Instead of his brothers to accept, encourage, wish him well and support him through prayers for the fulfillment of the dreams at the appropriate time, they rather demonstrated hatred for him by trying to kill him." From the above, the brothers of Joseph were supposed to protect him, provide for him and guide him but instead, they betrayed and sold him to foreigners who eventually became his task masters. Judging from the assertion of Ibimodi on his thoughts on how Joseph's brother betrayed him, if then the question is asked nowadays in Nigeria that, "who is your neighbour?" Hardly can anybody point at the nearest person to him or her as his or her neighbour. But, if the question is turned around that, "who is your enemy?" definitely, many people will have a lot to say.

The idea of neighbourliness is therefore paralyzed in hatred when evil out-weighs good deeds on a daily basis in Nigeria. Moshay (2002, 59) infers that, "matters on religion are complex. In a speech on the need for peaceful coexistence of Muslims and Christians in the world, and particularly in Nigeria, General Ibrahim Babangida of Nigeria wrote: it may be a

theological question whether God reveals himself or he reveals religion through his messenger, his prophet or his son, irrespective of the position one takes on this issue, one should be reasonable enough to know that God, like the father of any household, can never be satisfied with members of the family who quarrel, fight, undermine and sometimes kill one another in his name." Here, one might say that General Ibrahim Babangida was entitled to his opinion; however there are elements of truth in his submission. The matter of religions becoming more complex and ambiguous than it used to be every day needs to be re-examined. Religions are supposed to play a unifying role by bringing people of the same religious believes together. People of other inter-faith relations in inter-religious dialogues are supposed to enjoy good relationships and fellowship as neighbours instead of the hostility that is commonly noticed among them today. Well, considering the submission of General Ibrahim Babangida, from the perspectives of the religious, ethnic and security crises we are experiencing almost every day in Nigeria, the answer is clear that the next person communicating and sitting nearest to you, or your so-called friend or family member who should have been your good neighbour may turn out to be your enemy. A neighbour may be seen as enemy when it appears that he/she is trying to dominate and be in control of everything at all cost. This can easily breed hatred among the people especially when marginalization and hatred are setting in. In support of the above claim, Boer (2004, 41) posits that, "Nigerian Christians are of the opinion that Muslims have a natural instinct for domination. They have a need to dominate. They feel uncomfortable when not dominant. Tanko Yusuf had a conviction, born in the fire of experience that Islam, especially in its fundamentalist expression, seeks to control the entire world, including Nigeria. This is one of Nigeria's two major struggles, the other is corruption. He did not regard Muslim's push for domination as an aberration in Islam. It is an expression of its deepest nature. In Islam, religion and government are one and the same." From the above, Tanko Yusuf in Boer is opionated that no religion is greater or better than the other. For him, religious inferiority should not be allowed. Tanko therefore thinks that instead of the Muslims to claim that their religion is better, and that they should dominate and occupy important government positions anywhere they find themselves, they should rather see people of other religions also as important personalities are also entitled to such claim.

Muslims are expected to see people of other religions as their neighbour, they should tolerate each other and in peace coexist towards a sustainable growth and development of their land and economy in Nigeria. In the contemporary Nigerian society, as a good neighbour to one another, we should have outgrown the diversity of long hatred, acrimony and conflicts that existed among communities, tribes and families. Unfortunately, where love and genuine forgiveness should have been noticed, the reverse is the case. According to Thieme (2012, 19), "from the moment of birth, every person, regardless of age or gender, regardless of status in life, is in the midst of the great war. No one knows exactly when it began, and no man can end it." The insurgencies, insecurities, killings, kidnapping, and the outburst of moral decadences that we now experienced daily around us are the direct result of not seeing the next person to you as your neighbour because if you do, you will rather love the person and continually seek his good than planning his downfall and hurts. Harper, Greathouse and Beals (1989, 61) concluded that, "our non-resistance does not mean we become weaklings. In such love for enemy there is strength; there is power to overcome the forces of evil. It is eternally true that 'a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a hash word stirs up anger, (Prov. 15:1).'Also, in Nigeria today, people are afraid of giving arms and gifts to the poor and needy especially on the road because of the fear that what they have given could be used against them. This therefore contributed to the increase in the

level of poverty because of fear. The article therefore advocates the use of discretion in giving, practicing genuine love and forgiveness and constantly seeing everybody around you as your neighbour.

Methodology

The paper calls for a careful investigation of the notable daily happenings in Nigeria, adopting historical – critical and theological analytical method to carry out the writing, the exegetical study of Leviticus 19:9 – 18 therefore becomes invaluably necessary to get findings and recommendations.

Historical and Literary Context of Leviticus 19:9 – 18

Looking at the larger or wider context of the biblical account in Leviticus 19:9 – 18, one may challenge the idea of neighbourliness, the golden rule and the holiness code that Leviticus 19:9 – 18 talks about. Deuteronomy 20:16 – 18 made it clear that, "but in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, 17 but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the LORD your God has commanded, 18 that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the LORD your God." Although true love for God and for neighbour was emphasized in Leviticus 19:9 – 18, but the opinion in Deuteronomy 20;16 – 18 appears to be contradictory, because according to the story, the former occupants of the Canaan Land were commanded to be totally destroyed by the Israelites so that they would not be corrupted by them (their enemies) as they re-possess the land. For emphasis, total destruction here does not give us the true idea of neighbourliness but hate and anger and where people resort to war in resolving their differences or conflict through the destruction of lives and properties, then the chances for sustainable growth and development becomes slim.

Be it as it may, Leviticus 19:9 – 18 is situated within the "holiness code" (Leviticus 17 – 26), consisting of the moral, civil and ritual laws given to Moses at Mount Sinai. Theses verses outline socioeconomic justice, agricultural welfare for the poor and interpersonal respect that ends in the main command to "love your neighbour as yourself." The disobedient are reminded of the imminent retribution of Yahweh through the pronouncement of his priests and prophets in Ancient Israel. God's nature to bless the obedient still remains and he will not hesitate to punish the disobedient. Similarly, considering the evil acts of the two sons of Eli, the priest in Ancient Israel and how God punished them, Ibimodi (2024, 11) therefore noted that, "all the evil practices of both the people of Israel and the two sons of Eli, Ophni and Phinehas, made God to threaten the destruction of his people by the hands of the Philistines, their enemies, when God used them to raise up war against the Israelites because of their refusal to repent, be obedient and serve him with all diligence, reverence and awe." So God want his people to be law abiding citizens and to love and coexist with each other so that they can continually enjoy his profound peace and blessings.

Grammatical and Linguistic Context of Leviticus 19:9 – 18

Leviticus 19:9 – 18, part of the holiness code, details how God's moral character translates into everyday ethical and social behavior. Grammatically, it uses a series of jussives (commands in the third person or prohibitions) and imperatives, punctuated by the recurring motive clause "I am the Lord" to anchor the ethical mandates in divine authority.

Grammatical Structures

a. **Jusatives and Imperatives:** The passage relies heavily on negative command (*lo* + Imperfect verb, meaning "you shall not") to prohibit social wrongs like stealing, lying and grudging.
b. **Conditional Infinitives:** Verses begin with temporal or conditional constructs (such as "when you reap the harvest of your land") using infinitive constructs with prefixes to set real-life scenarios for ethical action.
c. **Reflective Suffixes:** The climax in verse 18 uses the prepositional suffix *kamoha* ("as yourSelf"), establishing an absolute grammatical and ethical equivalence between the self-regard of the actor and the treatment of the neighbour (*rea*)

Linguistic and Literary Context

a. **Micro-Ethics and the Decalogue:** Linguistically, the vocabulary mirrors the Ten Commandments (e.g. stealing, false witness, honouring names), shifting corporate ritual obligations into everyday civil and interpersonal speech.
b. **Repetitive Framing:** The text uses the anchor formula, *Ani YHWH* ("I am the Lord") to punctuate ethical demands, transforming grammar from simple legal statute into relational covenant.
c. **Key Term Precision:** Words like *rea* (neighbour/companion) and *ani* (poor/afflicted) define a tight social sphere that progressively broadens to include the *ger* (stranger/sojourner).

Exegetical Study of Leviticus 19:9 – 18

Leviticus 19:9-18: And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleaning of thy harvest. [10] And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather the fallen fruit of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the LORD your God. [11] Ye shall not steal; neither shall ye deal falsely, nor lie one to another. [12] And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, so that thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD. [13] Thou shalt not oppress thy neighbour, nor rob him: the wages of a hired servant shall not abide with thee all night until the morning. [14] Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but thou shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD. [15] Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour. [16] Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD. [17] Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbour, and not bear sin because of him. [18] Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

a. **Provision for the Poor and the Less Privilege (vv. 9 – 10):** From the text, verses 9 – 10 emphasized the need to show genuine love and care to the poor and strangers among the ancient people of Israel by leaving part of their harvested crops behind for them to re-harvest. This will help them also to be fed and take care of their needs as much as possible. Today in Nigeria, the attitude of caring for the poor, strangers, sick and needy is gradually fading away. While some people understand the need to do it, some simply shun the command. Some even have the habit of delaying their workers' salaries after working on their field. This paper frowns at such attitude and suggests that the strong should care for the less privilege, the weak, the poor and the strangers. There is nothing wrong if the Church, the government, non-government organizations (NGOs) and communal efforts can provide for the elderly, the weak, the poor, the strangers and the

less privilege communities among us in Nigeria to show that they have not been marginalized. In Nigeria today, politics seems to be shortest route to wealth, but while others use it wrongly by trampling upon the right of the elderly, the weak, the poor, workers, youths and marginalized communities, it can actually be used by the God-fearing politicians as a strong weapon to cater for the needs of their people.

b. **Being Honest in all Your Dealings (vv. 11 – 16):** It was clear from the text-verses that stealing, false dealings, telling lie, false swearing, oppression of neighbour, robbing, refusal to pay workers wages and salaries, inflicting pains on the deaf and the blind, and unrighteous judgments and injustices are forbidden among the people of God in Ancient Israel. This is a true demonstration of love among the people so that in genuine expression of love to one another, hateful speech, destructive attitudes and the inflictions of either physical, emotional or spiritual pains on a fellow neighbour are forbidden in Ancient Israel. This paper is also saying to the present day Nigerians that we should see somebody else who comes in contact with us as our neighbour, friend and fellow citizen who needs help and care because if we see them as true neighbours, citizens, friends, comrades and fellow, then, the thought of harming, destruction of lives and properties, ritual killings, stealing, engaging in false dealings, telling lie, false swearing, oppression, robbing, refusal to pay workers wages and salaries, inflicting pains on the deaf and the blind, and unrighteous judgments and injustices will be seen as a sin against God and humanity.

c. **The Golden Rule of Love (vv. 17 – 18):** Verses 17 – 18 was very direct in the expectation of the citizens of Israel to their fellow neighbour that God hated hatred in your heart against your neighbour. God expected forgiveness from his people by rebuking each other in love instead bearing sin because of hatred. God don't expect his people in Ancient Israel to take vengeance or bear grudge but rather to show genuine lovee through caring, kindness, and meeting of the needs of one another in love. The emphasis in verse 18 therefore remains the love for our neighbour as ourselves. This is the same message as the golden command from God to Nigerians that we should stop hatred, violence, fighting, marginalizing and destruction of lives and properties through ethnic, religious and political crises. We should forgive one another despite religious diversity and ethnicity. We should correct each other in love; stop taking the law into our hands by doing jungle justice through killing of a fellow citizen who has the same life, body, soul and spirit as you all in the name of religion and hooliganism. Nigerians should understand that they cannot use violence to resolve violence, therefore, the place of conflict resolution, religious and inter-faith dialogue to resolve the current trend of insurgency cannot be over emphasized.

6. **Theological Evaluation of Leviticus 19:9 – 18**

Usually, Leviticus 19:9 – 18 refers to as the heart of the "holiness code" in the Old Testament links vertical worship with horizontal ethics. It ascertains that true holiness is not merely cultic or ritualistic, but fundamentally relational and grounded in the character of God. This is demonstrated in the holiness as the imitation of God, divine provision and social justice, moral integrity and economic fairness, impartial justice, and interpersonal harmony and the "Golden Rule," the love for ones neighbour.

The Concept of Neighbourliness as an Inter-Ethnic, Inter-Religious and Political Ideology for Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria

Neighbourliness in Nigeria is an important socio-cultural and political structure for peaceful coexistence which is used to solve country's complex ethnic and religious divides. It gives emphasis to shared community values, empathy, and mutual respect, urging citizens to put interpersonal union and civic responsibility first over sectarian identities.

a. **The Inter-Ethnic Ideology for Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria:** Unlike the ancient people of Israel that communicate in the same dialect (Hebrew), Nigeria comprises of over 250 ethnic groups, making tribal identity a regular reason for tension. Neighbourliness addresses this by grounding human relationships in spatial relationships rather than ethnic source. The ideology promotes the idea that one's immediate physical community (sharing streets, markets and workplaces) shapes the most important unit of identity. By promoting cooperation among neighbours, this concept builds localized social capital and weakens ethnic individuality.
b. **The Inter-Religious Ideology for Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria:** Both Christianity and Islam, the two main religions in Nigeria, puts an important stress on loving one's neighbour and showing hospitality to strangers. As an ideology, neighbourliness influences these shared sacred writing mandates to encourage inter-religious tolerance and dialogue. It does not encourage religious bigotry as it promotes acts of kindness and mutual support in times of festivity or crisis, bridging divides at the grassroots level.
c. **Political Ideology and National Unity for Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria:** Neighbourliness, based on political level, forms the foundation of civic duty, national integration and patriotism. By identifying that everybody are participants in the "Nigerian Project," politicians and community leaders are advised to support justice, fairness, and inclusive governance across all demographics.

Implications of Literary and Cultural Representations and Mediations for Neighbourliness to Contemporary Nigeria

Literary and cultural representations mediate neighbourliness in contemporary Nigeria by exposing the frailty of ethno-religious coexistence and by building empathy through shared humanizing narratives.

a. **Revealing the Frailty of Coexistence:** Contemporary Nigerian literature often question how physical proximity does not automatically assure communal harmony. Works exploring Northern Nigerian fiction depicts neighbourhoods where historical harmony has been shattered by sectarian violence and political manipulation. These narratives imply that urban migration and indigene-settler tensions have severely strained the trust between diverse communities.
b. **Fostering Empathy and Shared Identity:** literature and oral traditions act as bridges that combat negative stereotypes and ethnic bigotry. By putting readers in the shoes of characters from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, writers foster a deeper understanding of the other.
c. **Leveraging Traditional Conflict Mediation:** Cultural representations highlight the necessity of relying on homegrown, indigenous frameworks for resolving neighbourhood disputes. Traditional institutions as the kingship groups and local town unions are repeatedly shown to be more effective, accessible and culturally relevant than formal legal systems. Literature reminds contemporary Nigerians of the value of collective mediation, negotiation, and reconciliation in restoring community ties. Reflecting on that assertion, Mambula (2009,

35) in Hoogerwerf, et al, (1983, 28) noted that, "peace is shattered whenever people of power and privilege exploit the weak for their own personal, political or economic gain. How can the Church in where some live lavishly while many starve, in a nation where civil rights are trampled upon and citizens exploited in personal relationships, where one person or group in the name of religion dominates, uses, and abuse others? Such injustice breads violence and the Bible see it as violence, because the humanity and God's image of persons are violated by it."

d. **Promoting Cultural Diplomacy:** Cultural events and festivals, such as National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST), act as institutional mediations of neighbourliness. These cultural platforms celebrate Nigeria's diversity and force different ethnic nationalities to interact, transforming potential sources of cultural conflict into opportunities for mutual collaboration.

Conclusion

Unlike the ancient community of Israel whose religion is Judaism and speaks the dialect of Hebrew, Nigeria is rather a complex and multifaceted nation with diverse ethnicity and religious affinity. It is a multi-cultural and interfaith related nation with diverse ideologies. The paper is saying that, to have a perfect understanding of neighbourliness in the context of Nigeria, Nigerians must learn to in love tolerate and peacefully coexist with each other so as to encourage sustainable growth and development of their economy. While urbanization is good, the rural settlements and localities should not be neglected to be under developed so that they will not feel marginalized at any point which can easily trigger crises if not well managed. The government, religious bodies and the traditional leaders should organize programmes that will promote peaceful coexistence among citizens. The paper is also saying that the poor, needy, strangers, orphans, the weak, the youths, the elderly and the physically challenged should be catered for and be empowered for self sustenance while all manner of ungodliness should be avoided in order to make Nigeria a better habitable place for every citizen. The government should also uphold righteousness and be fair in justice and there should be evenly distribution of political appointments which include positions, employment, and social amenities to show that they are all one united nation. CAN (2006, 14) asserts that, "Nehemiah and Daniel are outstanding examples of high level public servants who worked for non-Israelite governments. Esther is a wonderful example of first lady who feared God and used her influence to promote justice in the kingdom. God is calling people today to follow the example of these outstanding biblical characters." Everyone is therefore encouraged to shun evil and anything that could cause division, hatred, crisis or sentiments among the people for the betterment of our nation, Nigeria.

References

Boer, J.A., 2004. *Christians why this Muslim Violence?* Belleville, Ontario, Canada: Essence Publishing.

Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), 2006. *Nigerian Christian Creed on Governance.* Abuja: CAN.

Fasola, L.F., 1999. *Dialogue: Conflict or Cooperation?* Ibadan: Santop Printing Company.

Harper, A.F., Greathouse W.M., & Beals, I.A., 1989. *Matthew Vital Teachings of Jesus.* USA: Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Ibimodi, S.A., 2024. *Sexual Sin: An Explorative Study of Joseph as a Model for Youths.* Kabba: Ven. Dr. Samuel Ayodele Ibimodi.

…….. *The Ark of the Covenant: Learning from Israel's Failure.* Kabba: Ven. Dr. Samuel Ayodele Ibimodi.

Mambula, M.A., 2009. *Are there limits to Pacificism? The Nigerian Context.* Kaduna: Prudent Universal Publishing Co. Ltd.

Moshay, G.J.O., 2002. *Who is this Allah.* USA: Bishara Publishers

Ossai-Ugbah, C., 2014. *Survival in a Hostile Environment.* Benin City: Ambik Press.

Thieme, R.B., 2012. *The Angelic Conflict, the Spiritual Combat.* USA: R.B. Thieme, Jr.