

ETHICAL PARADIGM TO POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY

Akiti Glory Alamu*

Introduction

Globally, act of violence takes over other day-to-day activities for a variety of motives which perhaps include political violence, religious fundamentalism, ethnic uprising, and ideological purpose and among others. Such cases of violence have been the pivot of political consciousness consequent upon which they have both explicit and implicit political persuasion. Meanwhile, this political violence has since existed for centuries as a result of human nature. Human nature in this context has been described by scholars like Thomas Hobbes,¹ Sigmund Freud² and Konrad Lorenz³ as an inherently aggressive animal. This submission made by these scholars points to the concept of the life instinct and the death instinct in humankind. In other words, there is the existence of a destructive instinct in humankind. However, what differentiates today's political violence from others is the pugnacious frequency, the gamut of events and the available opportunities to the actors and political anarchists in the political system. The Nigerian pattern of violence caters for incidental and intended violence. Thus, incidental violence arises out of actions of protest or affirmations of certain view, and intended violence is aimed at the violation of others. Consequently, this violence of various kinds leads to killing, maiming and wanton destruction of lives and property worth billion of naira of which Nigeria is not excluded from this fiasco. Currently, both political and religious violence have drenched human blood, destroyed human civilization and sent whole nations to unprecedented despair. Violence has now occupied this beautiful universe as a way of life.

From political violence, it can be said that moral questions arise only because violence is inherent in human nature. In fact, morality is

* *Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, P.M.B.1515, Ilorin, Nigeria.
E-mail: agalamufreelance2004@yahoo.com*

about action, custom or practice or even a characteristic manner of acting, which expresses constant mode of behaviour in the deliberate action of man. Also, morality, as a conduct of good and bad behaviour, exists in concept in order to cater for the total and human- well-being, or best still, further serve human ends – the growth and development of man which occur by a great participation and responsibility on the part of political decisions once moral rationality and ambition can be combined to function in a way that makes life interesting and non-violent – rather than make means, such as production and consumption, into ends of human action. Therefore, it is the thrust of this paper to cursorily look at the moral panacea to political violence in contemporary Nigerian society.

Political Violence: An Overview

Violence is dynamic, spontaneous and volatile, it does not just happen; rather, it takes considerable time to grow and imposes itself on any human society. Violence is often sought after, invited or lured.⁴ Alamu argues that “violence is a long-standing romance with evil, the offshoot of an unholy alliance with death... it is the end-product of deliberate acts or choices of individuals or of entire societies”.⁵ Violence is defined in *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* as “behaviour intended to hurt or kill somebody.”⁶ Also, it is a very strong feeling that is not controlled.⁷

In Encarta Dictionaries violence is seen as;

the use of physical force to injure somebody or damage something. It is also a destructive force at extreme, destructive or uncontrollable force, especially of natural event... the illegal use of unjustified force or the intimidating effect created by the threat of this.⁸

In The English Thesaurus of Encarta Dictionaries violence is described as physical force, pugnacity, aggression, fighting, savagery, brutality, cruelty, sadism, bloodshed and carnage.⁹ Besides, Fourie opines that:

Violence is also seen as any conflict between rival groups by forces of arms or by other means which has claims to be recognized as conflict. It may be as a result of instability in the society, or break down of law and order, lack of physical and social

amenities, excesses in political tribalism when limited access is no equal opportunity to social service.¹⁰

In sum, violence is thus employed as immediate process of hostilities in the society. Violence can be broadly categorized into direct and indirect. Thus, direct violence describes act of deliberate covert action resulting in a direct attack on somebody's physical or psychological integrity. This category includes all forms of homicide (genocide, war, crime, massacres, murders, terrorism) as well as all types of forceful or brutal actions involving physical or psychological suffering (Kidnapping, torture, rape, mal-treatment).¹¹ Indirect violence covers harmful, sometimes even lethal situations or actions which, though due to human interventions, do not actually involve a direct relationship between the victims and institution.¹²

By and large, violence may be related to political or religious aspect of human life. Thus, the nature and history of political violence is central to the understanding of universal phenomenon, having the propensity or tactic of political action. Political violence depicts all forms of collective attack within a political regime. The concept represents a set of events, a common characteristic of which is to actually execute violence or threaten the use of violence, but the explanation is not limited to the concept.¹³ Honderish avers that Political violence is a considerable or destructive use of force against persons or things, a use of force prohibited by law directed to a change in the policies, personnel or system of government and hence also directed to change in the existence of individuals in the society and perhaps other society.¹⁴ Again, Anifowose captures the essence and meaning of political violence in our context. According to him,

political violence is the use of threat of physical act carried out by and individual or group of individuals with a political system against another individual or individuals, and/property, with the intent to cause injury or death to persons and/or damage or destruction of property; and whose objective choice of targets or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation and effects have political significance, this is intended to modify the behaviour of others in the existing

arrangement of power structure that has some consequences for the political system.¹⁵

The operational definition suggests that for violence to be political, there must be the intent of affecting the whole political process. In the words of Anifowose, political process is considered to be the system of distribution of values by specific individuals within specific institutions.¹⁶

Danzinger asserts that political violence entails the use of physical force, usually with the purpose of injuring or damaging the object of the violence. The toll of such political violence can range from flying fists and feet to clubs and bullets to nerve gas and nuclear missiles.¹⁷ Of most paramount importance are the concepts such as physical force, damage, destruction, maiming, carnage, brutality and pugnacity – all these negative concepts are the evidences of violence.

Political violence can as well be bifurcated by type and scale. The typology of different kinds of political violence investigated by this study include ethno-religious uprisings, public riots, party clashes, violent demonstration, arson, assassination, sabotage, hijacking, bombing, domestic terrorism and kidnapping. At one end of the scale, violence may involve thousands of people as regards demonstrations and riots and at the other, individual isolated incidents involving a handful of people.¹⁸ Not only that, the manifestation of this typology of political violence finds expression in *coup d'état*, riot and rebellion, separatist violence, revolution, war, terrorism, insurgence and Guerrilla warfare, sabotage, assassination, hijacking and party clashes and electoral violence. For more emphasis, party clashes and electoral violence is the most preferred for this work.

Political Violence in Nigeria

In human and political history, the actualization of peace, security, stability and general well-being has been the clamour of rational thinkers. However, violent acts become impulses which obscure rational and objective thinking and easily create a polarization as they reinforce each other on both sides of the political spectrum. From ages, scholars have argued for and against inherent violence in human nature. From Thomas Hobbes to Sigmund Freud, to Konrad Lorenz, Eric Fromm argues that man is an inherently aggressive animal. First, this argument was made by Freud that there is the existence of a destructive instinct in

Man. Lorenz shares the concept of an aggressive instinct and combines it with assumptions about inherited aggressiveness rooted in the evolution of men from animals.¹⁹ According to Lorenz, aggressiveness is spontaneously produced within the nervous system. It grows and accumulates and must be expressed if it is not to explode against or without a person's intention. Aggressiveness in this context arises by itself and seeks and finds those stimuli which give it a chance to express itself. Lorenz concludes by saying that we do not have aggression because we have different political parties, but we have different political parties because we carry aggression within ourselves.²⁰

Contrarily, John Dollard submits that aggression is always the result of frustration. This means that if people are not frustrated, they will not become aggressive, or to put it in different words aggression as such is not inherent in human nature.²¹ Whether or not violence is inherent in human nature, the fact remains that aggression and frustration are doctrines of violent acts.

Political violence in Nigeria can be referred to as a response to frustrating or aggressive circumstances. Nigeria as an evolving or emerging nation has many political paradoxes. Osaghae asserts that violence in the Nigerian polity is a "means of identifying the imperfection of a plural society and of suggesting remedies to remove or solve the problems of inequality, marginalization, exploitation internal colonialism and the misuse of majoritarian democracy and national government in a prejudicial manner."²² In view of the foregoing, political violence in Nigeria can be referred to as a sort of response to frustrating circumstances. In Nigerian politics, there is the evidence of politics as a game of "do or die affair". Today, politicians who are not wanted by the electorate still force their way to the mainstream of the nation polity. This is reinforced with the popular paradigm of the "end justifies the means". With this political callousness, some political anarchists become murderous in order to cling to power because politics in Nigeria is a lucrative job. Suddenly, all means are employed so as to attain power.

In Nigeria, politics is a game of promises without fulfilment, and given the limited available resources to the system, certain people, group and communities had their aspiration and expectations raised without the possibility of their being fulfilled.²³ Political violence emanates also through breakdown of consensual norms, instances of political alienation and forcefulness of a ruling group. This trend looks at the effort of large-scale changes in social structure and process. Trends like industrialization,

urbanization or modernization are assumed to create new classes or groups of the population with different perceptions and lifestyles.²⁴ This seems to be the gospel message of the evolving Boko Haram which emerged as a sect in July, 2009 with Yusuf as its leader. The sect virulently contends that it denounces democracy, western education and modernization. The group says among others that “we do not believe in any system of government, be it traditional or orthodox, except the Islamic system and that is why we will keep on fighting against democracy, socialism and whatever. We will not allow Nigerian constitutions to replace the laws that have been enshrined in the Holy Quran”.²⁵ Today, insecurity and bomb explosions at sensitive places are becoming a recurring decimal in Nigeria. Even, Police Headquarters was recently touched by bomb explosion killing several people.

Another cause of violence in the political system is the notion of relative deprivation, interpreted to mean a state of mind where there is diplomacy between what men seek and what seems attainable. The greater this difference, the worst their anger and their propensity toward violence. In Nigeria today, power seekers can do anything to achieve political power basically to improve their economic status. Those who hold positions in the power structure determine the location and distribution of scarce resources. Exclusion from this power position is hence very costly.²⁶ While supporting this argument, Dudley writes:

...the shortest cut to affluence and influence is through politics. Politics means money and money means politics. To set politics, there is always a price... To be a member of the government party means an open avenue to government patronage, contract deals and the like... But once, having knowledge the probability of having power, the party naturally uses the same governmental machinery to stay in power. The leadership becomes a self-recruiting oligarchy and no self-recruiting oligarchy has been known to tolerate opposition to itself.²⁷

Current Manifestation of Political Violence

Since the commencement of the current democratic experiment as the only “game in town”, the cycle of violence seems endless in Nigerian polity. The two sub-classifications of party violence are: intra

and inter-party violence. In Nigeria, the most common variant of party clashes is the inter-party violence; that is the one involving two or more political parties. Such political violence as depicted by Alanamu might be tagged election violence or post-election violence when they become widespread and involved more people during and immediately after the period of general election.²⁸ An attempted rigging or massive rigging in an election could also necessitate election violence. In Nigeria, prior to the independence, election violence had assumed an alarming rate, particularly with the extreme veniality and sordid event that characterized the 1957 general elections in the West.²⁹ There were also waves of electoral violence after independence.

In Nigeria, during the second republic large-scale election violence enveloped it. The then Ondo State was a hot spot between the incumbent Governor Adekunle Ajasin and Chief Akin Omoboriowo, such that state of emergency was *de facto* declared. This also happened in other states. There was also low-intensity election violence in 1999-2003 gubernatorial and presidential elections. In Kwara state, for instance, there were intense inter-party clashes between PDP and ANPP in Kwara State during the fourth republic. However, the call by General Buhari and Chief Ojukwu for mass actions against the result of the Independent National Electoral Commission which confirmed the February 2003 the electoral victory of President Olusegun Obasanjo, the PDP flag bearer and the incumbent for the term is a pointer to another round of political violence in the offing.³⁰ The 2007 general election also recorded low-intensity election violence. Even the late president Musa Yar'Adua, acknowledged the fact that there were electoral flaws in the process that produced him. With this confidence as the rule of law was recognised, some party flag bearers went to tribunal to seek redress for census and censored rigging. As a result, Edo, Ekiti, Osun, Rivers and among others reclaimed their mandate at the gubernatorial level. The end-product of these violent acts is incessant killing and wanton destruction of property.

The April 2011 general elections were another limestone in the history of political violence in Nigeria. Before the election, there had been clandestine, agenda of local and international terrorist groups in Nigeria trying to use April elections to pursue their insidious intentions in the country.³¹ There were cases of Bomb blast at many flash points in the North. Bauchi and Maiduguri have become "Bomb colony". Before the elections, INEC offices in Niger, were touched by Bomb blast, Abuja was not exempted even during Independence National Day, October 1st. These

insurgent groups as revealed “were meant to be used to disrupt, violently the electioneering campaigns and ultimately the April 2011 elections.”³²

The discontent of the Northern political Leaders Forum, NPLF, found affinity with the radicalized youths. They pitched their camp with Buhari and CPC, which accounted for the violence that followed his defeat at the polls. His followers believed that their hero could not lose the presidential election. To them, the election would be free, fair and credible only if Buhari had won. This insurgent group (Boko Haram) adopted him as the candidate consistent with their consciousness; a candidate likely to care for their welfare if he won the election.³³ The aftermath of the election was the unleashing of violence, churches were razed down, many corps members and those used as *ad hoc* staff of INEC were killed by these mob; an ugly incident that almost truncated the electoral process. This insurgent group called Boko Haram is posing danger in the nation by its incessant act of terrorism. In fact, they facilitate the spread of extremism and various acts and techniques of terrorism. Today, the situation in Nigeria is much more volatile than it was then. The indigenous extremists now have access to local power brokers. Even beyond this spring’s elections, with all its attendant challenges, Nigeria faces a very bumpy road challenges, Nigeria faces a very bumpy road ahead.³⁴ Having discussed the current manifestations of political violence in Nigeria, attention shall shift to ethical panacea to this political violence.

Ethical Paradigm to Political Violence in Nigeria

We have before now extensively and exhaustively discussed Political violence in Nigeria. It has some prevailing, excruciating and debilitating human effect both to the wielders and their targets. In sum, political violence raises moral question because human nature is permissive to some forms of conduct and as well aggressive to some forms of frustration and injustice. Essentially, morality, that is all about good and bad exists in concept in order to further human well-being for the better.³⁵ Therefore, any moral concept that does not attend to the wholeness of human being fails to be classified under morality. This position accounts for the naked fact that moral concepts start with the individual and reflect on others.³⁶

Descriptively, morality is the doctrine which ethics studies. Morality is concerned with human behaviour and as well the identification of certain measure of assessing the rightness or wrongness of man’s conduct in his immediate environment. Morality is relevant in virtually all

aspects of human endeavour. To this end, morality of an action is predicated upon intrinsic principles, such as honour, courage, respect, worth, etc. On the other hand, politics involves choice among competing values and scarce resources, influence, power and authority which perhaps are means to an end and not an end in them.³⁷ Dipo Irele argues that morality goes beyond the realm of politics. As a matter of fact, morality is a *sin qua non* for politics.³⁸ He further buttresses that an individual has a capacity of rational behaviour which enables him to make prudent choice which will enhance his intrinsic principles. Basically, this rational tendency is anchored on political and social virtues; hence politics depends on the choice of ethical and cultural values. Aristotle briskly enunciated that “man is a political animal”. Hence, politics is in relation with the choice of ethical and cultural values, this prudent choice extends to the act of governance and leadership, since politics entails element of power. From historical point of view of Dzugba, governance and leadership are both moral and political responsibility. Humankind is developed by God to administer, dominate and control the human and natural resources in the universe.³⁹ To this end, political leaders as political force are to be known and understood, are invested with moral and political responsibilities and as such, they possess the political will power to promise good governance or good politics in a bid to utilizing their responsibility to the maximum. According to Dzugba, political responsibility of political leaders is about satisfying the electorates and its separation from morality is impossible; hence, moral issues of general interest cannot be separated from non-religious issues.⁴⁰

However, it is obvious that the total separation of morality has paranoid insecurity, visionless and irresponsible leaders who manipulate political powers to serve their own parochial interest. Ejiofor is preoccupied with the complementary structural functional view of politics in Nigeria. This view has moral data for approval or disapproval, right or wrong. He posits that political activity involves importantly morality in its socialization and recruitment, interest articulation and aggression. Thus, political personnel must behave morally in their rule-making, rule-application and rule-adjudication.⁴¹ He adds that in politics, morality is manifest in the entrenchment of the fundamental right, justice, fair play, equality, human distribution, respect of conventions and norms, embedded in communication.⁴² Indicatively, all these parameters are agents for political change and transformation in the nation polity. The nation and its citizens enjoy participation in the political life of its country

and such political environment becomes healthy politically. Political leaders under such condition provide the electorates with an opportunity to organize, discuss and even share a portion of power without real fear of displacement. Under these conditions of stability, a pattern of political relationship between the concerned authorities, the professional politicians, elites, electorate development in an orderly and regular manner and the behaviour of all could be predicted.

Berger observes that patriotism in the nation polity is non-negotiable because patriotism as being rooted in the very constitution of man is thus cross-culturally and historically constant.⁴³ Undoubtedly, this patriotic allegiance enhances citizens' vision in handling critical and essential issues as loving one's own and others. Patriotism is an immensely valuable depository of human experience, joy and uniquely irreplaceable perception and disposition of the electorates.

Murphy and Ellis painstakingly survey the politico-ethical behaviour of the electorate as indicating that they could be understood on the basis of participatory democracy arriving at policy based on mutual agreement.⁴⁴ We must take into account minority voices by arriving at decision; electing representatives who on behalf of the electorate act and report back; and using varieties of persuasion, negotiation, and accommodation in relations to their electorate. This approach would therefore help in determining how political power would be used or demonstrated to run the affairs of the people in an inclusive manner, moving towards consensus as far as possible by whatsoever means available at their disposal.

From the foregoing, it is clear that morality and politics are clearly inseparable. Morality and politics in the collective courses demonstrate key factors of political behaviour, political action, political restraint, political conduct, participation, motivation and culture. Having established this, moral approach to political violence moral solution is to be sought.

An Antidote to Political Violence in Nigeria

Eradicating or minimizing political violence in Nigeria depends on the importance accorded to morality. Morality is the ability to differentiate good and bad, right and wrong and the ability to make rational choice amidst variables. Dipo Irele and Dzurgba observe that morality is a *sin qua non* for politics. Once morality is divorced from politics, politics becomes a dirty game which we have been experiencing

in contemporary Nigerian society. Omoregbe argues that “remove morality, remove honesty, public accountability, transparency, equality, probity which constitute moral variables in governance, but are gangs of thieves, looters, thugs, killers, daredevils and fraudsters”.⁴⁵ Politicians must adopt and cultivate a certain basic moral disposition towards the electorate. As a matter of fact, political holders and politicians must be morally cultured and matured in administering good governance as it is acknowledged by Omoregbe that the prosperity of a society depends on the moral disposition of his members.⁴⁶ In essence, politics and morality cannot be detached from each other, for as long as morality continues to be removed from politics, it becomes a dirty game in town. Recognizing both will complement each other as one is the significant part of the other. Therefore, morality should be brought squarely back to Nigerian politics in order to enjoy the polity of commonwealth for moral freedom and political freedom go together.⁴⁷

Not only that, during electioneering campaigns, abusive languages and other electoral vices are not completely avoided. Ujo stresses the necessity why some of these intemperate and vitriolic languages should not be used during electoral process.

No Political campaigns or slogan shall be done with abusive language, direct language, directly or indirectly likely to injure religions, ethnic, tribal and sectional feelings. Abusive, intemperate... base languages or insinuation, or innuendos designed or like to provoke violent reactions or emotion shall not be employed or used in political campaigns. Places designed for religious worship... educational institutions shall not be used.⁴⁸

The “do or die affairs” syndrome should be severed from the Nigerian politics. Power resides with the populace. Therefore, there should be no forceful imposition of candidate on the electorate. The attendant effect of this method has always resulted in murderous killing and assassination of the popular candidate. Trigger-happy politicians erroneously believe that politics is a “do or die affair”. Also, those who cannot win election naturally resort to violence, outright blackmail and intimidation in actualizing their political objectives.⁴⁹ Government also should checkmate the conduct of these political anarchists and trigger-

happy politicians who have private armies and Guerrilla in camp with deadly weapons that can cow the fire power of an armed regiment.

Furthermore, the game of promises without fulfilment should be stopped. With regard to manifesto, truth telling is required during manifestoes and this is what Murphy and Ellis referred to as "Ethic of Responsibility."⁵⁰ This ethic of responsibility is concerned with the political order towards achieving ends which promote pure intent and pure means. Albeit, men are not equal or even nearly equal in power and privileges as such political leaders who are elected should respect the right of others, fulfil promises made and their rights protected. To be moral involves respecting those rights and decisions which must involve making sacrifice and the acceptance of absurdity. Morality requires sacrifice, when it is necessary for the common good of the populace. Sometimes the common good is served only at the expense of some individual interest.

Moreso, consensus or censored rigging during election should be discouraged in its entirety. All the political stakeholders should be involved in discouraging this tendency. It is not healthy for our political culture. Political officeholders should imbibe the culture of moral power, such as respect for the rule of the game, respect for honest endeavours, respect for one man one vote, respect for the rights of everyone, eradication of corruption, and promotion of harmony and unity.

Having observed that politics has become a principle of mutual exploitation and violence, it comes handy at this juncture to help internalize ethics indispensable for sustaining integration, development and democratic governance in Nigeria. The application of religious internalization of ethic functions to sustain political environment and to enable constructive social intercourse because its task is to punish criminals, encourage good citizenship, permit domestic freedom and provide for public security against the scourges of armed or public insurrection. Once, politicians imbibe religious internalization of ethical value for the consummate future which locate the highest good, the lure towards which politician are being drawn; the ideal of the future they wish to actualize in the present would be easily grasped and happy shall they be. Essentially, electoral act should make imperative contingency arrangement in place because of the general dishonesty of rigging which will ensure compliance with legality- an institutional requirement in order to curb the excesses of security operatives, all of which are pivotal to the electoral process.

Conclusion

Our study has considerably revealed that political violence in Nigeria is manifold and ever increasing. We discovered that many factors are responsible for the various political conflicts in Nigeria. Some range from electoral malpractice to game of promises without fulfilment, consensus or censored rigging to game of “do or die affair” among others. It is therefore recommended that political leaders must adopt and cultivate a certain moral disposition, for polity is commonwealth which can be hoisted by providence to dispense and not to boss, to distribute and not to amass the resources of the citizens. Again stricter punishment and enforcement of law and order will not reduce violence. On the contrary, it increases violence, because it creates new resentment, hostilities, and frustration in those exposed to the organized violence of the state. The only means for changing the general tendency towards violence is in humanization of our human ends – growth and development of man can occur only by a great increase of participation and responsibility on the path of political decisions once ambition and moral rationality are brought together can man function in a way which makes life interesting and hence creates the possibility of productive and non-violent life. We need reduction of destructiveness and violence by making individual and political life more meaningful and human.

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