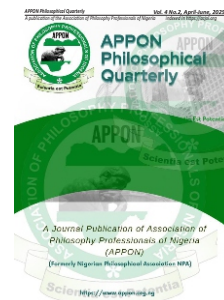


RETHINKING RESPONSIBILITY AND NIGERIA IN THE LIGHT OF THE *FACE OF THE OTHER* – A SOCIO-POLITICAL APPLICATION OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF LEVINASIAN ETHICS OF RESPONSIBILITY



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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the philosophical concept of the *Face of the Other* as a basis to analyse the relationship between the Nigerian State and its citizens in a fragmented nation. It contends that the State's failure to recognise and respond ethically to the “face of the other,” the diverse ethnic, religious, and socio-economic groups, has caused a breakdown in social cohesion and a crisis of responsibility. Drawing on the works of philosophers like Emmanuel Levinas, the work, using analytical and critical methods, investigates how the Nigerian State has historically objectified or ‘instrumentalised’ its citizens, rather than recognising them as unique individuals with an ethical claim on its attention. It will then identify how this objectification has intensified ethnic tensions, political corruption, and a sense of alienation among the population. The paper ultimately proposes a way forward for governance in Nigeria based on a Levinasian ethics of responsibility, where the State’s primary duty is not to dominate but to respond to the needs and vulnerabilities of its citizens. By re-centring the “face of the other” in its political philosophy, the Nigerian State can begin to mend its deep-seated divisions and build a more just and inclusive society.

Keywords: Face, the Other, Rethinking, Responsibility, Nigerian Nation

Introduction

Nigeria is one of the most diverse nations in Africa. The population is estimated to be around 200 million with more than 250 ethnic groups with distinct languages, cultures, and traditions. This diversity involves religious plurality, regional

differences, and a wide range of socio-economic practices. Properly harnessed, such diversity is a strength that can foster creativity, resilience, and unity. However, this diversity has also posed significant challenges. Ethno-religious tensions, uneven distribution of resources,

corruption, insecurity, and weak institutions often undermine social cohesion. These challenges are compounded by leadership failures and a lack of accountability, leading to mistrust between groups and frustration among citizens.

In this context, the importance of responsibility cannot be overstated. Responsibility, whether at the level of government, community, or individual, calls for accountability, ethical leadership, and a sense of duty toward the common good. For citizens, it means embracing civic duties, tolerance, and respect for others. For leaders, it entails fairness, justice, and transparent governance. By taking responsibility, Nigeria can transform its diversity from a source of division into a foundation for national renewal, peace, and progress. On this note, the work of Emmanuel Levinas becomes relevant for the progress of Nigeria. Levinas was born in Lithuania and raised in Russian culture and Jewish orthodoxy before relocating to France to study phenomenology under Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. He was a renowned 20th century philosopher who made significant contributions to ethics and phenomenology, particularly in relation to the concepts of *otherness* and responsibility. His experiences during World War II had a profound impact on his philosophical perspective, leading him to explore themes of trauma and the moral implications of human relationships.¹

The ‘face’ remains one of the most significant concerns in Levinas’ ethical seminal work, ‘Totality and Infinity’, critiques Western philosophy’s totalitarian tendencies and

advocates for an approach that prioritises the ethical relationship between the self and the Other. Levinas argues that true understanding arises from recognition of the Other’s integrity, urging that ethics should be considered “first philosophy.” His later writings, such as ‘Otherwise than Being’, further delve into the nuances of subjectivity and responsibility, emphasising a radical ethical stance where one is beholden to the needs of the Other.²

He establishes ‘Ethics as ‘First Philosophy’ as mentioned above, with a strong emphasis on the notion of the ‘face-to-face and its responsibilities’. For Levinas, the face is laden with responsibility, as Cohen reminds us in his book *Ethics, Exegesis, and Philosophy*, that responsibility is not a reflective understanding of the Other or an epistemic attitude. It is action; it is doing something.

Thus, the issue of moral decline within the Nigerian State has reached an unprecedented level of urgency in the current period of national crisis, characterised by political instability, corruption, ethnic conflicts, insecurity, and increasing inequalities as already established. Nigeria’s present state engages with a contentious landscape, where the principles of unity and shared belonging are consistently undermined by acts of exclusion, neglect, and violence. As the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche claims that “God is dead”, so, responsibility is effectively dead among most of Nigeria’s

¹ Wirzba Norman, “Emmanuel Lévinas”. Accessed September 9, 2025, (<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/emmanuel-levinas>).

² Ibid.

political elites.

In this paper, the concept of the face of the Other, as articulated by Emmanuel Levinas, provides a significant philosophical framework for re-evaluating responsibility and imagining the Nigerian nation. This paper, therefore, aims to investigate how Levinas's ethics of responsibility, when interpreted in conjunction with the Nigerian experience, can unveil new perspectives on nationhood that transcend legal frameworks and coercive authority. It poses essential inquiries: What implications would it have for the Nigerian State to acknowledge the 'Other' not as a threat or a burden, but as the fundamental basis for its legitimacy? In what ways could a Levinasian ethics reshape our comprehension of responsibility, not merely as a discretionary moral choice, but as the foundational element of political existence? Furthermore, can such a viewpoint help in redirecting the Nigerian nation towards a more equitable, inclusive, and compassionate order? It further aims to re-evaluate the concepts of responsibility and nationhood by placing Levinas's philosophy within the socio-political context of Nigeria. It envisions a Nigeria where the recognition of the Other's humanity serves as the foundation for governmental actions and the formation of national identity.

Emmanuel Levinas is best known for reorienting philosophy from ontology (the study of being) toward ethics. In his view, Western philosophy, particularly after Heidegger, is more concerned with being and selfhood and neglects the primacy of responsibility to the Other. In his ethical

philosophy of the *face*, he posits that ethics or "morality is not a branch of philosophy but first philosophy,"³ What this means is that ethics takes precedence over traditional philosophical pursuits, such as ontology. For Levinas, we have an ethical responsibility to the 'Other'. The 'Other' in this context implies another human being, who presents itself as an inescapable command that arises from the direct, "face-to-face" encounter and not as a choice.

The first things to remember about the face-to-face encounter between the self and the other person are that it is concrete and particular. It is not an idea or concept, nor a type of action or event. It is a concrete reality, an occurring event; it occurs. Furthermore, it occurs as utterly particular: The self is a particular person, and the face-of-the-other is a particular revelation of a particular person.⁴

The *Face* presents itself as an Epiphany: The *Face* is not just a physical feature but a powerful manifestation of the Other's vulnerability and mortality. It is a presence that "orders and ordains" us, demanding a response. "The first word of the *Face* says, 'Thou shall not kill.' It is an order. There is a commandment in the appearance of the *Face*, as if a master spoke to me. However, at the same time, the face of the Other is destitute; it is the poor for whom I can do all and to whom I owe all."⁵ This order, 'do not kill me,' and this command are unspoken

³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis. (Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1969), 304

⁴ Michael Morgan, *Discovering Levinas*. (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007), 61.

⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. by Richard A. Cohen, (Duquesne University Press, USA, 1985), 89.

and at the same time present passive resistance that puts our own freedom and power into question. It compels me without force to be responsible to the 'Other'.

This responsibility is "asymmetrical."⁶ I am responsible for the Other more than they are for me. This asymmetrical relationship differs from Martin Buber's "I and Thou," which is a symmetrical relationship; Levinas's face-to-face encounter is fundamentally asymmetrical. The Other, in their defencelessness and poverty, has priority over me. My responsibility to the Other is infinite; it is a debt that can never be fully repaid. Infinity in this context implies that the 'Other' reveals something that is beyond total comprehension that is also to say that the Other transcends me. "The claim that my neighbour is the first one on the scene directs thinking not only to the extreme degree to which his otherness transcends me, but also to an understanding of myself which says that everything I am and do takes place after the fact of a relation with the *Other*."⁷

Levinas described the Other as an Irreducible Alterity: The Other is unknowable and cannot be reduced to my own concepts or categories. They remain perpetually beyond my grasp and cannot be possessed as an object. In other words, the face reveals 'irreducible alterity', or "otherness". This is what makes the encounter truly ethical, because it prevents me from subsuming the Other into my own subjectivity and worldview. The face

reveals the Other in their vulnerability, transcendence, and irreducibility. It resists being reduced to a concept, object, or possession. The encounter with the face of the Other disrupts my self-centred existence and my 'will to domination.' It calls me out of my egoism and forces me to recognize a responsibility that is external to my own being. It is a rupture of the self, where my very subjectivity is formed in response to the Other. "The Other puts me in question in such a way that I find myself responsible for the Other, for whom I can never do enough. This is the asymmetrical character of the relation. I demand more of myself than I would ever have the right to demand of the Other."⁸ According to Levinas, "The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation, which no 'interiority' permits avoiding. It is that discourse that obliges the entering into discourse, the commencement of discourse rationalism prays for, a 'force' that convinces even the people who do not wish to listen, and thus founds the true universality of reason."⁹ Levinas tried to solve the question that may arise outside the relationship between the 'I' and my neighbour by introducing the concept of the 'third party'. While the face-to-face relationship places more emphasis on particular responsibility, society requires dealing with a third party. The third party portrays the presence of multiple Others. Thus, Levinas introduces the need for justice, laws, and institutions, but justice must never erase the primordial

⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Translated by Alphonso Lingis. (Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1969), 215.

⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*. Edited by Jeffrey Bloech, (Fordham University Press, New York, 2000), 132.

⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*. Edited by Jeffrey Bloech, (Fordham University Press, New York, 2000), 62.

⁹ Elisabeth Louise Thomas, *Emmanuel Levinas: Ethics, Justice and the Human beyond Being*. Routledge, (New York & London, 2024), 106.

responsibility to each unique Other.¹⁰

Levinas' Notion of Responsibility

For Levinas, responsibility is not a choice or a contract; it is given before freedom. The *Self* does not decide to be responsible; rather, it is, at the moment it encounters the Other. According to Levinas, "I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is his affair."¹¹ Responsibility, therefore, is asymmetrical: I am more responsible for the Other than the Other is for me. The demand of the Other is never exhausted by any response I give. Responsibility is therefore infinite, exceeding justice, law, or duty. In his words, Levinas directly said that, "the infinity of responsibility denotes not its actual immensity, but a responsibility increasing in the measure that it is assumed; duties become greater in the measure that they are accomplished. The better I accomplish my duty, the fewer rights I have; the more I am just, the guiltier I am."¹² This infinity comes from the fact that the Other is irreducible to categories of the self; their dignity cannot be measured.

In Emmanuel Levinas' notion of responsibility, the wealthy and powerful are referred to as the Subject/I; the poor and weak ones are called the "Other". Levinas' notion of responsibility

does not bear out the ordinary meaning. Thus, by responsibility, he means that everyone is made to serve the Other and that one's life is meaningful in his service for the Other. Specifically, he advances I speak of responsibility as the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity...I understand responsibility as responsibility for the other, thus as responsibility for what is not my deed.¹³

To sum it up, Levinas's ethics suggests absolute, unlimited, unconditional and non-reciprocal responsibility for the other. The Other is the beneficiary of the hospitality and solidarity of the subject/I.¹⁴ Based on the claims made by Levinas; one can convincingly conclude that his notion of responsibility is captured as humanism in disguise. From its inception, Levinas argues that the concrete man, rather than ontology, should be the object of philosophy. With this objective, Levinas set out to deconstruct idealism and ontology and directed the focus and emphasis of philosophy to the concrete existing man.¹⁵

Responsibility in Levinas gathers the force of moral conscience that is why

¹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or, Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. (Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1998), 157-159.

¹¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, USA, 1985), 98.

¹² Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: (Duquesne University Press, 1985) 244.

¹³ Elijah Okon John & Godwin Adahada, "An Examination of Levinas' Notion of Responsibility and Human Situation in Nigeria" in *Aquino Journal of Philosophy*, Vol 4, Issue 2. (2024): 102

¹⁴ Elijah Okon John & Godwin Adahada, "An Examination of Levinas' Notion of Responsibility and Human Situation in Nigeria" in *Aquino Journal of Philosophy*, Vol 4, Issue 2. (2024): 104

¹⁵ Elijah Okon John & Godwin Adahada, "An Examination of Levinas' Notion of Responsibility and Human Situation in Nigeria" in *Aquino Journal of Philosophy*, Vol 4, Issue 2. (2024): 115.

Levinas appeals for it as a duty. As the subject, the benefactor is an 'Other' to the beneficiary. Here involves the idea of substitution. The wealthy, the leaders must substitute themselves for the Others. Substitution essentially involves assuming the duty/situation of another. Responsibility, therefore, is essentially a substitution. A substitute answers for the *Other*, to make better the poor condition of the *Other*. "I am an 'Other'," but this is not alienation Impassively undergoing the weight of the other. Substitution aims at improving the Other's situation through an assumed responsibility. The substitute is inspired by his moral intuition that moves him to hospitality and solidarity toward the *Other*.¹⁶

The Nigerian State and the Absence of the 'Face of the Other'

The core argument of this paper is centred on the fact that Nigeria as a nation and its citizens have failed to acknowledge, recognise, respect, and respond to the "face of the *Other*," thereby eroding the foundation of ethical responsibility required for true nationhood. The Nigerian State's failure to recognise the 'Other' is a central issue in discussions about its political and social crises. Following the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, it can easily be argued that the root of Nigeria's problems is not just a lack of poor leadership or political will, but a deeper ethical failure. The country's political class and, by extension, its citizens have often failed to

see the vulnerable, marginalised 'Other' as a subject with an unconditional claim to care and justice. Nigeria has failed to construct a political community where every citizen is recognised with equal dignity.

Emmanuel Levinas's ethical philosophy of the *face of the Other* offers a mirror for examining this failure. In Levinas's thought, ethics begins with the face-to-face encounter in which the *Other* places me under an infinite responsibility. The refusal to acknowledge this ethical demand constitutes the absence of the *Other*, a condition that aptly characterises much of Nigeria's political and social history. In Lévinasian thought, the "face of the *Other*"¹⁷ is an encounter that makes an unconditional ethical demand that compels a response of care and responsibility. In Nigeria, the concept of the 'Other' is often tied to ethnic affiliation, religion, and social class. The country's political and economic structures are frequently constructed to benefit one group at the detriment of another. This exemplifies what Levinas would refer to as "totality,"¹⁸ which is the reduction of the *Other* to a controllable, exploitable, and classifiable item. In Nigeria, most of the games played among the political class are such that they see the vulnerable individual, a member of a different ethnic or religious group, as a threat or, more so, as an object to be dehumanised or destroyed. This act of dehumanisation transforms the 'Other' from being a person with a face into an object or an adversary. This philosophical

¹⁶ Elijah Okon John & Godwin Adahada, (2024): 112-113.

¹⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Translated by Alphonso Lingis. (Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1969), 24.

¹⁸ Norman Wirzba, *Totality and Infinity* by Emmanuel Levinas are a philosophical work that addresses profound cultural and philosophical crises, particularly in the aftermath of the World Wars. Levinas critiques traditional Western thought, which he views as inherently totalitarian and complicit in violence. He argues that philosophical reflection often fails to recognise the otherness of individuals, reducing them to mere objects within a totalizing framework. Accessed September 18, 2025,

exploration helps explain why the Nigerian State often operates with a sense of impunity and why its citizens struggle to form a cohesive national identity.

Another area of concern is the ethnic and religious fragmentation, which involves diverse ethnic and religious groups. Ordinarily, this diversity could have been a source of strength to the nation, but instead it has become a breeding ground for conflict. This is a direct consequence of a failure to encounter the 'face of the *Other*.' When one group fails to see another group as a fellow human with the same rights and vulnerabilities, but as an enemy to be dominated or a resource to be exploited, then the ethical bond that holds a nation together is broken. This is evident in the ongoing clashes between the herdsmen and indigenes over land, resources, and political power.

Rethinking Responsibility and the Nigerian Nation

Responsibility can be addressed as a moral, social, and political obligation. It is meant to act in ways that will sustain justice, promote human dignity, and advance the common good. In philosophy, for example, responsibility often extends beyond legal accountability to ethical duty. It implies what we owe each other as human beings. Thinkers like Emmanuel Levinas emphasise responsibility to the 'Other' as the foundation of ethical life, while African communitarian philosophies (e.g., *Ubuntu*, *Igwebuike*, or the Igbo phrase '*onyeaghalanwanneya*,' which means 'Let no one be left behind') root responsibility in *relationality* and community. In the Nigerian context, the above statement invites everyone, both leaders and citizens, to re-examine what it means to be responsible as citizens, leaders, a State, and society. Furthermore, Nigeria as a nation should be

concerned about the crisis of responsibility that has torn the country apart, including corruption, weak institutions, ethnic tensions, and insecurity, poverty, and leadership failures. Many Nigerian leaders have failed to exercise their political responsibility, prioritising personal gain over national welfare. Citizens sometimes retreat into apathy (which has led to so many ills like *Yahoo Yahoo* business, kidnapping, ritual killings and selling of human parts), 'clientelism,' or ethnic loyalty, neglecting their civic responsibilities, etc. Likewise, some institutions fail to uphold accountability, creating a culture of impunity. These crises raise the need to rethink how responsibility is understood and enacted.

Dimensions of Rethinking Responsibility in the Nigerian Context

Nigeria is facing multiple crises. They include issues of corruption, ethnic rivalries, insecurity, economic inequality, and leadership failure. At the heart of these challenges lie deeper ethical crises, a failure to exercise responsibility toward one another. Rethinking responsibility in the Nigerian context, therefore, requires moving beyond political rhetoric and legal accountability to a fundamental re-examination of ethical duty. Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of responsibility offers a fruitful framework for this rethinking, as it emphasises responsibility as the very condition of human subjectivity and coexistence. By bringing Levinas into conversation with African communitarian thought, this paper argues that Nigeria's renewal depends on rediscovering responsibility as an ethical obligation to the *Other*.

Ethical Responsibility: Levinas asserts that the face of the 'Other' issues an infinite

ethical demand: “the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge.”¹⁹ What it means is that responsibility precedes law, social contract, or reciprocity. In Nigeria, the daily reality of violence, dehumanisation, and neglect illustrates the absence of this recognition. Citizens are often treated as expendable, particularly in regions plagued by insurgency or systemic marginalisation. To rethink responsibility ethically is to affirm that every Nigerian, regardless of ethnicity, class, or religion, has an irreducible dignity that must not be violated. Therefore, ethical responsibility is far beyond legality; leaders and citizens must endeavour to embrace moral or ethical standards to enable them to respect human dignity, promote justice, and care for the vulnerable.

Communal Responsibility: In Levinas, communal responsibility is equivalent to being-for-the *Other*. Levinas insists that subjectivity itself is constituted as *being-for-the-Other*. This was expressed with these words: “I exists through the *Other* and for the *Other*”.²⁰ This resonates with African communitarian philosophy, expressed in an Igbo proverb, which says; ‘*onyeaghalanwanneya*’ (let no one be left behind). In the Nigerian context, communal responsibility calls for rejecting ethnocentrism, sectionalism, and religious ‘exclusivism.’ Instead, it envisions a polity

where solidarity is not a choice but a defining principle of human existence. Civic responsibility must therefore be grounded in shared belonging, not merely in individual rights. This strongly echoes through these words of Gyekye,

What distinguishes a community from a mere association of individuals is the sharing of an overall way of life. In the social context of the community, each member acknowledges the existence of common values, obligations, and understandings and feels a commitment to the community that is expressed through the desire and willingness to advance its interests. Members of a community society are expected to show concern for the well-being of one another, to do what they can to advance the common good and generally to participate in community life.²¹

The same emphasis resonates in the words of *Ubuntu’s* interconnectedness, “I Thus, responsibility should be re-imagined not as an individual burden alone am because we are, and because we are, therefore I am”²² but as a shared obligation.

Political Responsibility: This can be addressed from an ethical to a just perspective. “The Nigerian problem is the

¹⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Translated by Alphonso Lingis. (Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1969), 198.

²⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, (1998). *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 114.

²¹ Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997), 42

²² JOHN S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*. Anchor Books: (Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1969), 152

unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmarks of true leadership.”²³ Levinas distinguishes ethics (responsibility to the singular *Other*) and politics (justice for the many *Others*).

All human relations as humans proceed from disinterestedness. The proximity of one to the other is not a deforming abstraction. In it, justice is shown from the first; it is thus born from the *signifyingness* of signification, the-one-for-the-Other, empirically signification. This means concretely that justice is not a legality regulating human masses, from which a technique of social equilibrium is drawn, harmonising antagonistic forces.²⁴

Justice requires institutions that distribute resources and power fairly, while still being rooted in ethical responsibility. For Nigeria, this suggests that the State must move beyond patronage and corruption to embody accountability, equity, development and service. Political leaders must see governance not as domination but as ethical service to the *Other*. Citizens, likewise, must resist apathy and embrace active civic participation as part of their responsibility.

Historical Responsibility: It has been observed sometimes that the failure of the Nigerian State has always been attributed to the experience of colonial exploitation. Many have failed to blame the poor leadership structure that lacks ethical responsibility. Nigerians have refused to move on as others have done. For Levinas,

responsibility extends beyond the immediate encounter; it also encompasses recognising past injustices and the suffering of victims. Nigeria’s history of colonial exploitation, the trauma of the Biafran war, and systemic marginalisation of specific groups remain unresolved. Rethinking responsibility involves a politics of memory, acknowledging wounds, seeking reconciliation, and mending fractures within the national community. Without such historical accountability, Nigeria will remain in cycles of resentment and violence. The country must confront its colonial legacy, ethnic mistrust, and past injustices. Responsibility here involves recognising wounds and fostering reconciliation.

The Way Forward

The first thing to note is to accept responsibility as the ground of a new Nigerian nation. The path toward a new Nigerian nation cannot be found in political restructuring alone, or in the endless negotiation of ethnic and regional interests. Such strategies remain within the logic of safeguarding, elitism, often at the expense of others. Levinas calls us to a deeper starting point: the ethical primacy of the face of the *Other*. The *Other* interrupts my autonomy and demands a response that precedes politics, law, or contract. Thus, the renewal of the Nigerian nation must begin with a reorientation from politics of identity and survival to politics of responsibility.

Responsibility before Power: The Nigerian State must be reconceived not primarily as a machinery of power, but as a community founded on care and being responsible to the *Other*. Politics, when grounded in Levinas’s thought, is no longer

Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*. (Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., London-Nairobi, 1983), 1
Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise, than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998). 159.

about securing dominance but about responding to the vulnerability and demand inscribed in every human face. The *Other*, as presented in the poor, marginalised, or silenced, becomes the measure of political legitimacy.

Nationhood as Ethical Encounter: Nigeria can only be imagined anew if nationhood is understood as an ethical relation, not a colonial inheritance or artificial arrangement. To be a nation is to accept that one is bound to the *Other* in responsibility, whether the Yoruba or the Igbo, the Hausa to the Tiv, etc., each relation is sustained not by force but by the acknowledgement of the *Other's* irreducible dignity.

Justice as the Extension of Responsibility: For Levinas, the *face of the Other* calls me beyond the dyadic encounter to the reality of the 'third', which comprises the wider community. This is where justice emerges. A new Nigerian nation must therefore see justice both as an abstract principle and as the institutionalisation of responsibility. Justice is responsibility writ large, the demand to ensure that no face is forgotten, no *Other* silenced, no community erased.

Ethical Reorientation of Leadership and Citizenship: There is a serious demand to transform the leaders and citizens alike in their understanding of responsibility. This can be done through education for civic responsibility. It is about promoting ethics and civic studies that would shape young people to value accountability. When leaders possess the virtue of accountability, then leadership becomes not an entitlement but a response to the call of the *Other*. Citizenship becomes not merely the assertion of rights but the willingness to bear responsibility for one's neighbour. In this mutual ethical responsiveness lies the possibility of solidarity and shared

nationhood. It will also enforce transparency, the rule of law, and checks on power.

The 'Face' as the Beginning of Renewal: The way forward is not a utopian blueprint but a return to the most basic ethical encounter. It is equally necessary to revive our African communal values of solidarity, hospitality, and mutual care. When these are done, the possibility of looking into the *face of the Nigerian Other*, which comprises tribe, religion, class, or gender, will enhance the work of national renewal. The *Face*, as established by Levinas, disarms suspicion, interrupts violence, and makes nationhood possible.

Conclusion

The researcher visited a hospital on October 1st for medical care, and a card was given to fill out. The card included your State of origin and tribe. One wonders whether those were important. The question is, are we one Nigeria? It is a serious concern and a big problem. Today, the Nigerian State stands at a moral crossroads where its survival not only depends on how power is distributed but on a radical rethinking of responsibility. Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of the *face of the Other* confronts us with an urgent reminder that politics without ethics is violence disguised as order. The face interrupts indifference, commands responsibility, and calls forth justice. In this light, Nigeria has not only failed politically but has fundamentally failed ethically. It has too often ignored the *Other's* summons, reducing citizens to numbers, objects, or threats rather than recognising them as subjects of dignity. To rethink responsibility in Nigeria is to begin with the *Other*. It is to allow the *Face*, whether of the poor, the displaced, the silenced minority, or the rival ethnic group, to redefine what it means to be a nation. Justice, then, is not an abstract

principle but the institutionalisation of this responsibility across the structures of governance and social life. Nationhood becomes possible only when we recognise that the *Other's* humanity is the very condition of our shared existence.

The way forward is therefore not a utopian fantasy but an ethical revolution: a Nigeria where leadership is understood as service, citizenship as responsibility, and nationhood as an ongoing encounter with the *Other*. If Nigeria dares to embrace this vision, it can transcend the logic of exclusion and violence to become a community bound together not by fear or force but by the infinite responsibility that the face of the '*Other*' demands. In this responsibility lies the fragile but real hope of a new Nigerian nation.

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