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Bright Alozie

Portland State University, balozie@pdx.edu

Ngozika Anthonia Obi-Ani

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**PUBLIC MORALITY AND ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CHAUVINISM IN NIGERIA: WHY HISTORY MATTERS**

**ALOZIE BRIGHT CHIAZAM, OBI-ANI NGOZIKA ANTHONIA**

Department of History and International Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria. Email: donbright4all@yahoo.com

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**ABSTRACT**

Indubitably, history is a branch of knowledge which stretches way back to the beginning of time in human civilization and ipso facto, contributes to the shaping of a society's past and future as well. As Marcus Mosiah Garvey (1887–1940) puts it, a people without the knowledge of the history, origin, and culture are like a tree without roots. Therefore, since development is a product of change, and the subject matter of history focuses on continuity and change, it follows that development can only be understood and appreciated within the context of history. This article examines the relevance of history as a discipline to the nation-building process of Nigeria especially in this age when developmental breakthroughs are rabidly manifest before the comity of nations. It investigates why history in Nigeria has been sacrificed on the platform of intellectual negligence and why Nigeria is disconnected from her past. The focus of this paper is on public morality - the conduct of leaders in public service – and how abrasive corruption and ethno-religious chauvinism has affected nation-building process in Nigeria. While drawing lessons from Nigeria's past, the paper maintains that in an environment where corruption and ethno-religious chauvinism are the criteria for success in public life, public morality and national integrity are often replaced by chaos and instability which in no way foster cohesive nation-building, and until Nigeria learns from history, she may well be heading to the doldrums. Finally, the paper posits that any society that hopes to be transformed progressively and eventually achieve sustainable development must necessarily turn to history which is central to the humanities.

**Keywords:** History, Nigeria, Nation-building, Public Morality, Corruption, Ethno-religious Chauvinism.

**INTRODUCTION**

There is a nexus between history and nation-building. In fact, the role of history in nation building has now acquired its history in Nigeria. Of course, history played an invaluable role in the nation's independence. It was a critical weapon used to deconstruct the psychological colonialist construct that sought to undermine African achievements and thus provide the ideological basis for colonial rule. According to Afigbo [1] (1975. p. 4), the ability of the historian to rise to the challenge of demystifying colonialism and shattering its basis provided the needed intellectual and psychological succor to the African. Thus, for the European, it extricated him from the socio-political and moral basis on which to continue his colonial enterprise in Africa. This is to emphasize that history served as a veritable tool in the struggle to secure Nigeria's independence. Since independence, new challenges of development and national integration have continued to plague the nation. Unfortunately, the nation has been so quick to forget the role history played in the past and the continued need to deploy it in combating new challenges. Indeed, the work of historians focused on deepening our understanding of the challenges of the nascent independent state. However, the incidence of military rule with the concomitant plummeting of our intellectual life as a people deprived us of the benefits of these works. Knowledge, which is the main contribution of history to the development package, consequently began to play a minimal role in our national life. Decisions on several aspects of people's lives were taken without recourse to our past experience. The consequence is the persistent crises that have enveloped and pervaded the socioeconomic and political spheres of the country [2].

It is a commonplace to refer to the world that we live in as a knowledge-driven one and as historians, we know that in the history of humankind, the role knowledge plays in the development of any nation and its people cannot be underestimated. However, for knowledge to triumph and become useful for the transformation of society, it must be rooted in tradition. In a multi-national state like Nigeria, there must be a common tradition to unite the people in an over-riding sense of commitment to the nation. History can provide roots, a foundation for the country [3]. In fact, as Africans, our destiny lies in our understanding and appreciation

of our history. No civilization current or past has achieved any significant development based on their rejection of its indigenous culture, worldview and history, and wholehearted unreserved importation of foreign ideas and ways of life. By extension, the world is an extension of history. History is therefore the source of all that has come to be. Hence, what has happened with the emergence of the world, what happened thereafter, what is currently happening, and what is likely to happen are all embodiments of history (Ochefu and Ogbogbo, 2006. p. 80).

As the mother of all knowledge known to man, there is virtually no field of study and endeavor that does not encompass history. For example, accountants use the "historical methods" to balance their books, a medical examination cannot proceed without a history of the patient, lawyers rely on "precedents" to establish a point of law, to solve a crime the police must "investigate" the incident, the major difference between an architect and a draughtsman is in the knowledge of "art history" that the architect possesses (Ochefu and Ogbogbo, 2006. p. 81). In like manner, any nation that craves for development needs history. In the nation-building process, history is a necessary prerequisite. Due to the fact that Nigerian statesmen lack a proper sense of history, politics of the belly and that of the moment dominate the polity. Merit is consequently slaughtered on the slab of power profiteering. With all these virulent vices, development at all levels in Nigeria remains a wild goose chase. To escape from this seemingly inescapable quagmire, there is an urgent need to imbue Nigerians with an enduring sense of history. As Professor Ajayi (1990. p. 41) [4] once submitted,

The nation suffers which has no sense of history. Its values remain superficial and ephemeral unless imbued with a deep sense of continuity and perception of success and achievement that transcends acquisition of temporary power or transient wealth. Such a nation cannot achieve a sense of purpose or direction or stability and without them the future is bleak.

It is in this light that a study of this nature becomes of the essence. As part of efforts geared toward the historical awakening of Nigerians and the sustainability of the Nigerian environment, this paper will, *inter-alia*, have a general overview of the relevance of history in the

21<sup>st</sup> nation-building process in Nigeria; focusing on the conduct of public officers in the discharge of their national duties. Indeed, factors such as corruption and ethnic chauvinism have eaten deep into the Nigerian society. By undertaking research into the adverse effects of corruption, tribalism and the abuse of leadership in the nation-building process in Nigeria, historians would make available, contributions to the citizen's understanding of the nation's developmental problems [5]. The submission is that a systematic historical study of problems that affect nation building would be an asset to Nigeria due to the important lessons they entail. It is against this backdrop that the two enigmas – corruption and ethnic chauvinism – which have been the bane of post-independence Nigeria will be discussed. Without a doubt, both ugly trends are incompatible with public morality and nation building in Nigeria.

#### NATION-BUILDING AND THE VALUE OF HISTORY

Throughout history, from the time of Socrates to our modern age, the human race has sought restively answers to the fundamental questions of life; who are we and why are we here? Man has, however, endeavored to proffer solutions to some of these unsolvable problems by seeking after the truth. Moreover, one of the major ways he has been doing this is by perusing facts about the past. The role of history in the nation building process cannot be minimized at all. It goes without gainsaying that any nation that ignores its past, or which is scared of its past and all its great lessons are definitely bound to be ignorant of the background to its contemporary challenges [5]. Such nation is also incapable of forging ahead into a vigorous and certain future. There is one fact that is almost foolproof – no individual can run away from himself as it will be impossible for any nation to estrange herself from her history. The truth, however, is that there are always two sides to every coin. Nations are free to choose either to be guided by an accurate sense of history and be saved or neglect history – the super highway to eternal damnation. As clearly demonstrated by Hegel, history leads the Wiseman and drags the fool. According to Uzoigwe (1989) [6], "history is like Mother Nature; you cannot cheat it. It hangs over the head of every nation like the sword of Damocles. It is difficult to move; but whenever it moves, it is purposive and unsmiling. It does not suffer fools. It makes those who provoke it or try to cheat it pay dearly." As Whitney (1948. p. 13) [7] rightly puts it, history involves an integrated narration or description of past events or facts written in a spirit of critical inquiry for the whole truth. History does not just concern itself with the dead past, stories, and records and this is where its relevance comes to play. The past that the historian peers into are one that is fundamentally allied to the living present. The historian turns to the past from an understanding that it is the father of the present [8], implying that the present is the child of the past. Consequently, as Okpoh (2004) [9] argues that although the study of historians begins with the past, it does not end in or with the past. Thus, the historian turns to the past because he genuinely feels that both the past and present are inseparably linked.

Nation-building on its own is a concept that defies any concrete definitions. It is a concept that has come to be used synonymously with national integration, national development, and political development [5]. According to Rotgak (2004. p. 20) [10], cited in Ani (2011. p. 11) [5], nation-building deals with the dynamic transition to meet up with the responsibility of providing for the citizenry the basic resources for existential survival. The achievement of this task is dependent on the mobilization of the economic, political, and socio-educational factors. Put succinctly, nation-building is the process of mobilizing socio-cultural, political, and economic forces of a nation to transform the lives of the citizenry of the nation, while moving the state to a new level of civilization [5]. Whither history than in the process of nation-building?

Over the years, scholars have debated on the role of history in society. According to critics of the subject, "history teaches no lesson" or "history is bunk" [11]. For these critics, history, unlike science, cannot predict

the future with accurate precision. For others, history and historians do not produce anything that adds to national development. Those coming from the economic point of view assert that history is not a service sector and thus does not manufacture any goods. As a matter of fact, they have hauled history over the coals for not providing employment for graduates as in the social sciences. However, we might ask; how much of all these are true? Is history bunk, without lessons? History is not bunk; on the contrary, historical lessons are abundant. There is, in fact, no single national policy and development process that is not based on the historical experiences of the nation. It is important to educate critics of history that the discipline deals with human beings who are dynamic rather than subject to static scientific laws. This underscores the relevance of history in nation building and development. The problem is that as free moral agents and dynamic beings, while exercising our free will, we seem to be affected by myopia that prevents us from seeing and learning from the failures and achievements of our predecessors [12]. Two concrete illustrations will suffice. The people of England revolted against the Stuart absolutist monarchs in the 17<sup>th</sup> century due to arbitrary taxation. The immediate cause of the French revolution of 1789 was the refusal of the nobles and the clergy to bear their share of the financial burden [12]. Few questions arise out of this: Does not these examples portray that human experience tends to repeat itself? Have racism, imperialism, dictatorship, diplomatic relations, terrorism, reform, religious intolerance, corruption, war, peace, and nation building not also been recurrent episodes in history? Is it then unwise to probe the past to discover how such problems affected our society and how our predecessors also handled them? This is where history comes to play.

According to Marwick (1984. p. 52) [13], history is a necessity to the transformation of every society and a society without history will have difficulty finding its bearing. The mention of nation-building as one of the recurrent themes of history naturally leads us to the contribution historical education can make in the process of national development. Unfortunately, our policymakers still find it extremely difficult to appreciate what development entails. Thus, although our second National Development Plan, 1970-1974 declared the building of "a united, strong and self-reliant nation" as one of the five main objectives of the federal government, the authorities did not consider history important enough to be taught as a compulsory subject either at the primary or secondary schools or both. And yet, history is unquestionably the most potent academic discipline for the inculcation of national pride and patriotism [12]. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, the discipline of history means nothing to our political leaders. What they do not know, or rather what they know and fail to appreciate, is that everything has a history and history as a discipline covers everything. Even the scientist studying science will in part be studying the history of science. History, thus, becomes a meeting point for different disciplines, which enlightens the human society on possible ways of development. One may attribute attempts to exclude history from our educational system as a deliberate agenda of Nigerian elites toward their quest to continue to keep the generality of the people in perpetual ignorance. The day we learn to appreciate history, the Nigerian masses will be free [14].

If history is a constant rewriting and reinterpretation, it is also a cumulative development. Seeing where our predecessors were entrapped by the fallacies of their age, we are better equipped to avert the fallacies of our age. The relationship between history and a nation's development is very well summarized thus:

... History interacts with the nation for the nation is a product of history in the sense of historical circumstance and event, and therefore the nation cannot escape from its past. At the same time, the nation is shaped by the effort of history among others, who try to establish the history of the nation, influence its group memory and seek to define its nationality. That is the essence of what binds its people together what constitutes their identity, what makes them a people distinct from other peoples [15].

Indeed, what historical understanding does essentially for any nation is to place its development predicament within national time perspectives of human evolution. This is the utility value of history. History also helps people not to under-value what they are and overvalue what they are not. It provides confidence-building strategies to any nation that is striving to overcome present problems. In essence, history helps states identify their peculiarities; the things that characterize and distinguish a state from other states. Thus, history investigates into the values inherent in states' past action. The ingenuity and achievements of a state in the past actually defines what a state is. It allows a better study of what a state is doing in its nation-building process [5]. Indeed, the benefit of hindsight is brought to bear on the responsibility of present development [16]. Our institutions and values persist only because a sense of history and tradition has always been part of our people's way of life. Thus, it is not out of place to state that society itself is history and as Carr (1969. p. 4) [17] states that history is a social process, that is, the reciprocal process of interaction between the society of today and the society of yesterday. Hence, it is safe to posit that the past is intelligible to us only in the light of the present; and we can fully understand the present state of our nation's development and progress in the light of the past, that is what we could and could not do in the past so as to correct the present. If a nation is ready to identify herself in terms of her origin and past, if a nation considers the traditional dynastic breakthroughs of her past, if a nation considers the developmental behavior of her proud monarchies, and if a nation extracts the sanity ethics of her traditional and modern religions, the nation would no doubt automatically adopt the best positive culture that would speed up their nation-building process [5]. The history of a nation's past can definitely create sustainable development and functional display of the wonders of modern science and technology, which cannot be properly initiated or even transferred without the right knowledge of scientific history. Strangely and sadly though, history in Nigeria has been sacrificed before the low altar of intellectual negligence. The outcome of this is that Nigeria has been disconnected from her past and as such, the citizenry easily neglect the multiple past challenges of nation building, which have a way of producing multiplier effects on the present and future nation-building process. In the light of these, some questions beg for answers. What is the fate of a nation where apex degree of corruption has been installed and ordained by public and elected officials? What happens when ethno-religious crises are rife in Nigeria? What happens when youths are being mobilized to carry out conflicts in the nation while the majority of the masses have practically lost sight of the rich glory of their national heritage? These questions in as much as they beg for answers really affect the nation-building process in Nigeria.

#### **PUBLIC MORALITY, CORRUPTION, AND ETHNIC CHAUVINISM: WHITHER NIGERIA FOR NATION-BUILDING?**

Public morality has been defined as the proper conduct of people in public service, governed by certain fundamental and universally recognized ethics, in the form of the code of conduct within a particular society [5]. Indeed, public morality is necessary in nation building as integrity, clairvoyance, honesty, justice, dedication, and trustworthiness are all prerequisite societal values for nation-building. Indubitably, corruption flourishes in an environment of distrust and dishonesty. Corruption, even though a global problem, lacks a universally acceptable definition. Corruption is debased or perverse behavior. More often than not, the essence and manifestations of corruption center on ethical and moral conduct of the society at large. As a social problem, corruption is a global malaise which diverts material wealth of societies, supposedly to provide basic needs of the people, into private individuals. The truth is that the concept is multidimensional and therefore no single definition fits all the cases of corruption. Although most definitions of corruption tend to focus on the public or official sector, corruption takes place in all sectors and at all levels of the society [18]. To Osoba (1998) [19], corruption is "anti-social behavior conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms, and which undermines the authorities' capacity to serve the welfare of all citizens." The concept of corruption can be viewed from different perspectives because its

manifestation takes different forms and occurs at different levels. These identifiable levels include political, economic bureaucratic, and judicial among others [20]. However, Ahmed-Hameed (2006. p. 174) [18] observes that at each of these levels, corruption occurs whenever rules and procedures are not followed. According to Ikejani Clark (1995. p. 128) [21], corruption is an inducement in cash or kind to secure services or goods from public officials and other agencies through illegitimate, unlawful, or irregular means. It involves the deliberate use of one's position for wrong and clandestine ends motivated by private considerations. As for McMullan (1961. p. 183) [22], a public official is corrupt if he accepts money or money's worth for doing something that he is under duty not to do or to exercise a legitimate discretion for improper reasons. Simply put, corruption is a deviation from the norm. In Nigeria, corruption has debased the entire way of life and invariably battered its image and credibility internationally. Corruption has become almost the norm in all governmental activities at all levels. The prevalence of corruption in Nigeria has transformed it to be among the world's most corrupt nations. In essence, corruption, within the rank and file of Nigerian leadership, has affected the provision of basic needs to the people and maintenance of decayed infrastructures. Unquestionably, corruption is the most lucrative and viable industry in Nigeria; the unofficial ministry and sarcastically, the "37<sup>th</sup> state" of Nigeria. Without doubt then, corruption and public morality are unable to coexist; they are a mismatch, very much incompatible. As corruption is endemic and ubiquitous in Nigeria, it of course affects all the spheres and stages of Nigerian life and development and nation-building processes. Like corruption, ethnic chauvinism is incompatible with public morality since, it involves the use of one's position for wrong ends, motivated by religious and ethnic considerations and calculated to promote tribal inclinations to the detriment of the wider and legitimate national interest and the principles of fair play and merit [5]. Ethnic chauvinism has been a major player in the multiple conflicts post-independent Nigeria has witnessed.

It, therefore, goes without gainsaying that a corrupt and unjust national leadership is a liability, a millstone to any nation as it is incapable of making a positive contribution to nation-building process. The discipline or domain of ethics along with its subject matter – morality focuses on how human beings consistently satisfy their needs and constantly better their conditions of living and their fellow beings, through goodness, justice, happiness, and conscience in democratic governance. It, therefore, describes a specific class of human virtues, praiseworthy character traits opposed to irresponsible and cruelty or inhumanity [23]. Ahmed-Hameed (2006. p. 169) [18] observes that Nigeria has appeared among the top most corrupt nations in the world for many consecutive years. Extrapolations from the "Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Indexes" since inception reveal that corruption remains endemic in Nigeria. The depth of corruption and the degree of its entrenchment in Nigeria have accorded the country a devastating compendium from the Transparency International. Rather than promoting and protecting national interests, corrupt public officials are preoccupied with their private concerns; they deliberately and systematically impoverish the nation through utter exploitation, plunder, and neglect. These corrupt leaders often sap the national economy by keeping their lot in numbered accounts in Swiss and other overseas banks, instead of investing it at home for local development [24]. Undoubtedly, the General Ibrahim Babaginda and General Sani Abacha military administrations took corruption to its acme which accounts for the corruption perception index rating of Nigeria as the most corrupt nation in the world. The Sani Abacha led administration was reported to have created Kleptocracies that siphoned resources from the crumbling infrastructure of the society and instilled an ethos of corruption. It was also reported to have carted away billions of Nigerian national wealth to Switzerland and other "banana-sovereign states" thereby, crippling geometric nation-building process throughout the years of his reign [5]. In addition to, billions stolen from other sources, Abacha and his men stole \$1 billion (₦113 billion) from Nigeria's foreign reserve. The Federal government of Nigeria was only able to recover ₦63.25 billion from Abacha's family and several billions



from his aides. Under the regime of the then military President, Gen. Babangida, it was reported that \$12 billion Gulf War oil windfall of 1991 simply disappeared from the Central Bank of Nigeria and not accounted for (Ifesinachi, 2004: 77) [25].

Corruption is indeed a dangerous phenomenon in the Nigerian polity. This is not surprising since these days, the sole criterion in making some appointments and promotions as well as in some aspects of public life is anything but merit. For example, though appointments and promotions in the Nigerian public service sometimes depend on academic and professional qualifications, in practice corruption is a crucial factor in facilitating someone's appointment. Moreover, due to this trend, the whole national system is paralyzed by inefficiency, incompetence, and mediocrity. The economy of the nation in such conditions tends to become unproductive and even stagnant due to the prevalence of mediocre managerial personnel and executive. In fact, the records speak for themselves as they reveal the depth of pervasive corruption among public office holders in Nigeria. The shaky foundations of transition to democracy to democracy in Nigeria after the demise of General Abacha in 1998 scatted all genuine designs and patterns of alignments of the civil society. The sentiment that accompanied the transition was primarily centered on acquiring political power through hook or crook without necessarily establishing relationships between people's participation and democracy. In other words, an important element in the process of democratization of people's participation and empowerment became completely subsumed within the narrow and corrupt interests of the elite groups. Even under a constitutional democratic government of President Olusegun Obasanjo and other civilian administrators, and the formulation of the most robust and curative legal framework and policies for combating and preventing corruption, corruption became an evil enigma entrenched with the rebirth of democracy in Nigeria. A few of these instances will suffice.

In 1999, both the Speaker of the House of Representatives and President of the Senate, Salisu Buhari and Evans Enwerem were forced to resign on account of falsification of academic qualification and age. In the year 2000, Dr. Chuba Okadigbo, former Senate President was removed on charges of financial irregularities in the management of the Senate's fund and the award of contracts to cronies at inflated prices. Immediately after his removal, there were calls for the probe and removal of the Alhaji Ghali Na'Abba, the Speaker of the House of Representatives. In a dramatic turn of events, the Speaker accused the Presidency of giving ₦4 million to legislators to remove him. Again, in 2000, Haruna Abubakar, the then Deputy Senate President was impeached for embezzling ₦16.9 million as charismas and sallah gift (Alabi and Fashagba, 2010. p. 37) [20]. In 2003, the Ibrahim Mantu led committee for screening political nominees was alleged to have requested ₦54 million as a condition for confirming the nomination of Nasir el-Rufai. The case was later swept under the carpet. In 2005, the Senate President, Adolphus Wabara, resigned and was arraigned for conniving with the Chairmen, Senate and House committees on education to take bribe worth ₦55 million from the education ministry headed by Professor Fabian Osuji. In 2006, the Senate ad-hoc committee on that investigated the PTDF case was alleged to have taken bribe from the vice president to conceal the truth on the PTDF stolen fund (Alabi and Fashagba, 2010. p. 37).

The executive arm has equally not been left out. Former Bayelsa State Governor, Chief Diepreye Alameiseigha was impeached by the State House of Assembly on allegations of corrupt practices, money laundering, and misuse of public trust and abuse of office. He was arrested in London on September 15, 2005, for laundering 3.2 million pound sterling. Not only that, former Inspector General of Police, Mr. Tafa Balogun, was accused and tried of corrupt practices. He was accused of diverting Police funds to buy shares in companies and landed properties in Choice areas in Lagos and Abuja. His successor, Sunday Ehindero, was also accused of embezzling the money meant for the Police [26]. In May 2010, a majority of the legislators in the lower chamber of the National Assembly demanded a new quarterly allocation

of ₦42 million (\$277,000) each. This is apart from their monthly salary of about ₦1.3 million (\$8,600) each. Obviously, the request of the upper chamber of the same assembly should be higher and thus more provocative in a country where the vast majority of ordinary citizens earn less than \$2 or ₦300 per day! Incidentally, in view of the fact that such allowances were not considered in the 2010 budget of the National Assembly, the most probable way to accommodate this may be to collapse the capital vote of the chambers. In other words, no capital project shall be executed by the legislative arm in the year. Surprisingly, all of these seem not enough to discourage lawmakers from various forms of malpractice such as contract scams, bribery in connection with oversight functions, and sundry activities that have led to the removal of most of the principal officers in the various legislative chambers across the country between 1999 and 2010. It is in line with this that the immediate past speaker of the house of representative, Dimeji Bankole was arrested in June 2011, shortly after the expiration of his tenure over serious allegations of abuse of office and financial misappropriation. In recent times, the unstable and strained relationships between the executive and legislature [26], from national, state and local government levels, were completely undemocratic and unconstitutional. The arm-twisting devices by the executive over the legislature and vice versa, the impeachments and threats of impeachments, the dissolutions of elected local government councils: All courtesy of executive or legislative and sometimes judicial corruption as the case may be. These have become a norm rather than exception. And to think of it, the established "democratic norm" in the political environment thus, metamorphosed into centralization of authority, compartmentalization of vested state activities, fractionalization of authority of the elites, and the nation as a whole preservation and fierce protection of vested interests which all together culminated into inevitable locked political conflicts. These, no doubt, jeopardize the promotion of local initiatives and obstructed efficient administration and overall development. Indeed, public security, generation of investments, etc., were almost out of question as production stagnates with interests and conflicts multiplying in leaps and bounds. All these are past instances of corruption. Thus, official corruption, in many forms and magnitude, garrison democratic governance, and nation building, have glaringly appeared and thus, forms of just, democratic governance and egalitarian society are a mirage-increasingly failing to manifest and appear in Nigeria. The submission then is that corrupt leadership is purely detrimental to nation-building process. Moreover, in a situation where corruption becomes the criterion for measuring success in public morality, then volatility and instability becomes the order of the day.

Instances of corruption are generally as rife and endemic as ethno-religious chauvinism. The major criticism of an ethno-religious-oriented national leadership is that it is ethno-religious in outlook, motivation and action, hence, incompatible with real national interests [5]. Religious antagonism, sectionalism, and regionalism are characteristically inconsistent with basic national integrative force and sad to say our leaders chip away at efforts to integrate the nation. In their peculiar kind of leadership, they encourage the people to think and act as members of an ethnic and group religious group first, second, as people of the same class, and finally, as citizens of one country [5]. In the light of this, it is, therefore, not entirely surprising that invariably every Nigerian citizen feels that they have much more in common with members of their respective tribes than with the rest of other nationals. This is disastrous; it has led to so many conflicts and crises throughout the far flung corners of Nigeria. In terms of nation-building, it is also ruinous, for it hinders the development of a viable and robust national unity and pride. Nigeria can hardly pride of being the giant of Africa when the fire of in-house hostility is blazing the country away?

A survey of ethnic-religious conflicts, between 1999 till date, show that the crises are indeed a worrisome development, which threaten harmonious coexistence and jeopardize the unity of Nigeria and its fledging democratic experiment far more than any other challenges of democratic consolidation. And sad to say, the government seems to lack the proper perspective to arrest the situation. By way of historical

retrospection, ethno-religious conflicts have persisted in all geopolitical zones of the country. The most notable wave of ethnic and religious riots in Nigeria immediately after military handover in May 29, 1999, was in July 15, 1999, when some Owo cultists in Sagamu, in Ogun State accused a Hausa woman of coming out when the cultists were outside in their gnome. This led to some altercations, culminating eventually to a full-scaled crisis [27]. In October 2000, another ethno-religious conflict rocked the nation. This was the Lagos-(Idi-Abara/Oko-Oba) Kano mayhems. The cause of this was the misunderstanding between the Hausa residents and the Yoruba in Idi-Araba in Lagos over the use of convenience by a Hausa resident. Consequent on this, many Yoruba residents were killed with bows, arrows, and machetes. In response, the O'dua People's Congress intervened but only to quench fire with gasoline. Later, Oko-Oba, another Lagos suburb with high population of Hausa/Fulani stock joined the fray of madness [27]. The violence, as expected, later spread to Kano with most southerners being the victims. In September 2001, the ethnic tension between the Tivs and lunkuns in Plateau State reached a head after decades of fighting. The September 2001 ethnic tension was caused by what can be called a mistaken identity. What this means is that some Tivs took some 19 soldiers to be lunkuns but in fake army uniform. The Tiv youths captured them and slaughtered them one by one. The reprisal attacks by the men of the Nigerian army in Zaki Biam were devastating. Also in the same month Jos, the Plateau State capital city, joined the madness. The cause of this was the appointment of a Christian as a Local Council Chairman. It is interesting to note that by the time sanity found its way back to the city, more than hundred and 60 lives had been lost in the mayhem [28]. The Jos crisis of 2008 was fatal as it recorded more than 700 casualties. The July 26, 2009, Boko Haram crisis emanated from Dutsen Tenshin in Bauchi State before it later spread to Kano, Yobe, and Borno States. Close to 800 people were killed both by the sect members and by the security forces. Boko Haram made the fatal mistake of engaging in open revolt against the state and the executive. The response of the security forces, the police in particular, was the summary execution of the leadership that had been captured alive. It showed clearly once again that Nigeria still has a long distance to go in edifying the rule of law in the country [28]. While it was clear that the security forces had become the objects of attack by the group and many had been killed, their response showed an inability to strike a balance between security operations and human rights. In fact, as at the time of writing this paper, the Boko Haram mayhem has spread all over the country like a mad wildfire. Just months ago, the Nigerian police headquarters were bombed by the Boko Haram, followed by the United Nations building in Nigeria. All these attest to the fact that ethno-religious chauvinism is indeed a disastrous epidemic that runs contrary to the process of nation-building.

The big questions to be asked then are: How can remarkable development take place in atmosphere of corruption, instability, crises, chaos and disturbances? Can nation building ever be sustained in a country where corruption and ethno-religious crises have become the order of the day? Are those killed in the crises not relevant in the scheme of development of the nation, more-so that virile men and women are mostly the victims of the crises?

#### WHY HISTORY MATTERS

After an expose of these cankerworms and various ways they permeate the society, one would be moved to ask, what are the dangers of these cancers which have transformed the Nigerian state into pathetic, insecure, and unhappy polity? Significantly, the answer to this question lays bare the relevance of history to Nigeria's nation building process. Its answer begs for a systematic scholarly study of the subject by historians of Nigeria. Corrupt practices and ethno-religious chauvinism in an environment that is either devoid of public morality or where the value of this noble tradition is minimized or totally disregarded [5]. On the whole, these social evils perpetrated by the political cliche have increased adverse effects on societies across the country. The significance of all these being that by drawing attention to the injustices,

corruption, and ethno-religious bigotry, a systematic historical study of the subject would be an asset to the national leaders in their task of nation-building. It would further assist them in promoting genuine national identity, sustained by indigenous cultural values and common national norms and interests. Without doubt, it is the existence of such an identity and cultural heritage that has sustained nationalities such as the Poles, Turks, and Jews as viable polities throughout their long and chequered histories [5]. From the foregoing, a corrupt leadership and an ethno-religious bigoted government cannot make for a socially and politically stable society; neither can it foster nation building. The Nigerian history has proven that the task of nation-building and development is a far cry from what is obtainable in the society. Hence, this paper maintains that historical knowledge, good leadership, and public morality could play in the crucial process of nation building in post-independent Nigeria [5]. In fact, I subscribe to the once President of United States, Harry S. Truman's words when he said:

I had trained myself to look back in history for precedents, because instinctively, I sought perspective in the span of history for the decisions I had to make. This is why I read and re-read history [29].

Now how many of our leaders appreciate history and consult it to learn? None at all! They all fail to recognize the relevance of history as an integrative and therapeutic force in national development and in forging viable national identity. As Carr [17] rightly puts it,

The belief that we have come from somewhere is closely linked with the belief that we are going somewhere. A society which has lost belief in the capacity to progress in the future will quickly cease to concern itself with its progress in the past. Our view of history reflects the past.

The quest for transformational leadership in our country appears very difficult to achieve due to the gross disregard for the discipline of history. As instances show, this is in contrast to developed countries where lessons of the past are regarded as dependable anchors in the affairs of nations to avoid the tragedies of past generations. Indubitably, history remains the "mother" of all other academic disciplines. Its status as the foundation on which other aspects of knowledge are built can hardly be contrived. Much of the political instability, upheavals, corruption, and the leadership crisis are mostly due to the near if not absolute neglect of history and lack of historical consciousness. The current problem our nation faces in terms of religious and social conflicts, ethnic chauvinism and antagonisms could actually be addressed from the lessons of history. There is no better way to put it than in the words of Collingwood (1956. p. 10) [30] when he said that the value of history is that it teaches us what man has done and thus what man is. Of course, it is imperative to state that there is no nation that had developed without history and as such, adequate knowledge of history is important for the understanding of the forces determining the nature and character of the development process.

In view of all these, it has been suggested that historians of Nigeria have a vital role to play by researching and highlighting some of the major historical constraints on development in their state and ways such problems may have adversely affected nation building. Part of the subject matter of history is the study of change and continuity in society. In the words of Marwick [13], history is a "major industry in contemporary society." For those critics of history who scorn and ask: "Of what use is history?" The crispest and most enlightening reply is to suggest that they try to imagine what everyday life would be like in a society in which no one knew any history. Development occasioned by nation building is necessarily a product of change. However, for it to be relevant and meaningful to society, it must have some elements of continuity, even if only at the level of ideas that have informed such development. Implicitly, nation-building is not possible and cannot be appreciated outside the context of history. Apparently, just as not to know what took place before you were born is to remain a child forever [13] so also, not to have a sense of history is to remain a child forever. This is why some

of the most advanced nations of the world cannot do without placing a historian in every major area or segment of the nation. Societies that ignore history virtually condemn themselves to not knowing the present, because historical development alone permits us to weigh and to evaluate in their respective relations the elements of the present. It is a case of not knowing about the past, and so comprehending the present is impossible. This means that there cannot be a platform for planning for the future and since nation-building is a process that takes place over time, it falls squarely within the ambit of what historians study. Hence, given the abrasiveness of corruption and the spate of crisis and antagonisms orchestrated by ethno-religious chauvinism all over our country, we are better placed to analyze the pernicious effects of our leaders' actions as well as harmonize our religious and cultural divergences to learn from the lessons of history. Historical research, therefore, can provide us not only with hypotheses for the solution of current problems but also with a greater appreciation of the culture and role which their knowledge can play in Nigeria's nation-building process. History really matters a lot in the post-independent nation building process in Nigeria; historians must be consulted and our public officials must learn the lessons from history no matter how bitter.

#### CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it has been shown that corruption along with ethno-religious chauvinism is incompatible with nation-building process in Nigeria as they are disruptive and chaotic in their operation and consequences. Corruption and democratic governance are the dilemma of the moral choice open for the Nigerian elites. As corruption and ethnic bigotry derails nation building and democratic governance, in law making, political system, party formation and consolidation, judiciary, leadership, electoral process and elections, armed forces, peoples psyche or orientation [31], they, therefore, bring about societal decay, conflicts, crimes, backwardness, and overall insecurity. The unethical and immoral socioeconomic and political environment in Nigeria have continued to derail attempts to bring about democratic governance. Thus, accountability, legitimacy, responsiveness, people's participation, provision of basic needs, checks and balances, rule of law, opposition, civil society human rights, etc., constituting some essential ingredients for nation-building are being thrown off. They thus pave the way for authoritarianism and repression, corruption and conflicts, state terrorism and state assassinations, use of force and unethical policies all within the orbit of garrison democracy. Public morality is in fact farcical in Nigeria. Unquestionably, these cankerworms are powerful causes of social and political instability in Nigeria and they hinder development. History is replete with instances of these menaces and how ruinous their effects have been. The logical conclusion, thus, is that historical knowledge, coupled with public morality, can be powerful tools in fostering cohesive nation building and could enable Nigeria to awaken to the consciousness of transformation where integrity would trade for depravity; hope for despair; turmoil for tranquility; abundance; and social justice for abject poverty and injustice. In fact, if Nigeria is to understand the nature, dimension, implications and even proffer a way out of the multiplicity of national problems facing us such as the ones discussed in this paper, we must as a matter of necessity turn to history to unearth what was done that has led us to this quagmire and what should be done to ensure that these drawbacks and quandary are avoided. As for Nigerian leaders, they must learn from history; must learn from not only their historical records but also that of other regions of the world and how they have developed overtime. As for Nigerian historians, they must break away from the current inhibiting factors and work in alliance with other sincere scholars with same ideas and intentions to redirect the present leadership of the country and chart a new course for the emergence of a more purposeful and responsive leadership aimed at enhancing a cohesive nation building process. This task is not going to be easy but definitely not impossible. In all, the task of nation building in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be achieved without the discipline of the Humanities in general and history in particular. What is required does not at all require speculation or prophesying but simply

intelligible knowledge from historical records so that we can drive through a well informed and well-guided development.

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