



## The new face of violence in Africa : its causes, consequences and possible solutions

Thomas Hobbes, in his political philosophy, describes the condition of people before there was any state or civil society as hypothetical. In this level of being, every human person has the right to do whatever he or she considers necessary for their survival.

The right possessed in this state of life has no corresponding responsibility. Equality in “the state of nature” means that people can hurt their neighbour and take from them what they consider necessary for their good. The driving force here is the will to survive, and the resultant psychological attitude of everyone is fear- fear of violent death. The scenario we get from the state of nature is one of people moving against each other’s bodies in violent and fearful motion- or the anarchic condition which Thomas Hobbes calls ‘the war of all against all’. All these are motivated by a twofold human drive: appetite and aversion[1].

According to Awoshiri Williams; “The condition in most African countries is rapidly and swiftly reverting into the Hobbesian state of nature. Ours is an age where rebel groups have become stronger than faithful citizens. In fact Africa has had more than a fair share of rebellious forces. Their activities of course reveal that there are no laws, no authority, no morality, no sense of right or wrong, and no sense of justice or injustice. No other rule of action than self-interest and its satisfaction”[2]. All these occur because the sensible pedagogy of settling disputes are ignored by armed goons, who are ably supported by civilian sycophants. The seismic intensity with which these rebel forces have rocked our continent with wars, and the unfolding drama of blood bathing that ensue have made observers like Awoshiri Williams to opine that in the nearest future, archeologists will dig the African soil and find skeletons of Africans of the 20th and 21st centuries, and would debate hotly if we have brains[3].

Taking a cursory look into the contemporary African society, one cannot but ask some salient questions, which could plunge one into pondering. The heroic sacrifices of our heroes past have been thrown into the dustbins. Everything seems to be in the doldrums, our ethical values and systems are on the verge of extinction. The traditional values of the “glorious past Africa ” such as peaceful co-existence, fellow feeling, communalism, respect for elders, moral consciousness, etc. have been laid in the coffers of nothingness[4].

The Continent of Africa has been set in a web of total cultural disarray; the Africans have been entangled in a cabinet of criss-cross network of identity crisis. The contemporary African society has replaced the dictum, “be your brother’s keeper” with “to your tent oh Israel .” Everyman is



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in search for privacy, and the traditional communalistic outlook renounced and abandoned like a leper[5]. Traditional African society was known for its sensitivity to the common good which is the hallmark of authentic Africanism. However, recent turn of events has shown that the African continent has been 'raped' of its values that depict African authenticity such as morality, love, decency, familyhood, brotherhood and the likes.

This paper is concerned with exposing the new face of violence in Africa , with a view to uncovering its causes, consequences and proposing a way forward.

### THE EXPERIENCE OF THE NEW FACE OF VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN SOCIETY

Violence in Africa can be categorized into communal violence, religious violence and violence by ethnic militias. But trekking the allies of all these categories is not the basic concern of this segment of the paper. We will be particularly concerned with the violence effected by ethnic militias. This not withstanding, in what appears to be a well coordinated effort to seize the continent by its jugular and thereby make it a theater of violence, the momentum of activism and the unrelenting pressure of ethnic based organizations and their militias in Africa , have been on the increase in recent times. It will not be blown so much out of proportion to say that almost every tribe in Africa now has a militia.

Turning our lenses on Nigeria, in the roll call, we have the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) in the North, the Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC) in the South-West, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and the Bakassi Boys in the South East, the Egbesu Boys and the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) in the Niger Delta. These ethnic organizations were formed at various times as vanguards for the protection and promotion of ethnic interests in their regions of domicile[6].

For instance, the Arewa Consultative Forum is an umbrella organization designed to protect the interest of all persons from Arewa, irrespective of their political, religious and tribal affiliations. The Oodua People's Congress was also formed to promote the interest of the Yoruba ethnic nationality. However, their recent activities show a blind promotion of the interest of the Yoruba Ethnic nationality. Afenifere, the Pan Yoruba Socio-Cultural organization has accused the leader of the OPC of dragging the integrity of the Yoruba nation in the mud by drumming up support for Patricia Etteh despite the report of the honourable Idoko House Renovation panel[7].



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The movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) which was started in 1993 by Chief Ralph Uwazurike wanted the “marginalized” people of the South-East to opt out of the Nigerian Federation. The Ibos feel that they have been deliberately left out of the power equation in the Federal Republic of Nigeria[8]. Their activities are variegated and overwhelming. In Anambra State , residents were jolted on an early November morning, when an army of MASSOB members brazenly took over major highways of virtually all important cities of the South-Eastern States. Dressed in their colours of black T-shirts, black trousers, red or black caps or head and arm bands with the ubiquitous Biafran black, green and red flag with the rising sun in the middle, the members clearly overwhelmed the police all over the State. Help was sought from the Abuja police headquarters before they could be dislodged. To help quell the situation, the federal government arrested and jailed Chief Ralph Uwazurike who has until this time been in jail. These notwithstanding, whatever the conditions considered before jailing him, history reveals that no ethnic crises is successfully solved by arresting ethnic militants.

The NDPVF led by Muujahid Asari Dokubo, was formed to promote and protect the interests of the oil producing ethnic nationalities of the Niger Delta[9]. In the Niger Delta, the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) fought to arrest ecological and environmental degradation, and the gradual annihilation of the people’s sources of livelihood such as farming, fishing and hunting a result of the activities of oil exploration. To be precise, agitation by the people for environmental justice and a more equitable distribution of the proceeds from oil, resource control, self-determination and the development of the area are all responsible for youth restiveness. However, due to conflicting variables and continued prevarications by the federal government, the Niger Delta deteriorated into anarchy, terror and revolving criminality[10]. In the present, through the activities of the NDDC, with its dreams of creating substantial jobs, pursuing industrialization and better environmental management, human capital development etc, the government has begun to address the needs of the people which has pacified the activities of ethnic militias in the region to a considerable degree[11].

In Ivory Coast , the country remained divided and in conflict between the rebel-controlled north and the government-controlled south governed by Lauren Gbagbo. The result of this was the death of people, including expatriates, with particular reference to Jean Helene a BBC reporter from France[12].

Sudan has had more than a fair share of ethnic unrest; even as this paper is presented there is



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serious conflict between the Northern and Southern Sudan . The simple historical account is that during the colonial period, the British Colonial administration favoured the Arab North at the expense of the black South, with the inevitable socio-economic development. The South therefore preferred to go its way as the condition for de-colonization, a move fiercely opposed by the north which led to a ferocious armed campaign, named Anyaya wars. While the South fights for a restoration of her rights to self-determination as a bargaining chip for a fairer distribution of national resources, the western media have continued to stereotype the war in Sudan as purely a battle of wit between the Islam Arab North and the Christian-animists black South, thus making it a religious war. The civilian death toll is estimated to be one of the highest of any war since World War II[13].

In Angola , the ceasefire agreement signed on April 4th 2002 , by the Angolan government and UNITA rebel group formally ended one of Africa 's oldest and bloodiest civil wars, which raged for 27 years. The war costs the lives of about one million people, displacing about a 3rd of the population of 12 million and leaving land mines scattered all over the country[14].

East central Africa features the civil war in Rwanda , which involved the Hutus and Tutsis. As a result of this war, hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed[15]. This is not all, countries like Burundi , Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia , Sierra Leone Ethiopia etc, have their peculiar histories of violence.

Adams Smith, a famous European economist, proposed war as a means of shedding population and raising standard of living[16]. He probably did not have Africa in mind, because the more we fight each other, the more our standard of living degenerates. With the world fast growing into a global village, what rebels have made fashionable for us is a pariah continent that is Africa . They have kidnapped the continent, made her bad in the 1960's and 1970's, worse in the 1980's and 1990's and terrible in the 2000's. The older this continent grows in age and freedom, the further it degenerates in value and reason.

However, it is worthy of note that ethnic struggle and self-determination groups are a creation of the society in which they find themselves. When one looks at the emergence of these groups, and whatever monster they might have become nowadays, one will also realize that they are the product of the failure of the leadership of the continent. But all hope is not lost. Africa shall rise again. For after the rain comes sunshine, after the night, day returns, after the storm there



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comes a great calm. Africa is on an evolutionary process towards greatness, and in this process she is bound to throw up periodic insanity.

### CAUSES OF THE EMERGENCE OF REBEL GROUPS IN AFRICA

The emergence of ethnic militias or rebel groups in Africa is facilitated by a retinue of factors.

One of the major reasons for these unabated rebellious forces in Africa is because of the despotic rulers and authoritarian laws that the continent has had in the past and still has in many countries, like in Zimbabwe . Among African leaders there is the tendency of what could be referred to as a delusion of grandeur, coupled with the idea of indispensability and a sit-tight syndrome encouraged by political touts and sycophants. Presidents for life like Jean Bedel Bokassa of Central Africa Republic and Octogenarian Kamuzu Banda of Malawi held on to power until rebel forces flushed them out. The Reign of Dr Alhaji Idi Amin Dada of Uganda led to the growth of rebel forces in Uganda . Jaffor El-Nimeiri of Sudan , Mohammed Siad Barre of Somalia , Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and Samuel Kanyon Doe of Liberia cannot be left out in this discussion on the art of popular power. By their holding on to power they set up empires of rebel forces in their countries as legacies, and till date some of these countries have not know the true taste of peace[17].

Nelson Mandela, the former South Africa President has been of the opinion that the blame for most of the problems faced by Africa was caused by the Western Colonial powers[18]. His assertion is only a confirmation of the issues glaring to everyone in Africa . For instance in Sudan , the problem they have, has its roots in the sentiments created and left behind by the colonial masters. The administration of the British imperialists, favoured the Arab North at the expense of the black South. The South decided to part ways with the Arab North, a move fiercely opposed by the North. Thus, leading to the ferocious Anyaya wars[19]. This is the plight suffered by many African countries.

In the contention of Professor Angulu Onwuejeogwu, "Lugard's 1914 amalgamation of Nigeria has no basis or solidity, it was arbitrary"[20]. In this regard, the agitation by the ethnic militias is for them to be heard, recognized and be given a role to play in the affairs of national project. They are fighting the 'false structures of federalism'. For this reason, the primary aim and objective of each ethnic group is not for any terrorist agenda or to break up any country, but to fight for self-determination, justice and equity, and to also challenge the denial of equal rights



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of access to power by the different ethnic nationalities (big or small).

The high number of ethnic nationalities in Africa is also one of the causes of the increasing number of rebel forces in some parts of Africa . If we are to turn to the West, the old Soviet Union had 127 ethnic nationalities in its geo-political space; China and India each has over 40 ethnic groups; England has 4, France and Germany 7 each. But in Africa , a country like Nigeria has about 504 ethnic nationalities. Therefore, Africa has a unique problem not experienced by any other people in the world past or present. The problem is that of achieving solidarity in action and purpose in the midst of hundreds of ethnic nationalities each exerting both centrifugal and centripetal forces on the central issue of one nation, bound in freedom, peace and unity where justice reigns. We therefore, have so much tensions and conflicts to contend with because of the attitudes of hostility or hatred of one group towards another. Inequality in the distribution of the wealth of the nation and its material benefits trigger ethnic conflicts[21].

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF CRISIS IN AFRICA

The consequences of ethnic crisis in Africa are many. They will only be outlined

- Poverty, which reduces the living standard of the people of Africa .
- Death, which has demographic consequences.
- It enhances underdevelopment and revokes development.
- It scares away foreign investors.
- It reduces investment by citizens who are able.
- It leads to emigration in large numbers.
- It enhances a general sense of insecurity and suspicion.

### THE WAY FORWARD

The reality about African ethnic groups is that each ethnic group enjoys a large followership in its region of occupation because most African national governments have failed to give the people in these regions a sense of belonging. In this regard, it is in line with reason that governments in Africa should abandon their tough posture of arresting the leaders of these ethnic militias. For instance in Nigeria Asari Dokubo was arrested, though has been released, his arrest did not solve the problem in the Niger Delta. Uwazurike who has until now been in detention, has heightened the sentiments among the Ibos. The government should embark on a process of reconciliation, beginning first with political reconciliation, after which the government



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should move to engage in ethnic reconciliation, which is greater and more crucial to the survival of the African continent. Therefore African leaders should bring together all the leaders of the various ethnic nationalities and self-determination groups in a meaningful dialogue and friendship, in this way they will win over the trust and confidence of the militia leaders in order to lay down their arms and give room for amicable resolution of the ethnic conflicts in Africa .

The solution to the instability in Africa is the establishment of a Centre for Ethnic Studies in African universities:

- The Centre, with relevant government agencies, would always employ vigilance to detect early warning signals or any signs of instability and to device proper responses to any disequilibrium generated by the activities of the multi-ethnic nationalities.
- The Centre would be a warehouse of ideas on ethnic studies and indeed, anyone who is concerned with the ideas of peace and stability in Africa should be deeply interested in the mechanism of its plural ethnicity as this would be a dynamic pivot of its programme of activities.
- The Centre would provide a dozier on, and thorough knowledge of, each ethnic group because each of them has a population, a territory, a culture, a language, a traditional religion, an aspiration and economic potentiality.
- The Centre will keep a democratic surveillance over all ethnic nationalities in Africa out fringing on the human rights of its individuals. It will also monitor, orient and report ethnic activities leading to stability or instability of the country to the central Government.
- The aims and objectives of the Centre for Ethnic Studies will include: to serve as a repository of learning and education in ethnic matters for Africa 's policy makers and other government officials.



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- The Centre will develop ethnic and cultural models for promoting unity, peace and harmony among ethnically diverse Africans. The centre will train ethnic and cultural development officers who will integrate Africa 's cultural diversity into the educational system at all levels in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.
- The Centre will carry out public enlightenment campaigns and generate awareness about the various facets of Africa ethnic diversity[22].

It is high time the different leaders of the various African states knew that each ethnic group in Africa acts like a nation, and therefore if they as our leaders want to give solidarity to Africa , if we must move forward, they must recognize the existence of our ethnic groups. Each group wants to be acknowledged, not suppressed at the “committee of nations”. The idea of killing ethnicity to get one nation should be completely forgotten because ethnicity has a location in our land with its people, their rituals, myths, festivals, arts and culture.

Our leaders must learn to know about the ethnic nationalities of their various countries. The leaders governing multi-ethnic nationalities as we have in Africa should constantly be reminded that they are managing a system that is inherently unstable and should, therefore, constantly be watchful of upsurge of tensions and conflict because, a nation with many ethnic nationalities with all the contentions and oppositions inherent in each, will be in constant state of political instability. The eternal duty of the leaders will be how to reduce areas of tension before it smolders into open conflicts. Any leader who ignores this warning or pretends that ethnic distinction does not exist shall face the consequence. According to Onwuejeogwu, “any leader who underrates the force of ethnic tensions and conflicts is playing with sparks of cultural fire which can burn disastrously any nation. The major ethnic nationalities are not as dangerous as the small ethnic minorities because the activities of the former ones can easily be monitored and figured out.”[23] They should, indeed, appreciate it, respect and understand it so that they can use its dynamic structure to build a New Africa that is rooted in communalism.[24]



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### CONCLUSION

The time has come for us to realize that ethnic diversity remains an important aspect of social life irrespective of the level of development in Africa . In the words of Onwuejeogwu, “the stability of Nigeria depends on the stability of the component ethnic nationalities in the country”. If Africa manages well and integrates properly her diverse ethnic nationalities and multi-culturalism, it could become one of her special gifts to the modern world. With her rich and vast culture and artistic heritage, Africa is a potential tourism market place where her customs and traditions will readily position her as a preferred top destination for international tourists who want to see something new, exciting and vibrant, like the African cultural practices that are different from the Western values.

Sequel to this, it is incumbent on Africans both at home and outside to come together and harness what they have, along with acculturated goods. Africa should not rest on the designation of “a third world continent” and continue in the shadows of the “civilized worlds.” We should stop blaming the Whites for this darkness that has overtaken us, when we have the choice of lighting a candle. Since our enslavement and domination was collective, we can not hope for liberation if we do not put in collective and concerted efforts. As Kwame Nkrumah warns, “ Africa must unite or sell themselves out to imperialism or colonialist exploiters for a mess of pottage.”[25]

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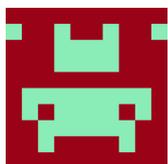
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