

## THE PHILOSOPHER AND REVOLUTIONARY ATTEMPTS IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*In an organized society, human beings have revolted against inhuman conditions of living or systems that governed them through structured groups called syndicates, movements, oppositions and revolutions. The uprising could be spontaneous or initiated/inspired by a « wise person » (the philosopher). Admitted that existential realities are the bases for every desire to ask for, complain and even demand for substitution in the way of doing things, the fundamental question which the paper intends to answer revolves around the implication of the philosopher either in inspiring or leading revolution. This is why this work is titled: *The Philosopher and Revolutionary Attempts in Nigeria*. One is of the opinion that philosophers are intrinsically part of the revolution either by inspiring others or by actually leading revolution. In discussing this topic, one shall first explain the meaning of revolution; secondly, the paper expounds the debates concerning the involvement of philosophers in revolution and lastly, the paper describes the revolutionary attempts in Nigeria*

**Keywords:** Democracy, Deterritorialisation, Philosopher, Reterritorialization, Revolution,

### **Introduction**

It could be accepted that “the developments of philosophical reflections were influenced by the paradigm shifts in science” (Onah, 2021, 304). In other words, progress in science led to the development of philosophical thoughts. For instance, “The philosophy of Plato was influenced by the Mathematics of Greeks; the Cartesian philosophy was shaped by the Galileo's construction of the physics; Kant's philosophy followed the pattern of Newton's physics; the philosophy of E. Husserl took after mathematical logic and K. Marx science of history had great effect on the philosophy of dialectical materialism” (Onah, 2021, 304).

However, with regards to revolution, the debate as to whether or not philosophers are the cause of revolution is a complicated one. Deleuze & Guattari (1942, 96) are of the opinion that “It's not wrong to say that revolution is “the philosophers' fault”. This is in the measure in which his thought provokes the reaction of people in order to overturn a supposedly bad system. That is why Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defined revolution as “a sudden, radical, or complete change” (Revolution, 2023) in order to oust a bad government.

In philosophy, the movement of ideas contributed in shaping the structure of the State, in freeing morals from religions (Diop, 1987, 30-31). Philosophical ideas have led to social revolution which consists in the inclusion of those who were formerly forbidden to occupy certain positions. People from any tribe or religion could be ministers of defense

as long as they have the competence (Diop, 1987, 28). Besides, the importance of philosophical reflections leading to Hitler's belief that the Aryan race was the most superior race in the world is linked to the works of Hegel and Heidegger (Onah, 2021, 306). According to Mundaya (1996), while Habermas' *Theory of Communication* was elaborated in order to address the solitary and egocentric conscience of westerners, Gabriel Marcel proposed a new idea of the human being to his contemporaries following the effects of the Second World War. This means that every philosophy is conceived in order to solve a particular problem bothering the people at a particular time.

From the preceding line of thought, the pertinent question which this paper wants to examine is: to what extent is the philosopher involved in any revolution? Do philosophers lead revolutions in person or are revolutions mere product of their thoughts and ideas? This present work is interested in analyzing the responsibilities and roles of philosophers with regards to change in the human society. This change could be cultural, social or political. It will also clarify the implication of playing an “active role” or a “passive role” in any revolution as a philosopher. The reflection in this article will be articulated in three points: first, I will explain the term “revolution;” secondly, I shall examine the dilemma of holding that the philosopher plays an active or passive role in revolution; thirdly, I will describe the Nigeria attempts at revolution.

### **What is Revolution?**

According to Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, revolution can be defined as “a fundamental change in political organization especially: the overthrow or renunciation of one government or ruler and the substitution of another by the governed” (Revolution, 2023). This is in view of obtaining a better living condition for the citizenry. That is why it is often seen as “activity or movement designed to effect fundamental changes in the socioeconomic situation” (Revolution, 2023). Le Bon (2001, 11) wrote: “We generally apply the term revolution to sudden political changes, but the expression may be employed to denote all sudden transformations, or transformations apparently sudden, whether of beliefs, ideas, or doctrines”.

There are tendencies to mix up the term revolution with reformation, movement, etc, or even to liken it with coup (Kandelakki, 2006, 2). Minkkinen (2009, 14) likened the term revolution “to *re-evolution*, which denotes that it is important to reorient the process of evolution which is taking place in a given social formation and geo-historical context”. This means that in the series of events which characterize the life of a group of people, there is need to change the principal cause(s) of human suffering or reason for the malfunctioning of a system. In the case of reformation, it is understood as the end-result of the social order and the form which is reformed (Minkkinen, 2009, 14). Whereas the death of human beings is indispensable in revolution, that is not the case in reformation. Revolution is a concept that resembles but different from rebellion, resistance or secession.

Considering the impact of revolution in any given society, promoters of “democratization preferred to describe transformation of political regime as 'transition'” (Kandelakki, 2006, 2). In the spirit of democratization, revolution could be likened to a “new mentality in order to build a new society” (Lamb, 1983, 73). In the thought of many, it could be

compared to the struggle for liberation. However, “revolution covers economic, social and cultural spheres of life” (Chengte, 2016, 34). Although it is possible to consider revolution with reference to changes in a country (French revolution, Chinese revolution), regions (the Arab spring, the dissolution-revolution of the Soviet empire), world (in 1848 and 1968 = Read Minkinen, 2009, 17), but one could also think of it in terms of progress in science and technology such as: industrial revolution, digital revolution, technological revolution (United Nations, 2016), or even in terms of institutional change Marxist revolution (Lamb, 109), the Aristocratic Revolution of the City-States among the early Greeks, Latins and Romans (Diop, 1987, 24), demographic revolution (Easterlin, 2019, 3) and political revolution.

Moreover, revolution is characterized by profound questions concerning values – that is, the manner in which holding on to a value affects human existence. When it is positive, it will engender multiple production at different levels in order to improve the living condition of human beings. On the contrary, when the significance attributed to human existence becomes negative it provokes revolt, disgust, reactions and revolution. Some of the unhelpful qualities are government's rampant corruption, blatant election rigging (Kandelakki, 2006, 2). It is their importance in the society and the existential realities which proceed from them that give rise to different kinds of revolutions.

However, there is possibility of a country or society to undergo revolution based on “enthusiasm”. Such enthusiasm involves nothing rational or even reasonable (Deleuze & Guattari, 1942, 96). Enthusiasm in this sense presupposes little application of rationality. Even though the origin of revolution may be rational, Le Bon (2001, 11) explained “we must not forget that the reasons invoked in preparing for it do not influence the crowd until they have been transformed into sentiments”. A perfect example would be the Georgia's revolution which “involved both a sudden change of power and mass mobilization” (Kandelakki, 2006, 3). Unfortunately, those who “find the philosophy faculty's teaching a poor substitute for their inclination to enthusiasm” would be unable to make a connection between the expression of passion by the crowd and the reflection that engendered it. Albert Camus is an ideal representation of a thinker whose idea gathered crowd to agitate for change in Algeria. He was a philosopher and a revolutionist. He wrote in many journals and was actively involved in some of the protest that took place.

In Europe and America, revolutionary movements have either been positive or negative. If the American pragmatic philosophy was successful to the point of producing the democratic revolution and a new society, the French philosophy produced a “republic of the mind” which is expressed in revolutionary cogito. But England will never stop asking why revolutions turn out so badly when they promise so much in spirit. (...) Germany, for its part, will not stop reflecting on the French revolution, as something it cannot do (Deleuze & Guattari, 1942, 99). This reflexive evaluation of revolution is accentuated if one takes time to analyze revolutionary attempts in African continents.

Generally, the struggle for the independence of African States could be considered as a revolution. This began in Kenya when “the Mau Mau guerrillas fought black Africa's first war of liberation (Lamb, 1983, 151) and then the nationalist movements (Lamb, 1983, 161). According to Lamb (1983, 69), “revolution is a popular – and an overworked – word in Africa. Almost every president likes to think he is either the product or the producer of

one”. One can count the President of Samora Moisés Machel of Mozambique as one of the products and producers of revolution (Lamb, 1983, 70); others are President Julius Nyerere “the conscience of black Africa” (Lamb, 1983, 70), Jomo Kenyatta (Lamb, 1983, 58-65), Jerry Rawlings = “coup of conscience” (Lamb, 287), etc. One attitude that is common to all the leaders of revolution is the desire to change the living condition of their people. But how successful were they? The terrible happenings in Uganda made Ugandans rebels and a ragtag of army invading Tanzanians to revolt against Idi Amin and the latter fled to Libya (Lamb, 1983, 79), Mobutu Sese Seko Kuru Ngebandu Wa Za Banga of Zaire also went into exile to Morocco (Baggaley, 1997) after exerting hardship on the Congo people of Kinshasa;

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mobutu Sese Seko Kuru Ngebandu Wa Za Banga entertained fear that the presence of the Faculty of Philosophy (in *Faculté Catholique de Kinshasa*) would produce great and critical minds who will advocate for change in the system of governance and better living condition. This made him to suppress the department of philosophy in 1971 by merging it with two other universities – l'Université de Lubumbashi and l'Université de Kisangani, with the new site in Lubumbashi (Kaplan, 1979, 71-72). He became conscious of the fact that the unlimited freedom of philosophy/philosophers “to proclaim any sort of opinion publicly is bound to be dangerous both to the government and to the public itself” (Kant, 1979, 55). Contrary to Mobutu's fear, Idi Amin of Uganda “declared himself a doctor of philosophy and the chancellor of Makerere University, and the one-time 'Harvard of Africa” (Lamb, 1983, 89). In either case, the fear of the seat of philosophy in a country or the self-declaration of doctor in philosophy by dictators does not provide a framework where human beings can attain self-accomplishment. In the case of Democratic Republic of Congo, it produced what Albert Camus (Camus, 1942, 34) described as “freedom of the prisoner” while that of Uganda produced “university of semiliterates” (Lamb, 1983, 89). To paraphrase the words of Kant (1979), Mobutu was oblivious of the fact that “the philosophy faculty can lay claim to any teaching, in order to test its truth. The government cannot forbid it to do this without acting against its own proper and essential purpose.” Briefly, the purpose of any government consists in providing a framework for citizens to express their freedom. This consideration makes it worthwhile to examine the association of the philosopher in revolution.

### **The Debates Concerning the Involvement of the Philosopher in Revolution**

I would like to indicate three levels of the debates: the philosopher-participant, the philosopher-non-participant and the moderate view. The first two are extreme in character while the third is an intermediate position. The arguments revolve around having a concept and then being a spectator or an actor. The explanation of the aforementioned terms will contribute in taking a modest position concerning the role of the philosopher in revolution.

To begin, I would like to ask: Which is most important, to have a concept and then work towards actualizing it or to act first, and later qualify one's action? On the one hand, to have a concept means to understand and to have knowledge due to some experiences. Concepts are not empty thoughts; they are abstract ideas with specific content. On the

other hand, concepts are functions in the simplest term (Oxford Dictionary, 2023). With regards to the role of the philosopher in any revolution, this means that from the time of conceiving an idea, the philosopher has an objective and knows the probable outcome of propagating his or her thought. Conversely, the philosopher acts and when his or her action begins to have effect, the philosopher begins to interpret the phenomenon by forming a concept. In the former, the philosopher is active while in the latter, the philosopher could be said to be passive.

Besides, the active or passive nature of the role of the philosopher may also raise curious question like: what is the possibility of separating the “spectator from the actor”? In other words, what is the possibility of separating the philosopher who inspires or instigates revolution from those who actually lead the revolution? Here, the philosopher who only inspires revolution is said to be passive and takes the sense of a spectator and the one who actually inspires and leads revolution is said to be active and has the quality of an actor. These are extreme positions. While it appears easy to make this distinction between “philosopher-spectator” and “philosopher-actor,” it is important to find out under what context the philosopher-spectator could be said to be “active”.

Perhaps, it is better to evaluate the historical context of each revolution in order to arrive at a moderate interpretation concerning the philosopher's commitment, either emotionally or intellectually to the cause of revolution. This consists in affirming that revolution “is self-referential, or enjoys a self-positioning that can be apprehended in an immanent enthusiasm” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1942, 97). That is to say, it may not be connected to any specific experience in the life of the people who are eager to have a change. However, the above way of thinking does not sufficiently explain why people agitate for replacement in government or change in the system of doing things. In his comments on Kant's work *Conflict of faculties*, Foucault (2015, 22) explained that the author seems to support the fact that the philosopher is involved in revolution. This is because by asking the question: “What is Revolution?” the author introduces new form of historic-philosophical questioning of the sense of that which also affects him.

Moreover, if truly the philosopher is actively involved in any revolution, it means that “The people is interior to the thinker because it is a “becoming-people”” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1942, 105). In other words, the philosophers awaken the consciousness of the people to the live-experience which is threatening and which is not dignifying. The philosopher speaks, writes, educates and “incites” people to do something for themselves and for the generation to come. This is because he is enlightened and able to foresee an unimaginable amount of suffering which could beset the people. His effort is limited at doing this because he feels he is “incapable of creating a people” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1942, 105).

Besides, the philosopher is intimately involved in revolution, either at the theoretical level by inspiring it or at the practical level by leading it. Just like it is difficult to disassociate theory from practice so it is between the philosopher and revolution. In other words, “it is not even possible to draw a clean demarcation between 'doing' and 'thinking,'” (King, 2001, 66). Practically, the philosopher realizes what he could not accomplish alone by inspiring the crowd to revolt, demonstrate, and reclaim a better condition of living. But theoretically, he uses his tools, paper and pen, to elaborate how people should not be

content with the actual state of existence (*King, 2001, 66*).

From the foregoing line of thought, it is possible to deduce that there is a double force that could trigger revolution. At the conceptual level, the philosopher comes down to the level of the none philosopher in order to make the latter reflect like him, see things like him and reason like him. Afterwards, the people develop enthusiasm to bring about a new society with new mindset. Perhaps, this is the result of a combined effort of the philosopher and the people. Sometimes the active role of the philosopher is perceptible and at other times it is not perceived. What the philosopher and the people who have resolved to overturn a bad system “have in common is resistance: resistance to death, to servitude, to the intolerable, to shame, to the present” (*Deleuze & Guattari, 1942, 105*). But what has been the experience in Nigeria?

### **Revolutionary Attempts in Nigeria**

There are three perspectives to understanding the revolutionary attempts in Nigeria. The first makes allusion to the struggle for independence, the second has to do with the various coups d'Etat after Nigeria's independence and the third is linked to the cohesion of the citizenry. I shall describe each of the above attempts to transform Nigeria into a beautiful society with a view to pointing out the desire to realize a fundamental change which will impact positively in the life of people.

The first perspective could be situated before the independence of Nigeria. Nationalists such as Nnamdi Benjamin Azikiwe, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Ahmadu Ibrahim Bello, Chief Margaret Ekpo, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Chief Anthony Eromosele Enahoro, Chief Frederick Rotimi Alade Williams, Eyo Ita, Mallam Aminu Kano, etc are the heroes of the struggle for Nigeria's independence/pioneer political, professional and business leaders (*The Guardian, 2020*). It should be noted that the nationalists' struggle for the Independence of Africa in general, and Nigeria in particular is characterized by intellectual production on different themes. They spread nationalist consciousness, national self-determination; they sought to create an egalitarian society, to defend African culture and the decolonization of Africa.

The significance of the change at that time in the history of Nigeria was to achieve self-governance and the unity of Nigerians. While it is true “that all revolutions are more or less progressive or emancipative” (*Minkkinen, 2009, 15*), that of the First Republic in Nigeria (1963-1966) was regressive and constituted other forms of slavery. This is evident in the formation of political parties along ethnic and tribal sentiment (regional politics); falsification of census results (*Olayiwola, 1991, 36*) and the attribution of the ownership and media broadcasts with ethnic, tribal and regional status (*Olayiwola, 1991, 36*). It created rivalry, feeling of domination by the ruling party, mistrust and the aftermaths were the civil war and several coups d'Etat which wrecked the country and plunged the citizens into misery. Although the ambition of the nationalists was great but the ability to sustain it was disrupted by coups and counter-coups d'Etat.

The second perspective of revolutionary attempt in Nigeria is marked by coups and counter coups d'Etat. This is not surprising because “there can be counter-revolutions within revolutionary process” (*Minkkinen, 2009, 16*). This point of view can be situated

after Nigeria's Independence (between 1966-1984). For instance, Nigeria experience “three coups d'Etat, the assassinations of two heads of state, and one civil war that claimed a million lives” (Lamb, 1983, 301). The coups had the objective either of sanitizing corruption and embezzlement of public funds or to succeed in the areas where the civilian or previous government had failed. The statements issued after the successful take over by coup d'Etat made promises that they “will no longer be ashamed to be Nigerians” (Nyang'oro, 1993,140). The declarations were full of ideas to make Nigeria regain her lost glory; they were intelligible remarks which solicited the citizens to obedient followership in order to justify reason for overthrowing previous government. Nevertheless, the revolutionary experiences at this time in the history of Nigeria could be described as marked by “neo-liberal and anti-social economic policies, in combination with undemocratic rule and the repression of especially the leftist opposition” (Minkinen, 2009, 16).

In reality, “the counter coup against General Gowon in 1975 had been justified in part by elements in the military who argued that Gowon was about to renege on a promise of a return to civilian rule” (Nyang'oro, 1993, 130). Besides, a close examination of the various coups d'Etat in Nigeria is best described as “officer coups”. According to Nyang'oro (1993, 133), “officer coups are systemic in nature, that is, they reflect cleavages (class, ethnicity, nationality, regional, etc) in society”. Again, this perspective of revolutionary attempt failed because the various heads of State imposed themselves on the people against their consent. For instance, the first coup which produced Major-General Johnson Thomas Umunnakwe Aguiyi-Ironsi as the Nigeria's first Military Head of State. It could be said that the military were incompetent in administration, wasteful and abandoned agricultural based economy.

Being a democratic State, Nigeria is governed by the principle of majority carries the vote. However, where democratic principles are not respected and the rule of law is relegated to the background, the people who are supposed to be beneficiaries of the dividend of this form of government will be forced to revolt. The people could justify their collective action using democratic means such as impeachment. This means that military interruption of democratic regime is a kind of revolutionary activity that damages a group of people with an explicit purpose and written rules.

The third perspective to the revolutionary attempt in Nigeria can best be described along the line of thought of Deleuze & Guattari (1942) as the willingness to achieve “deterritorialisation”. In this work, the term “deterritorialisation” means the ability of people to recognize their common humanity and to join force in order to fight a common enemy. The people (Nigerians) do not look at their individual characteristics such as tribes, religion or ethnic group. Their sole objective in the common struggle is to obtain a dignified condition of living for everyone. It is the determination to live together without discrimination. “Deterritorialisation” is an assiduous effort to live in the same territory with people from the Southern part of Nigeria or Northern part of Nigeria. In this case, it is a persistent activity to realize, in the words of Nnamdi Azikiwe “One Nigeria”.

Nigerians have made several efforts to live together, to appreciate the humanity of fellow citizen, especially when they became aware that the politicians are the ones inciting them to discriminate and victimize others along ethnic, tribal and religious difference. Efforts

in this direction were manifested in the 1993 General Elections and 2023 General Elections. However, in the former, the results of the General Elections were annulled by the military president Ibrahim Babangida (Okorie, 2021, 27) while in the latter, the results are still being contested by major opposition leaders like Peter Gregory Obi and Atiku Abubakar in the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal (PEPT) in Abuja (The Cable, 2023).

The coming together of Nigerians, irrespective of their individual characteristics to express their franchise could only be made possible through the expertise of philosophers – They help the citizens (through debates, analysis and discussions) to be radically conscious of the deplorable condition of living or in extreme case, to inspire the process of the “transevaluation of values”. The intervention of philosophers in this context would be described as “reterritorialization”. By reterritorialization, I mean the conceptual work through which philosophers gather people together in order to fight a just cause. It consists in making recommendations, suggestions and proposals to find solutions to the problem confronting humanity. Concretely, reterritorialization inspires everyone, irrespective of cultural background or political affiliation to come together in a designated “space” in order to make it sane. This is the ultimate goal of every revolution or political movement – peaceful co-existence of human beings, equal right and dignity of every human being.

### **Conclusion**

It is evident from this work that revolutions have taken place in the history of human society. Even though this article did not give the details of each revolution, the motivations for any revolution remains the desire for a better society, an improved living condition for human beings and the aspiration for an effective system of administration.

The implication of philosophers in any revolution reveals that they are part of the human society; their commitment to building a social order where everyone can find his or her place obliges them to educate the people about the need for change. Their loyalty to the nation requires that the procedure should be non violent. The philosophers are neither passive nor spectators to what is happening in the society. Even if the spark off of revolution could be attributed to philosophers, it is however difficult to control the enthusiasm and the passion of people who are determined to come out of undignified condition of living. When the people succeed in gaining back their self-respect, the revolution is victorious; but their failure to overturn the cause of their misfortune means the revolution did not succeed.

In the case of Nigeria, three revolutionary perspectives were identified. They were attempts to change the way of things as opposed to what they thought and felt it should be. The existing states of affairs were: the fight for independence, the objectives of various military interventions in the process of government and the effort to express their quality of being benevolent. The procedure of achieving this begins with the philosopher in what I call “reterritorialisation” and the space for experiencing our humanity is what I called “deterritorialisation”.

This approach of discussing revolutionary attempts in Nigeria reveals that philosophers have their role to play in changing the order of things or systems that are unfavorable, adverse and detrimental to a happy Nigeria.

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