

ON THE NEED FOR REVOLUTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This work attempts a philosophical survey of revolution. It argues that the concept of revolution is not new to philosophical discourse and that the meaning of revolution should not be narrowed to rebellion, resistance or war rather that it is the societal tool for change. It was instrumental in warding off colonial system for alleged wrong doings and it is the tool that the current Nigerian youths should apply in righting the ineptitude, corruption, and the perceived political insecurity in the country. Through revolution the Nigerian youths should demand for change not just in the formation of government personnel or a regime change, rather a total change in the mindset, episteme and attitude of the of the people in the society towards their political organizations. Using the method of critical analysis which is native to philosophical discourse, this paper concludes that the concept of revolution should not be misunderstood and it is a tool for rising against bad leadership. The work further argues that the Nigerian youth should see violent revolution as a means of restoring their dignity in the face of oppressive leaders.

Keywords: Philosophy, revolution, politics, youth, leadership, African, colonialism

Introduction

Overtime, the word “revolution” has become part of the vocabulary on the lips of some Nigerian youths. The clarion call for revolution in Nigeria is often attributed to the perceived ineptitude, corruption, insecurity, injustice, and political instability in Nigeria. However, some of the proponents and/or advocates for revolution in Nigeria may not be well-informed or have the epistemic mind to grasp the meaning and implications of the revolution which they continue to ask for. Hence, this article attempts to elucidate, dissect and clarify the meaning of revolution. Beyond this semantic task, this work attempts an intellectual roadmap which advocates of revolution should consider if their

dreams will materialize into concrete reality. Further, this work attempts a rational justification for revolution.

Some civil war veterans would concur that war is not something wish for. Although this may be slightly different from the views of the jihadists, it is however, unreasonable for sentient beings to inflict pains upon themselves or their fellow men. Who is to revolt? Why, when and how? Do we have sufficient reasons for revolution in Nigeria? These are questions that everyone sympathetic to the ideology of revolution must come to terms with. This brings to question the issue of the purpose or mission of the revolution. This further brings to question, why should I revolt and what is the goal of my action/inaction? If I was a Trojan soldier, should I fight for Paris' love for Helen, another man's wife?

Philosophical survey of Revolution

In some Homeric poems, particularly, *Odyssey*, the king revolted against the god Poseidon who requested for loyalty in the form of gratitude for a rigged battle but when the king disobeyed, he decided to punish him. If by revolution, we mean to say resistance, rebellion, demonstration, disobeying constituted authority or conflict, there could be instances of one revolting against oneself, the other, machine, destiny, supernatural forces, society but since we are yet to come to terms with the meaning of revolution, a quick philosophical survey of revolution will not be out of place. For the purpose of this work, we shall define revolution as change, a change in the process or way in which the people are been governed and a change in the attitude of the masses towards politics.

If by revolution, we mean to say change then we will not be saying too much if one is to categorically ascertain that the history of philosophy is the history of revolution. Ideas revolting against ideas with Thales of Miletus standing as an aggressor or a field marshal who was tired of the old order of things. Thales revolted against the old methodological explanation of things. (Nkrumah 1964:6) He rejected the causes of things been pinned to religious and mythological happenings. He proposed a scientific cum rational order of explanation or causes. The religious priest and myth makers were not at home with this new arrangement and it obviously led to a break in epistemic transmission with each antagonizing the other. On May 27 585BC Thales army defeated the priestly order as the sky darkened in-between it became crystal clear that the mission of the revolutionary was legitimate and goal oriented. Thus, the society submitted

to the superior argument put forth by Thales that all is indeed water. (Stumpf, 1978: 5)

However, Thales logic was short lived as the antithesis to his thesis was been prepared by Anaximander his pupil and follower who revolted and was in turn opposed by Anaxemenes. When the Pythagoreans, Heracliteans and Parmenedians got to the battle field it was clear that the revolution has turned into mockery as the Heraclitean theory of change seems more plausible and impregnable within common sense than the Parmenidean theory of permanence based on pure logic. Several attempts made towards reconciling the revolutionaries did not see the light of day. On note here are the views of Empedocles who saw Love and Hate as two opposing forces in history and the atomic theory of Democritus. (ibid, 8) Later on the Sophists took it upon themselves to explain and teach the mission and goal of the revolution to the Athenian youths. This insurmountable task became the mission of Socrates who died for a revolution he believed in and lived by. Sad enough his pupil came and destroyed the society which he died for. (Nkrumah, 1964) For two reasons, Plato betrayed Socrates. First for destroying the society and laws which Socrates believed in and secondly for inventing a noble lie of the world of forms and ideas which was more plausible, in his opinion, to this mutable and perishable world. It was clear that Aristotle will never accept this Platonic world given that he was a man of this world, very human, earthly, materialistic and realistic. He revolted against the Platonic world of forms in praise of this material, concrete but meaningless world fashioned by the Demiurge out of a recalcitrance receptacle. Disgusted by this new frame of mind of atheism which is inherent in the revolution, an attempt was made to restore the old order of things, to bring back the old priest to the pulpit. These new revolutionaries were interested in reconciling man with his maker whom they argued is transcendent yet immanent. Their views were squarely matched with the modern revolutionists who sought for an empirical testing or verification for burgoos metaphysical claims. These soldiers revolted against armchair reflection or *a priori* thinking lacking even the slightest form of thought experiment. It was around this period also that Nietzsche revolted against explaining major issues of life with reference to a small group of people who clustered around Jesus. The superman should understand the issues of this world from a Darwinian point of view. Earlier on Darwin has revolted against the old theory of design or creationism. Darwinian theory of cosmology rushes us away from fixation to a theory of possible survival of the fittest.

Kant also revolted against the theories and movement of his time. The Kantian-Copernican revolution is a famous revolution in the history of philosophy. In his famous work, *The Revolt of the Mass Man*, Ortega yGasset lamented the emergence of a psychological mind whose ideas have dominated the Europe of his time. He continued by asserting that in contrast to the select man who is urged to appeal from himself to some standard beyond himself, superior to himself. The mass man ceases to appeal to other authorities and feels himself lord of his own existence, so long as his surroundings do not constrain him. Conservative and liberals, illiterates and elites, all are part of the decadence of the mass. All are equally incurious and equally complacent, guarded from reflection guarded by partisan formulas or solipsistic apathy. And despite this the mass agitates for power and relevance; there is no question concerning public life in which (the mass man) does not intervene, blind and deaf as he is, imposing his opinions. Hence Revolt. This is so because man is unable to keep pace with the progress of his own civilization. Even the mass man demands this progress which he does not know where it is coming from. (yGasset, 1960). Some Nigerian youths are no longer seeing themselves as part of the masses. He now secludes himself in the confines of his home with the motive of making money without stress.

For Marx the society is that of class struggle resulting in synthesis of the thesis and antithesis. His position is that the oppressed has nothing to lose for revolting. Revolution against the oppressor is a fundamental step towards self-liberation, political stability, security, classlessness. Marx's dream was to see the workers of his time revolt against the rigid, insensitive and oppressive capitalist regime of his time, the method and style which the revolution is to take is well spelt out in his *Communist Manifesto*.

The idea of the social contractarians which inspired the revolutionary movement of their time and equipped the youths for their fight against injustice is also worth pointing out here. In a time like this where the youths are busying discussing BBnaija we need ideas of revolution to be discussed in salons, viewing centres, lounges and houses and spread among people via books, pamphlets and movies. Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, Rousseau concept of the General Will, Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* which, for example, kicked against the absolutism of monarchy, today, we need revolutionary ideas which will kick

against the ineptitude of some leaders. The notable French revolution was built on the views of these iconic scholars.

Excavating Revolution in African Discourse: A Map

Let us attempt to bring this philosophy back home. The German scholar, Hegel has opined that:

The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all our ideas – the category of Universality. In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence – as for example, God, or Law – in which the interest of man's volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being. This distinction between himself as the individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, underdeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained; so that the Knowledge of an absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting. The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality – all that we call feeling – if we would rightly comprehend him; *there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.* (Hegel, 2001:110-111) (emphasis mine)

Others such as Bruhl, Kant, Hume, have pinched camp with Hegel. However, a new frame of academic thinking started with the publication of works such as *Black Athena*, *Stolen Legacy* and the masterpiece *Bantu Philosophy*. Perhaps, Tempel's *Bantu Philosophy* became the foundation of African philosophy in an academic sense. Today, the contours of African philosophy are carved along a revolution against the Hegelian diatribe. It was this thinking too that made Dismaris Masolo in his *African philosophy in Search of Identity* to argued that what we might call African philosophy today is a reactionist movement, a revolution, against Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, a response to Western discourse of Africa and Africans.

Soldiers such as Blyden, Du Bois, Abraham, Mudibe, Cesaire Alain Locke, Senghor etc joined in the battle for the soul of Africa. Senghor, for example,

picked the negritude amour made in the factory of Cesaire and gave it a new meaning, definition and explanation. Negritude left the little space of cultural identity and freedom to a tool of political freedom and existentialism. The Senghorian army later failed to retreat when the enemy change their strategy, in the hands of Senghor and his disciples, negritude went too far, it got to the extreme of becoming a racist movement. Sartre was quick to mention this when prefacing the work of Senghor. A deathblow sounded by the opponent himself. From Senghor to other African nationalists, we see a revolution against white supremacy and struggle for universalism of reason – haven defined humanity along the borders of reason – a revolution aimed at restoring African personality, identity and above all humanity was necessary. When in the wake of day, Africans were granted independence, it became a question as to which system of thought should be adopted in African. Kwame Nkrumah opted for *Consciencism* as an intellectual roadmap for the reconciliation of the three opposing systems – traditional, Western, Eastern.

Nkrumah himself erred in so many areas. First for thinking that socialism is egalitarian in nature and that this egalitarian philosophy is based on a materialistic conception of nature. His claim that everything that has matter is equal is facile. Secondly, for thinking that African society is materialistic and as such egalitarian. He failed to acknowledge the atheistic flavour inherent in materialism and he even attempted to solve political issues by making recourse to debatable metaphysical concepts. Thus, Nkrumah's roadmap ended up identifying Africans with Eastern thought. Nkrumah had a hidden agenda which a revolutionary should not have. He was found wanting of becoming a life president, a warlord and indeed his regime was dubbed as corrupt as it became obvious to even the finest person in Ghana that the beautiful ones are not yet born.

Julius Nyerere's *Ujamma Socialism* which was a revolution against Western style of political authority did not consider even in semantic terms that socialism is a Western invention and as such is alien to Africans. He dealt with the subject as if it was an African concept with a contextual meaning. He even found an African linguistic evidence for his claim. He forgot that prefixing socialism with 'ujamma' does not make socialism an African concept. His denial of class structures and upholding of brotherhood in Africa is facile especially in this period of xenophobia. Nyerere projected work as a way of sustainability and

independence in Africa but his prophecies will not hold water given human nature. Man, if provided with his basic amenities, by nature is stubborn and will not work for the good of the society.

After Africans leaders have taken the mantle of leadership there were coups and counter coups. Hence, a new form of revolution to address this political instability in the continent began with the military finding a justification for their plunders. Notable among these coups is that of Jerry Rawlings of Ghana. He demonstrated high level of patriotism and revolutionary spirit but his leadership skills have not justified his actions. Today one African most sought-after scholar on the necessity of violent revolution in the struggles in Africa is Frantz Fanon. From his clinical studies Fanon threw himself into Algerian anti colonial revolution. Instead of African culture to take shape around songs and poems as manifest in Senghor's negritude, it should be based on violent struggle to reassert the boldness of the Black man.

Psychologically Africans have been weakened since their oppressor, the Whiteman does not see anything positive in African culture, religion, history, epistemology, metaphysics, language, perhaps, traditional organizations. While Africans were abandoning his own culture, religion etc to embrace the other, the Whiteman secretly wished he was a black man. However, since he cannot have it, he then decided to alienate Africans from their roots – Africans became neither black nor white – they became the Whiteman's burden since the White man took it upon himself to humanize, civilize, and evangelize those who live in the world extreme corner fetching water and hewing woods. More derogatorily, Africa nations became the third world or developing countries while America (the plantation farm) became the new world. Thus, the Black man became inferior before the Whiteman. This inferiority complex was deepened by the look of the Whiteman, alienation of the black man and the religious foundation of racism in biblical terms.

Fanon, therefore, have a plan B should the Whiteman fail to dance to the songs and poems of negritude. His plan is the Marxist approach to free the oppressed from the chains of the oppressor. It is an attempt to restore the humanity and dignity of the oppressed – an attempt towards social justice. The first armor is a psychological conviction that both the Whiteman and the black man are one. Africans must begin to see themselves as non-inferior before the Whiteman and

this can be achieved through violent revolution. In short, Fanon thinks "... violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect. . . illuminated by violence, the consciousness of the people rebels against any pacification" (Fanon, 1961: 94). Teodros Kiros, a noted Fanon scholar, explains:

Only through violence can the tortured and anguished colonial subject expunge from the depth of his or her soul the fear of the colonizer, who is just another human being. The interiorized invincibility of the colonizer can be washed away only by violence. In violence, then, Fanon thought he had found a solution to the apparently insurmountable presence of the oppressor's gaze, the oppressor's wealth and power, the oppressor's self-perpetuating colonial machine. The colonial machine must be broken, Fanon declares. Violence is precisely what the natives must fearlessly master in order to cleanse themselves of their wretched condition. Fanon is not celebrating violence for its own sake. He is arguing that, unless this violence is vented out, unless the pent-up energy is discharged onto the body of the oppressor, the "natives" are going to turn it upon themselves, and they will never cure themselves of fear, resentment, bitterness, and sorrow. (Kiros, 2004:219-20)

However, it is important to note here that the game oppression is still on only that the players of have change, it is no longer the Whiteman and the Black man rather it is now the oppressor and the oppressed – the leaders and the followers.

The Need for Revolution in Nigeria

Simply put revolution means change. Having defined revolution along Frantz Fanon's thinking, let us now examine the necessity of revolution in Nigeria. The question is; what is the relevance of revolution in Nigeria? What is the basis for opting for revolution as solution to the problems in Nigeria? in responding to the above questions, I will categorically say the quest for good governance is the basis for revolution in any civilized society.

Now, by good governance, the followers or citizens should know her duty and the leaders or those in government should also know her duty. For the duty of the follower is to obey while that of the leader is to rule. So good governance is

knowing how to rule and ruling well. Plato, in his Republic, once argue that the state should be ruled by those who knows the art of statesmanship. Hence, since the episteme of the leader is inseparable from the duty of the leader, Plato built an epistemological ladder which a person ascent if he is to become a leader. If the leader fails in his or her duties then the followers can request for a change. Change in the leadership system or change in the government personnel through violence is therefore justified if the personnel refused to embrace this change.

A leader, therefore, in this platonic sense, should be like a charioteer who must of necessity lead the horses (whether stubborn or insolence) to the river. When everyone, therefore fulfils his part or duty, there is bound to be peace or virtues in the society otherwise vices, hence revolution. Now, given the current state of affairs in Nigeria, have our leaders rule well? Using the electoral lens, in Nigeria for example, one will argue that we have a system whereby we continue to recycle our leaders. The electorates continue to live a rigged life given that some of the leaders who emerged from the electoral process are not the will of the majority of people. The majority of people do not longer participate in the electoral process because of the distrust for the electoral umpire. But leadership has not always been like this in Nigeria, how then did we get to this current situation? Where did we get it wrong?

Nigerian leaders inherited a dying country from the Whiteman. Since, the Whiteman exploited and raped Africa. The concerted effort brought to bear to displace the Whiteman was latter use to resist and fight ethnic wars or coups which today, the country is still suffering from. And as a result of these coups and counter coups, Nigeria has become what it is today. What we have in the country today is simply the rulers and the followers. The oppressor and the oppressed – it seems that the oppressed where use to displace the Whiteman so that oppressor becomes the Whiteman. Hence, colonialism is not over, inferiority is not over, alienation is not over, oppression is not over until one final step – revolution – a step to change. For example, Africa needs a revolution in their linguistic usage – a change to an African language.

Now while the oppressed, the followers think revolution is not over, the new masters, the leaders think revolution is a negative idea and that it should stop. A careful study of the new political arrangement in Nigeria does not show any significant difference with the arrangement setup in the colonial era which Fanon

rejected. Hence, the need for revolution in Nigeria is borne out of the fact that there is a big gap between the rich and the poor in the country where the qualification for leadership or service even in the army is your wealth and connection. Thus, when Niger Delta Militant sprung up it was an attempt to ask for change where dialogue has failed. The Boko boys are also asking the government questions which everyone sympathetic to good governance should not be afraid to ask. Although their resolute, doggedness, and convictions may not go down well with some non-fundamentalists but one issue stand clear from their struggle, it is the believe that we are in want of good governance. The Biafra struggle which started in selfish proud by our leaders to respect the resolution of the Aburi conference, today it has become a struggle for change and demarcation of the territorial boundaries of Nigeria, a slice of our sovereignty – this is not revolution! In his poem, “The Hawk prays for peace, Tanure Ojaide captured the sorry tale of Nigerian leader’s peace talk, when he states that after immortalizing themselves and becoming the sole proprietor of the world, after committing so many havocs they shout “Let there be peace.”

Revolution is similar to civil disobedience, Martin Luther King Jr, Mohammed Gandhi to name just a few disobeyed a moral law to protest against an immoral or unjust law. In revolting, every Nigerian youth should be reader to carry placards and chant the songs of freedom and change. Innocent Idibia popularly known as 2baba attempted such a protest or revolution but he was forced not to push it to a logical end. When a government is perverted the people should cease to obey.

Conclusion

From the above analysis, there is no gainsaying the need for revolution in Nigeria is as a result of bad governance. This brings to question; what is the end of revolution in Nigeria? Put in other words, what happens when the leaders are governing well? The Nigerian youth should not forget that a major cause of youth restiveness should be bad leadership and political instability. These factors prompted the revolutionary actions in Egypt that ousted Hosni Mubarak in 2011, the Iranian Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was ousted in 1979 and in Libya Muammar Gaddafi was ousted in 2011 although revolution in Nigeria does not necessarily meant a regime change, as even a regime change does not guarantee a happy life but by this the youth will assume the task of changing the political narrative in Nigeria.

In many parts of the world, say Syria, Morocco, Bahrain, Mali, Nigeria, revolutions have been attempted with virtually no success often times leading to war and unnecessary bloodshed. Sometimes to get the full supports of Nigerians is also not easy given our heterogeneity. There are also efforts by the ruling class to maintain the status quo in the pretence of protecting lives and properties and as such prevent revolution as seen in the case of 2baba, Femi Falana, Sowore etc.

In all, revolution should be seen as change in the episteme of the youth, a change in their attitude towards politics, elections and social policies. A change against the narrowing or diverting of the youth mind, there is need for us to remember that the slogan "Your time is coming" does not seem to make any more sense since the Nigerian youths should understand that either he rules or he obeys.

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