

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

Received: 10 February 2019, Revised and Accepted: 02 April 2019

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 Ogbobgo, 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 Ogbobgo, 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

