

## THOMAS HOBBS'S LEVIATHAN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA STATE

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### Abstract

*The question of what constitutes a stable and secure state has occupied political philosophers for centuries. A stable and secure state is defined by security of life and property of its citizens in the absence of which life will be “brutish, short and nasty”. Thomas Hobbes is one of the leading modern political thinkers whose notion of overarching power of the state is encapsulated in his world famous concept of Leviathan. Nigeria state is unfortunately ever under the threats of centrifugal forces of ethnicism, fear of religious and cultural domination, which once precipitate a civil war (1960 – 1970). Nigeria political history is a history of management of these forces of ethnic, religious and cultural domination. This research seeks to employ the positive aspects of Hobbes's Leviathan as a philosophical foundation of a strong Nigeria state. The research argues that a strong state is defined by strong political institutions. The research employed the method of philosophical analysis and finds that terrorism, banditry, separatist agitations, struggle for ethnic, religious and cultural domination among the constituent peoples of Nigeria federation constitute centrifugal forces militating against stable, secure and economically viable state in Nigeria. This research argues that the idea of a strong state advocated in Hobbes's Leviathan is a solution to Nigeria state crisis. The research makes the conclusion that the positive aspects of Hobbes's Leviathan is a veritable tool of state-building and a panacea to centrifugal political forces bedeviling the Nigeria Federation.*

**Keywords:** Stable state, overarching power and strong state.

### Introduction

The failed state syndrome of the Nigeria state is a political reality seeking for an urgent resolution. It is a state where the citizens' right to life, freedom of movement and association are not guaranteed due to the weakness of the institutions saddled with the responsibility of maintaining the state structure. The collapse of the state would be so devastating that it would take us back to the state of nature. Whereas, the fall of Nigeria state will be a highly upsetting reality that would set ripple effects and templates for the balkanization of sovereign states in the Africa continent. This is what Thomas Hobbes'

view of sovereignty or overarching power of the state aimed at forestalling and which is the crux of this philosophical essay.

### **The Implication of Hobbes' Leviathan for Nigeria State**

Hobbes' commonwealth was built with the assurance of security of life and property of the citizens. His concern was to show a necessary relation between order, political power, autonomous authority, and political obligation. Therefore, his Leviathan state was a creation to end the lawlessness and threats to life of the state of nature. Without a state power and authority (sovereignty), each man becomes his/her own judge and legislator and when majority were governed by their own reason, there is nothing one can make use of which will not be of a great help to him in conserving his life against his adversaries. Within this context, nature allows each man to seek for self-preservation and to do what he/she believes is necessary to actualize this end. Consequently, each man turning against the others and in this state, life then becomes solitary, poor, nasty, animalistic and short (as cited in Bagby, 2007:31). Hobbes argued that since no man can safely rely on his own strength alone in safeguarding him/herself, men's objectives under this law of nature to refrain from harming one another must be subject to collective guarantee else, for anyone to abstain in the competitive struggle would be to jeopardize his/her life. There is no dependable guarantee to the safety of everyone unless all parties agree not to exercise their natural right to all effects, but to submit unconditionally to a sovereign authorized to act on behalf of each of them, with the facility to help them keep their agreements. Collective restraint would also be a duty. Hence, according to Borchert (2006:140), the supreme duty of the state is the preservation of peace and forestalling the war of all against all as witnessed in the primitive state. This duty entails that the sovereign becomes the necessary common power demanded to maintain peace and security. With the authority given to the state by every man within its governance, the state can use legitimate right to force his people into a state of peace and this would make life, liberty and property possible.

By acceding to the Leviathan state all the powers, Hobbes' argument would mean that more sure and harmonious exercise of political authority plus obedience to the sovereign is directly tied to peace in all realms. The covenant needed the state to empower the sovereign to run the state, to determine controversies through proper adjudication and phrasings of laws. The Leviathan Commonwealth is one in which the state does not lack the political temerity of leveraging on the overarching power of the state in protecting the fundamental rights of the citizens via guaranteeing their safety and quelling uprisings, terrorisms and secessions but maintains the harmony within the state as its prominent duty among all. There was no lurking fear of attacks of fundamentalists in the Leviathan state because the state possesses the requisite power to forestall anything that can revert the standard back to the state of war of all against all. There is a lesson here for Nigeria towards building its state power and authority. The incessant armed confrontation by bandits, terrorists and separatist movements against the Nigeria state raises up the question of how sovereign is the Nigeria state sovereignty and its sustainability. When the government which is an apparatus of the state is unwilling to draw the overarching power of the state in ensuring a prevailing peace for the Nigeria state and where citizens now pay taxes to terrorist groups instead to the Nigerian state, in order to ensure their safety

(Adewale, 2022:43). A situation where the terrorists are overwhelming the apparatuses of the state, annexing territories and there is no guarantee of security for the citizens to ply their trade were not what the Leviathan state would have condoned.

It is noteworthy that for Bagby (2007:9), in the Leviathan state, there is this assurance of security from the lurking fear of the state of nature because of the sovereignty of the state which resides not just on the government but also on the willingness of the state's institutions to draw the state's overarching powers. Hence, Nigeria state could borrow a leaf from Hobbes' Leviathan to make for a strong state which could bolster Nigeria statecraft, legitimacy of the government and the confidence of the Nigeria citizens in the Nigeria project. Thus, ensuring that the essential functions of the state seen in Hobbes' Commonwealth are maintained. When the weight of the state is utilized, it will reassure the faith of Nigerians in the viability of the Nigeria state, and ensuring that the Nigeria State as a unified entity would be preserved, and the balkanization of Nigeria state guarded against. When the citizens cannot ply their trade without fear of attacks from one of the terror groups holding sway in the country is worrisome. Even to transverse the length and breadth of the country is not safe due to the activities of the non-state actors, because no means of transportation in Nigerian is now insulated from the attacks of the terrorists, be it air or train. The horrors of the Kaduna attack of March 26, 2022, where heavily armed men numbering over 200 attacked the International airport in a major city, killing security personnel and temporarily halting flight movements remains vivid to memory (Adewale, 2022:43). The situation was even worsened by the train attack of March 28 2022, where many citizens traveling to Kaduna were either killed or abducted by terrorists. How can the Nigerian state not leverage on the modern technological gadgets like GPRS (General Packet Radio Service) and satellites in ensuring the security of its territorial space? This certainly, the Hobbes' Leviathan would have done, if it were to be in our days.

### **Hobbes's Leviathan and Nigeria Polity**

The Leviathan has acquired for itself a notorious name in the socio-political philosophical cycles, and this notoriety is not what this work is out to defend rather trying to grill out a positive aspect from it and that aspect is the notion of the overarching power of the state and how best its utilization would be of a greater benefit to the Nigeria polity. Nonetheless, a state was needed because of the fact that no existent is self-sufficing given man's selfish ambitions and expectations. Having all these ambitions, we call on one another's help to conciliate them and when we have collected a number of comrades to live together in one place, we call that agreement a state. Supposing that the state owes its actuality to the human requirements which are to bridle the selfish tendencies of man to dominate and maim and the first and the topmost need being the provision of food to keep us alive and the shelter. Still, for Hobbes, the state was a creation of the acceded will of the people in order to be suitable to escape the horrors of the state of nature. The fear of the state of nature is the starting point of Hobbes' construction of the state and for Schmitt (1996:31), the boundary is security of the civil state condition. Every state is surely pioneered on a covenant and this forms a harbour for the conformation of the guiding principles for the civil state.

Hobbes' social contract and state of nature would become important models for doctrines of human nature and politics in centuries to come. "Covenant," as Hobbes calls it,

according to Popkin & Stroll (1993:76), consists of an agreement among people to abide by a selected set of rules, or conventions. These constitute what we now call the guiding principles of the state (Popkin & Stroll, 1993:92). Nevertheless, the emergence of the Nigeria state was shrouded in miry shadows because it never followed the paths sculpted by the studies of Hobbes rather, it was a product of a forceful amalgamation of the Southern Protectorate with the Northern Protectorate in 1914 by Lord Fredrick Lugard for the economic gains of the British Crown (Ebizie & Eloanyi, 2020: 94). Be that as it may, an imposition is never a creation of the people's wish and would as such not augur well for the people, instead the compressed strange bed fellows will perpetually struggle to stampede each other out. Nonetheless, we found ourselves with this reality and thus became the citizens of the Nigeria state. Following the mandate for civil state as stated in Hobbes' social contract, the Nigeria state is expected to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation provided that the sole aim of opting for a civil state is not compromised.

Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* had left a lasting influence on political thoughts of subsequent philosophies. His idea of sovereignty and his thoughts on the role of state led to more investigations like this discourse. He recommends that people should submit themselves almost completely to the will of a sovereign power, a will that represents the people's will (Bagby, 2007: 30). He wants people to see the logic of submitting to a sovereign of almost limitless power and accept his authority willingly even if that authority is not always pleasantly applied, as far as the authority is willing to safeguard the state and its citizens from external aggression. In accepting this contract, the people will have no right to revolt against their sovereign, no right even to complain unless, where the state is failing to keep its end of the contract, which is hinged on the provision of security of its citizens (Bagby, 2007: 33). Because the state's failure to keep to its own end of the contract will create the situation of war of all against all which was what Hobbes tries to avoid by opting for a sovereign state. Therefore, the only right which the people will retain is the right to try to protect their own lives if they are threatened with death, for no one can take the right to self-preservation in any case because, it represents the survival instinct and it is the whole reason for entering the social contract in the first place (Bagby, 2007: 32).

The security concern of a state is indisputably as ancient as the state itself and it is the bedrock for the formation and opting for a civil state, thereby escaping the dreads of the state of nature where life is brutish, solitary, and short. As could be drawn from the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Section 14, article b and c.) It declares that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of the government and the participation by the people in their government shall be ensured in accordance with the provisions of this constitution. This points that the spine of the Nigeria commonwealth revolves around the provision of security for life and property to advance the fortunes of the state and its citizens. However, Ujomu (2018: 31), maintained that security is more than just safety from the violence, it means the absence of any form of violence, whether it is economic, sexual or military. For Ujomu (2018: 32), "the central feature in the quest for natural security is the concern for the desire and capacity for self-defense or as the preservation of the borders of a state".

Thus, a constitutional state is a state where within the confines of the state, laws and extra-legal laws aimed against the state cannot exist. Only a state established by such constituent assembly is constitutionally a lawful and constitutional state (Schmitt, 1996: 68).

As Hobbes' Leviathan state witnessed tranquility (*pax humanae*) through the instrumentality of the overarching power of the state. So, the Nigeria state via its institutions like the armed forces, the legislature and judiciary is expected to witness a pervading tranquility and stability within the jurisdiction of the Nigeria commonwealth. But, this is not yet achieved and therefore puts a question against Nigeria sovereignty. In the thoughts of Collins (2005: 11), stable sovereignty was the most elevated of human achievements, for it secures what he considered the abiding end of political life: peace. The state then is saddled with the responsibility of maintaining law and order within its borders and also promotion of peaceful coexistence of its populace.

Then, how tenable are the primary objectives of a state within the Nigeria state? Has the Nigeria state the political temerity to ensure the optimal security of lives and properties within its borders? The overarching power of the state demands obedience to the rule of law. Utilizing the overarching power of the state to provide constitutes real freedom in all its ramifications- emotional, economic, social-political and cultural well-being of the state and its citizens and ensuring that the secular status of the Nigeria state is not trampled on the altar of religious bigotry. This will form the bulk of the analysis in the succeeding subheading as we focus more on the state-building in Nigeria as informed by the Hobbes' Leviathan.

### **Hobbes' Leviathan and a Strong Stable Nigeria**

Where the state is too weak to wield its constitutional sovereign powers, non-state actors like the Boko Haram, ISWAP, Bandits, Fulani Herdsmen, and separatists will question the sovereignty of the state. When the government seems to have ceded partial control of a vital state function to terrorists like amassing new territories and collection of taxes and tributes as the Boko Haram and the Bandits are doing now is one of the signs of the urgency of a strong state as could be seen in the Leviathan state. The irrefutable fact about the Leviathan State is the fact that it surfaced to foster confidence in the state and encourage co-operation among its citizens. It is herein that there sounded to be some situations of core social values in the Leviathan state similar as trust, co-operation, compassion, justice, forbearance to insure that the colorful situations of the state could effectively manage the human cum natural resources for the overall security, peace, prosperity and well-being of all within its borders (Ujomu, 2018: 32). The Leviathan state was a political creation of the masses via a binding covenant. This covenant consists of an agreement among people to abide by a particular set of rules, or conventions. Rested on this covenant is the capability of the Leviathan state to moderate the over-ambitiousness of people which is substantiated on the continual trouble of safety and security of all others, this Hobbes believes is inimical to the peace of the state. When our national assets could not go round for the good of the citizens because of corruption and embezzlement by a group of people in the corridors of power, is just but taking us back to the state of nature which was modernity exited through opting for a civil state. Where the 80 percent of Nigerian crude oil is stolen and the greater percentage of the oil revenue ends in private pocket (Obiezu, 2022) and the Nigeria state is hapless, is unhealthy for the survival of the

statehood of Nigeria. Besides, it is due to the government's lack of political will and leveraging on the overarching powers of state as seen in Hobbes in checkmating the crime against the state because of a religious belief that is very dangerous and worrisome.

In order to avert this, Hobbes advocated for a state power to moderate the capricious drives of men (Bagby, 2007: 9), so as to insure a secured atmosphere within the bounds of its jurisdiction and ensure that religion is far removed from the scope of state politics because of the secular status of our democracy (Lawhead, 2002: 224). It is within this context, that we take the statecraft as the construction of the state institutions defined by their monopoly of use of lawful violence in a given territory. And this conception does not indicate that the state is the only actor actually using violence but rather that it is the only actor that can legitimately authorize its use (Munro, 2013: 116). These institutions include the parliament, the judiciary and the armed forces controlled by the state. The state can grant an actor the permit to use legitimate violence without losing its monopoly as long as it remains the sole source of the proper use of legitimate violence as could be seen in the functional engagement of the armed forces and still maintains the capacity to apply this licit monopoly (Munro, 2013: 117). The armed forces is a central feature of the state vested with the primary ideal of securing the territorial integrity of the state. The central idea of security provided by the fortified forces was according to Ujomo (2018:32), a heritage of Westphalia Treaty of 1600s. So, due to the essential attribute of sovereignty of the state, it becomes all the more necessary for the state to have a modern armed forces utilizing the modern security gadgets in ensuring that it maintains its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and citizens' protection from internal and external adversaries. One of the comparable characteristics between the Leviathan state same and the Nigeria state is the premium placed on security, like it is in every animal kingdom which is the logical warrant and precedent to the propagation and survival of the species. Ukhun, (2018: 86) noted that indeed in the lower beast fiefdoms, security is a *conditio sine qua non* for survival because it is a serious business. Security has always been a deciding factor for the food and durability of human civilization. The Nigerian budgetary security allocation since 2012 till date had be the highest in the percentage when compared to other critical sectors on the state. Why then is it so difficult to rescue the Nigeria state from this impending collapse. While, Hobbes advocacy for a civil state via the Leviathan was in a bid to alleviate the dreads of the state of nature in which life was solitary, poor, nasty, animalistic and short and the emergence of the Nigeria state should have been for the effective maximization of the richness of our both human and natural resources. And not to allow the festering of ethnicity, religious fundamentalism and terrorism which are inimical to the sovereignty of the Nigerian state as they constitute the chunk of the forces trying to tear the Nigerian state apart.

Within the Nigerian geopolitical terrain, public security is the safety of the state and all its factors. A state is safe when its territory is not violated, its sovereignty is not threatened, its wealth is not despoiled and its citizens can conduct their licit business on the corridors of tranquility and harmony (Umeh, 2023: 54). The rising nature of the terror conditioning of the Boko Haram, and ISWAP in the Northern Nigeria, coupled with the enterprising moves of bandits and worsened by the Fulani herders despoiling around mutilating lives and properties in an unbounded manner point to some latitude of sympathy within the

dimension of those that should wield the powers of the state. This is in discrepancy to what the Hobbes Leviathan advocates for the safety of the state. Because, Hobbes' Leviathan was neither swayed by political permutations nor lacked the political will to wield the tool of the state. Citizens cannot transverse the length and breadth of the country for their businesses freely because of the terror conditioning of these non-state actors. They kidnap citizens in droves unbounded whether it is on the Kaduna-Abuja Express Way or in Katsina and Zamfara. As if their coward act were yet to brim over, they have moved towards adding some part of the Nigeria territory in their shot to declare a caliphate, this becomes the most grueling attempt to the Nigeria sovereignty.

Why is the Nigeria government so amenable to these terrorists? Is it that Nigeria has lost the sense of requisite overarching power of the state? Why is the Nigeria state not using the system applied to quell the dare threats of the IPOB in the East that led to the successful conduct of the November 6th 2021 gubernatorial election in Anambra State, the Yoruba secessionists in the West and the militants in the South? Hence, the urgent need to borrow the overarching powers of the state as supported by Hobbes in crushing these apostates to insure the non-collapse of the Nigerian state. With the appreciation of Hobbes' Leviathan we can begin to think of a Nigeria beyond banditry, kidnapping and endless circles of violence that have engulfed the Nigeria state.

What about the economic terrorists, who have planted themselves at the corridors of powers and doing away with our common heritage through pillaging and embezzlement, thereby, threatening the profitable viability of the Nigerian state and pushing it to ruin and eventual collapse. For Ebo (2018: 119), the enormity of the economic terrorism to the sovereignty of the Nigeria State is unappreciable. This ranges from endemic and institutionalized corruption, embezzlement of public funds, cyber related crimes and advanced fee fraud of what is now termed "yahoo-yahoo or yahoo plus". Thus, there is the necessity for the utilization of the overarching powers of the state as advocated by Hobbes to ensure all round security which is attained based on the principles of justice and fairness.

On another note, the other powerful institution of the state is the legislature. The legislature is the arm of Government saddled with the responsibility of formulation of laws that will guarantee the peace-building of the state and shield the state from the tyrannical propensity of the members of the executive arm of the Government and protect the sovereignty of the state and the supremacy of the constitution from internal threats as would have been the case with Olusegun Obasanjo's Third Term Agenda, which was killed on the floors of the plenary. Thus, motivated by the drive to uphold the statehood of the Nigeria State through a waxing and formidable state, the Legislative arm of the Government ensures that laws that can enhance the legitimacy of the state's monopoly of violence are formulated and implemented through the various windows of governance-checks and balances and oversight functions.

Lastly, the judicial arm of the Government as the temple of justice and altar of equity and fairness, armed with the sacred edicts of the state becomes the last hope of the common man, ensures that there is legitimacy in the state acts of both the executive and the

legislative. Wielding further its constitutional power of the review, the judiciary becomes a veritable institution of the state whose contribution to the statecraft is unquantifiable (Umeh, 2023: 57). The members of the bar and bench had contributed immensely to deepening the strong state advocated in this thesis through their various pronouncements and judgements because it aids in statecraft and ensures the stability of the polity and peaceful coexistence. Finally, armed with the lessons from the Leviathan state, Nigeria can wriggle out of its sorry state by enforcing the secular status the Nigeria state as to give each citizens the necessary freedom from the shackles of confusion over the status of religion and the state in a plural democracy and ultimately preserve the unity of the Nigerian state and prevent its eventual collapse.

### **Evaluation and Conclusion**

In the course of this philosophical discourse, it is very evident that Thomas Hobbes critically gave us a clear picture of how a society without a government would look like and the principles that were at work in such a society. Man's life there was in solitary, poor, very nasty, brutish, short and worst of all, in continual fear and danger of death. However, the civil state was an evolution from a state ruled by nature. And the quintessential nature of the state of nature is none other than civil wars which can only be prevented by the overarching might of the state. Exacting the overarching powers of the state whenever the situation compels. This philosophical discourse also examines how to strengthen the Nigeria State using Hobbes' idea of an overarching power of the state against the hydra-headed security challenges threatening Nigeria and its core formation. It considers those incidents that threatened to hold the Nigeria state to a standstill only to be minimized with the stepping in of the overarching tool of the state.

This discourse in a subtle manner appreciates the crux of the foundation of the state as the escape from the brutish condition of the state of nature into the safest condition that guarantees right to life, freedom of movement and association and above all, the security of life and property. This essay buttresses the fact that the state is the only legitimate base that possesses a monopoly of licit violence and saddled with the responsibility of protecting its territory and inhabitants within its territory from every illegitimate violence as orchestrated within the ambience of the charter of civil state creation. Hence, it is only Thomas Hobbes among all the state and social contract theorists who is so emphatic about the notion of the overarching power of the state in his socio-political philosophy which this research work rated to be a very positive aspect that should not be discarded due to the notoriety of the Leviathan.

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