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Henry David Thoreau's Theory of Civil Disobedience as an Authentic Paradigm for Political and Social Change

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Abstract

The idea for forming government is to bring about order, safety, peace, wellbeing and organization of the human society. In the formation, a contract between the governors and the governed is entered into - the governors to protect the life, property, liberty and provide basic necessities of life and conducive environment for the wellbeing of the governed who in turn submit to and obey the laws promulgated for the general good. In quite a number of cases however, governments fail or renege on the contract by not promoting justice, rule of law, accountability, transparency, equity and fair-play. On the contrary, they perpetrate injustice of various kinds - oppression, suppression, humiliation, intimidation, and marginalization of their citizens via obnoxious laws, policies and programmes. Nigeria typifies the global perpetration of injustice on the governed by the government. In response, citizens often resort to protests and agitation for political and social change. The challenge however, is about the violence which often accompanies protests and agitations leading to deaths, physical and psychological injuries, destruction of public and private properties, and general breakdown of law and order. It is in view of preventing these inimical consequences that Henry David Thoreau's Civil Disobedience is studied and proposed as an authentic paradigm for political and social change globally.

Keywords: Civil disobedience, political and social change, authenticity, agitation, protest

Introduction

In the opening chapter of the famous *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx warned that "a specter is haunting Europe – the specter of communism" (Marx, 1848: 14). Today, the specter is no longer communism but annihilation of the wellbeing, happiness, and liberty of the citizens by the

government. It is the specter of injustice, unethical and iniquitous methods deployed by the governments of the world to oppress and suffocate the citizens. This specter, unlike the communism that Marx pointed at, is not targeting only Europe but the entire globe. It has such pervasive power and influence that it has caught up with virtually all nations of the modern world. It is a global phenomenon typified by the Nigerian situation. Thousands of lives (human and animals) and multi-million Naira worth of property have been lost in Nigeria as a result of protests, agitations, and other forms of conflict. In other words, Nigerian history is inundated with protests, agitations, and conflicts, many of which were violent, bloody and destructive of life and property in addition to further entrenchment of acrimony, distrust, schism, and underdevelopment. The questions raised by this paper are: What is the rationale for protests and agitations? What is the basic goal of an agitation or protest? Must an agitation or protest be violent to achieve a meaningful result? Can a non-violent agitation or protest achieve a meaningful result? These interrogations are the framework for this research. In concurrence with Henry Thoreau, we opine that the basic goal of a well ordered protest is to effect political and social change and that protest can achieve a meaningful result without being violent.

The Why and How of Protests or Agitations

Protests and agitations are not trivial rather, very serious affairs, no wonder governments do their utmost to prevent them from happening or to quell them if they unavoidably occur. As a matter of fact, protests and agitations are ignited and catalyzed by long held grievances and concerns as exemplified by the EndSARS protest and agitation for self determination in the South East of Nigeria. Sometimes, it is spontaneous as exemplified by the protest that followed the murder of George Floyd in the United States of America and the violent protest that accompanied the perceived irregularities in the 1965 elections in the South West of Nigeria. In whatever way it happens, protest is aimed at bringing about political and social change as is deemed beneficial for the protesters, most often, the marginalized. Unfortunately, protesters and agitators are often perceived as societal nuisance and dubbed disruptors and terrorists. That notwithstanding, protests and agitations are vital forms of political engagement aimed at positive political and social change (at least in the belief of the protesters and agitators) wherever it occurs.

In the midst of crisis, panic and retrenchment in 2020, protests erupted across the globe demanding for change in support of survival of marginalized groups. Beyond the call for us to find our humanity, the many protests and agitations validate the view that protest is increasingly gaining support as a method of political participation especially in a democracy where protest is expected to be a part and not a threat to governments. This also implies that society, on the one hand, must be open to protests and agitations; on the other hand, protesters and agitators must adopt better approaches. Lessons must be learnt from protest movements' successes and failures, from their tactics and methods and from their determination to be inclusive in order to bring about the desired political and social change.

The fact that protest must be accepted by the society as a legitimate and crucial method of political participation, a part of democracy, and not a threat to government suggests that it must not necessarily be violent to achieve a meaningful result. Violence is most often accompanied by loss of lives and properties. The question therein is: whose lives, whose properties? It is most often the protesters who lose their lives as was proved by the EndSARS protest which resulted in the death of 103 protesters. According to *The Cable*, "The Lagos government had in a leaked document, confirmed the recovery of 103 corpses of EndSARS protests, but said the bodies were not from the Lekki tollgate", (*The Cable*, July 27, 2023).

In other reports, the two groups agitating for Biafran independence, Mobilization for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), have lost many of their members to the superior fire-power of the Nigerian armed forces. The *Daily Post* of January 5, 2017, that records that "The Campaign for Democracy, CD, has claimed that no fewer than 2,000 Igbo youths had been killed by the Nigerian Army under the guise of Rule-of-Engagement," (*Daily Post*, January 5, 2017). On a similar note, the *Punch* newspaper of April 5, 2023, in a caption: "Ohaneze decries killing of Igbo youths in South-East" noted that "On Friday, March 31, 2023, five members of the IPOB were shot dead in Osusu, Aba, Abia State, while they were on a procession." The paper went on:

Confirming the incident, the Abia State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Mustapha Mohammed Bala, a Katsina born well-educated (**literate**) police officer claimed that "On 31/03/2023 at about 11:45 hours, policemen on **confidence building patrol/show of force** within Aba metropolis came under attack by the proscribed IPOB/ESN members. They were armed with petrol bombs, machetes, battle axes and other dangerous weapons. The attack was repelled by the Police operatives with minimal casualties while the majority of the hoodlums scampered for safety (*Punch*, April 5, 2023.)

Contradicting the claim of the Police, the paper wrote that:

Ohaneze's findings revealed that 'some residents, armed with video evidence, informed that the group was protesting peacefully against the continued detention of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, without disturbance before they were shot at. It is most appalling that Bala should refer to the IPOB men as 'hoodlums' and most unconscionable to view the death of five IPOB members as 'minimal casualties' (*Punch*, April 5, 2023.)

Other protesting and agitating groups have also lost a substantial number of personnel. All these point to the fact that most casualties are usually the protesters and agitators. About the loss of property, public facilities are sometimes destroyed, but protesters also lose theirs, even more. On a number of occasions, government agents have razed down communities, markets, buildings and cars of suspected leaders and members of agitation groups. It is also common for the government to partially or totally paralyze businesses of agitators and even those of their relatives and sympathizers. To sum up, violent protest or agitation does more harm than good. Though it may achieve the goal of causing political and social change; it is always at a great cost. Since the same goal is achievable with less violence or no violence at all, it is instructive to mirror civil disobedience of Henry Thoreau very closely.

Incidentally, many people still hold strongly to the view that their wishes, desires, and aspirations could only be achieved through violent protests. Such people do not have faith in non-violent or civil disobedience. They argue that it is a weakling's approach to solving problems. They regard those who discourage violent protests as being feeble, cowardly, woman-like and as living inauthentic life. According to Akpa *et al*, "in-authenticity is an existential mannerism through which man lives in self-denial and unreality of himself thereby under-utilizing his natural potency to exist meaningfully," (Akpa *et al*, 2023: 220). The idea is that the use of violence shows the manliness of man and that it is what compels the government to change. That, to us, is a fatal error. Civil disobedience is more efficacious than violence in achieving a desired goal. In Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Park's Bus Boycott in 1955 resulted in a change to the Bus Segregation Law in 1956. As a result of Mohandas Gandhi Salt March, Indians were allowed to make salt for domestic uses. In 1963, the March for Jobs and Freedom in Washington contributed immensely to the

passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. That made it illegal to discriminate against black people over things like hiring, public transportation and education (Famous examples of civil disobedience in history, [examples.yourdictionary.com](https://examples.yourdictionary.com/famous-examples/)>famous-examples...). Civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks and others, the resistance to apartheid in South Africa, Student sit-ins against the Vietnam War, the democracy movement in Myanmar /Burma led by Aung San Suu Kyi, to name a few, are all instances where civil disobedience proved to be an important mechanism for social change, (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Civil Disobedience.")

Civil Disobedience in Context

Fraudulent electoral practices, leadership failure, injustice, exploitation, extortion, extrajudicial killings, unemployment, obnoxious and repressive laws and policies, oppressive governance, discrimination, marginalization, and corruption, among others, are some of the commonest causes of protest and agitation. For civil disobedience and all other forms of protest or agitation to take place, there must have been some hostile conditions in place; there must have been some disparaging conditions and situations affecting the people concerned. Those undesirable conditions must be changed for the desirable. The citizens are not to engage in civil disobedience when there is no just cause. Civil disobedience can take place when certain minorities are denied the right to vote or to hold office or to own property and to move from place to place, or when certain religious groups are repressed and others denied various opportunities and this injustices are obvious to all, (Rawls, 1971: 327).

Civil disobedience can easily be understood as the refusal to comply with certain laws considered unjust, as a peaceful form of political protest or agitation. On a most widely accepted account, civil disobedience is a public, non-violent and conscientious breach of law undertaken with the aim of bringing about a change in laws or government policies. On this account, people who engage in civil disobedience operate at the boundary of fidelity to law, have general respect for their regime, and are willing to accept the legal consequences of their actions, as evidence of their fidelity to the rule of law (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Civil Disobedience"). For a disobedience to be classified as civil, it must be non violent, it must be done in the public, it must be conscientious and a political act. This picture of civil disobedience raises many questions: Why must civil disobedience be non-violent? Why must it be public? Why must people who engage in civil disobedience be willing to accept punishment?

Civil disobedience is said to be non-violent because it discourages the use of physical violence or force, but encourages the use of peaceful means to achieve political and social changes. Non-violent resistance has two ends: the intrinsic and the extrinsic. The intrinsic end of nonviolent resistance is to obtain justice and respect for human dignity. The justice that is sought here is not for a particular race, but for the entire human race, (Nwinya, 2014: 23).

To say that civil disobedience should be done in a public implies that it is not something that should be done in a secret place. It is done in the public where people can be seeing it. John Rawls asserts that it is engaged in openly with fair notice. This means that it is not covert or secret; so, one may compare it to public speech, a form of address, and an expression of profound and conscientious political conviction which takes place in the public forum, (Rawls, 321).

The conscientious nature of civil disobedience means that one should be careful in order not to do what is wrong, but should always strive to be thoughtful so that civil disobedience can lead to what is right. Conscientious refusal means non compliance with a more or less direct legal

injunction. It is a refusal since an order is addressed to us and, given the nature of the situation, whether we accede to it is known to the authorities

Etymologically, "civil" means "the citizens" or people who live in a country, or something that is done in a formal or polite way while "disobedience" means the refusal to carry out somebody's instruction or refusal to do what someone says that you should do. Therefore, civil disobedience is a practice whereby the citizens disobey the unjust laws, legislations or policies of government in order to bring about a positive change which could be either political or social. According to Simon Blackburn, civil disobedience is the political tactic of disobeying a law deliberately, in order to bring about some change. The disobedience should ideally be public, non-violent, and committed by activists willing to face the penalties of the law, (Blackburn, 2005:62). Civil disobedience is a political act not only in the sense that it is addressed to the majority that holds political power, but also because it is an act guided and justified by political principles, that is, by the principles of justice which regulate the constitution and social institution generally, (Rawls, 1971: 321). Civil disobedience takes place whenever there is injustice and the aim is to reverse the injustice to justice. It is not carried out in order to satisfy personal interests or needs, otherwise, it is a personal disobedience, but to bring about positive political and social change. That is why John Rawls says that:

it goes without saying that civil disobedience cannot be grounded solely on group or self-interest. Instead one invokes the commonly shared conception of justice that underlies the political order. It is assumed that in a reasonably just democratic regime, there is a public conception of justice by reference to which citizens regulate their political affairs and interpret the constitution. The persistent and deliberate violation of the basic principles of this conception over any extended period of time, especially the infringement of the fundamental equal liberties, invites either submission or resistance (Rawls, 1971: 321)

When there is an infringement of fundamental equal liberties, the citizens have no other option than to actively or passively resist it. Passive resistance is same as civil disobedience because it is the refusal to obey the demands or commands of a government or occupying power, without resorting to violence or active measure of opposition; its usual purpose is to force concessions from the government or occupying power, (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Civil Disobedience").

Civil disobedience is of different kinds and often follows different methods. It can be active or passive, direct or indirect. A person can engage in civil disobedience by either actively committing a prohibited act or passively refusing to conform to a prescribed action. Ronald Dworkin has also distinguished between three kinds of civil disobedience: integrity based, justice based, and policy based. Integrity based disobedience focuses on the morality of the law. It takes place when the citizens disobey a law on the grounds that it is immoral. Justice based disobedience happens when citizens disobey a law based on the denial of their rights by the government. Since citizens are entitled to certain rights, it is an injustice to deny them those rights; hence, they can disobey a law based on such denials. A typical example is when Black people illegally protested during the civil rights movement in the United States of America. Policy based civil disobedience is organized in order to change dangerously wrong policy or policies, (Wikipedia, "Civil disobedience").

Henry David Thoreau's Theory of Civil Disobedience

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), is an American philosopher, a transcendentalist, a poet and also a writer who was born in Concord, Massachusetts. He published an essay entitled "*Resistance*

to *Civil Government*” but the essay was later reprinted with the title “*Civil Disobedience*” in 1849. He begins with the proclamation:

I heartily accept the motto, - "That government is best which governs least," and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe, - "That government is best which governs not at all;" and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient" (Thoreau, 1849: 1, 2014: 1).

Thoreau was averse to injustice, particularly the collection of poll tax by the American government that was used to promote slavery and the prosecution of the American/Mexican war. He was detained at the Concord jail because of his non-payment of the tax which according to him was associated with the institution of slavery. The slavery crisis inflamed New England in the 1840s and 1850s making the environment tense especially with the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

Thoreau strongly castigated American imperialism especially the Mexican-American war also known as the Mexican war in the United States of America and in Mexico as the *Intervencion Estadounidense en México* (U.S. intervention in Mexico), an armed conflict between the United States and Mexico from 1846 to 1848 which followed the 1845 U.S. annexation of Texas, which Mexico still considered Mexican territory. The government failed to recognize the Velasco treaty signed by Mexican General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna when he was a prisoner of the Texan Army during the 1836 Texas Revolution. At the time, the Republic of Texas was *de facto*, an independent country, but most of its citizens wished to be annexed by the United States. The Mexican government was encouraging border raids and warning that any attempt at annexation would lead to war. Annexation procedures were quickly initiated after the 1844 election of Polk, who campaigned that Texas should be “re-annexed” and that the Oregon Territory should be re-occupied, ("Mexican War: Causes, Definition & Time"). As a result of this, Thoreau in the "Civil Disobedience" excoriates slavery and war. He writes that "people must cease to hold slaves, and to make war on Mexico, though it costs them their existence as a people," (Thoreau, 2014: 7). His major aim is to fight against any form of unjust laws, governmental policies or programs that are capable of causing man's inhumanity to his fellow man. He notes that:

Unjust laws exist; shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once? Men generally, under such a government as this, think that they ought to wait until they have persuaded the majority to alter them. They thought that, if they should resist, the remedy would be worse than the evil. But it is the fault of the government itself that the remedy is worse than the evil. *It makes it worse.* Why is it not more apt to anticipate and provide for reform? Why does it not cherish its wise minority? Why does it cry and resist before it is hurt? Why does it not encourage its citizens to be on the alert to point out its faults, and *do* better than it would have? Why does it always crucify Christ, and excommunicate Copernicus and Luther, and pronounce Washington and Franklin rebels? (Thoreau, 2014: 12)

Thoreau compares government to a machine that should produce justice, but if corruption and injustice become the part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, that machine of government should go. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, that we should consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires us to be the agent of injustice to another that we should break the law. He maintains that our lives should be a counter friction to stop that machine that is producing

injustice. What we should do is to see, at any rate, that we do not lend ourselves to the wrong which are condemned (Thoreau, 2014: 12-13).

Thoreau is livid with taxation, though not all forms of taxation. He says that those who pay certain taxes (unjustified taxes), involve themselves in injustices. Thoreau is referring to those taxes that the government uses to hurt the citizens and carry out unpleasant projects, typified by the poll-tax which he refuses to pay for six years on the grounds that part of it was used to promote slavery. As a result of that, he was jailed as earlier mentioned. As it were, he was happier in jail because he believes that the prison is the proper place for a just man under the government which imprisons people unjustly. It took the interference of someone, who paid the tax on his behalf, for him to be released. Thoreau paid other just taxes, (taxes that were in the interest of the citizens), for instance, the highway tax. He states:

I have never declined paying the highway tax, because I am as desirous of being a good neighbour as I am of being a bad subject; and as for supporting schools, I am doing my part to educate my fellow countrymen now. It is for no particular item in the tax-bill that I refuse to pay it. I simply wish to refuse allegiance to the State, to withdraw and stand aloof from it effectually. I do not care to trace the course of my dollar, if I could, till it buys a man, or a musket to shoot one with, - the dollar is innocent, - but I am concerned to trace the effects of my allegiance (Thoreau, 2014: 22).

Thoreau points out that there are thousands who are opposed to injustice like slavery and war, but they do nothing to end them. They will sit down with their hands in their pockets, and say that they do not know what to do and because of that, they will do nothing. They remain docile under oppression. They suffer and smile, in the words of legendry Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the late Afro-music maestro; they "*sidon de look*", as late Bola Ige would say, yet groan under the heavy weight of injustice. Thoreau points out that the people will hesitate and regret and sometimes petition; but they do nothing in earnest and with effect. It is not enough to wait and vote for the right thing to be done during elections or referenda which usually are time-bound and are determined by the democratic principle of majority superiority. He affirms again that voting for the right is doing nothing for it. He notes that voting only amounts to a feeble expression and wish that one's desire will prevail. Like a game, it is a thing of chance and "a wise man will not leave the right to the mercy of chance, or wish it to prevail through the power of the majority" (Thoreau, 2014: 9).

Thoreau exhorts people not to just wait passively for an opportunity to vote for justice, because voting for justice is as ineffective as wishing for justice. What needs to be done is to actually be just. This implies that we are obliged to devote our lives to fighting for justice and not to lend our support to injustice in any way. Thoreau was displeased with those people who commend a soldier because he refuses to serve in an unjust war, yet through payment of unjustified taxes, sustain the unjust government that makes the war. He avers that if one is cheated out of a single dollar by his neighbor, that, that person should not be rest satisfied with knowing that he is cheated or with saying that he is cheated or petitioning him to pay that person his due. Rather, one should take effectual steps at once to obtain the full amount, and see that he is never cheated again.

As a peaceable personality, Thoreau advocates for a peaceable revolution devoid of violence. This type of revolution does not involve the use of force, violence or destruction of lives and properties. An example of this type of revolution is when a thousand men refuse to pay their tax-bills. This according to him would not be a violent and bloody measure, because if it is paid, it will enable the state to commit violence and shed innocent blood. Thoreau suggests that anytime the government becomes tyrannical or inefficient, that the people should exercise their right to

refuse allegiance to the State, and to resist the government. He is not saying that there should be no government, rather, he only asks for a better government though government is a matter of expediency.

A Critical Appraisal

Thoreau's theory of civil disobedience is so powerfully appealing that it seems to answer the question of how best to respond to the injustices, corruption, highhandedness, and oppression by governments. The theory suggests that it has an answer to the brutality of world governments as typified by the government of Nigeria under Mohammed Buhari within which "new records are set on nepotism, corruption, insecurity, and outright bellicose to civil liberties ... and ... the nation is tragically sliding fast into the Hobbesian state of nature where life is nasty, poor, brutish, and short." (Ogbujah, 2020: 8-9). The questions that resonate and which this paper attempts to address however, include: Can civil disobedience bring about the desired political and social changes needed for the good of society and wellbeing of mankind? Why should it be regarded as a better paradigm in juxtaposition with violent revolution? In this appraisal, focus is on the Nigerian state which serves as an example of global government mistreatment of citizens and where the need for political and social change is imperative.

Thoreau never advocates that we should disobey government unnecessarily. He only enjoins that if government begins to be unjust by producing injustice which could be in the form of unjust laws, policies or programmes, that we should as conscientious citizens' break such laws, policies or programmes. The citizens should act as a counter friction or resistance to stop that bad government from carrying out their bad intentions. Breaking the law is tantamount to disobeying the government; however, the disobedience must be justified in the sense that the law, policy or programme so broken must be seen as unjust and causing hurt to the citizens. The disobedience must be non-violent in its operation in the sense that the citizen protesters or agitators must be exclusively peaceful. This may sound utopian and too idealistic for stubborn problems are said to require drastic measures, hence, violence is necessary to counteract bad government. In spite of the cynical disposition, by some towards non-violent methods of agitation, there is ample evidence that it is preferable. Even the government would prefer to deal with non-violent agitators than with violent ones. For several years, the government of Nigeria has been asking all agitators - IPOB, Boko Haram, OPC, Niger Delta Youths, etc, to exploit peace in resolving their grievances. President Mohammad Buhari in a retreat tagged "Promoting Effective Executive Legislative Partnership, Finding a Middle Ground", jointly organized by The Executive/Legislative Leadership Retreat at the Presidential Villa in Abuja, and adjures Nigerians to always explore the process of reforms, in line with democratic norms if they feel bad about some laws (*The Nation*, October 6, 2020). Civil disobedience is one of the means that the citizens can ventilate their grievances in a democratic dispensation.

From 2nd January, 2012 to 14th January 2012, there was a socio-political protest movement known as "Occupy Nigeria". The protest was caused by the removal of subsidy on petroleum products leading to a staggering 120% increase in the price of petrol, corruption in government and public service, inhuman treatment of Nigerians by government and security agents and high rate of poverty (*Wikipedia*, "Occupy Nigeria"). The methods that were used in carrying out this protest were civil disobedience, civil resistance, strike actions, demonstration and online activism. The goals of the non-violent resistance are to reverse the removal of subsidy on petroleum products and the review of the Federal government budget (*Wikipedia*, "Occupy Nigeria").

To protect the lives and properties of Nigerians from criminal elements, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigeria police force, was formed in 1992. The mandate of SARS was to combat crime of all sorts, especially, armed robbery, kidnapping, car snatching, etc. Unfortunately, instead of carrying out this goal, SARS started to extort money from people and engage in extrajudicial killing. In fact, the unit turned out to be a contradiction of what it was formed to be; it represented the height of police brutality, against the citizens. According to Wikipedia,

SARS was controversial for its links to extra judicial killings, forced disappearances, extortion, torture, framing, blackmail, kidnapping, illegal organ trade, armed robbery, home invasions, rape, of men and women, child arrests, invasion of privacy, and polluting bodies of water with illegal disposal of human remains (*Wikipedia*, "Special Anti-Robbery Squad").

The derailment of SARS led to the popular 2020 EndSARS protest, a non-violent agitation by the Nigerian youths against SARS. Though lives were lost due to mismanagement by the government, military and police, the protest led to the dissolution of the unit on October 11, 2020, a proof that non-violent protest can actually be successful and can achieve the desired goals. Today, the Nigerian Police has changed to some extent; at least there has been a drastic drop in the rate of extrajudicial killings. However, there are still widespread corruptions, extortion, and brutality; vestiges of the old order; among the rank and file of organization. Elaborating on the significance of the choice of peaceful rather than violent protests by the Nigerian youths, Eno-Abasi argues:

Nigerian youths may have decided to emulate their counterparts from other parts of the world that through peaceful protests brought to stand-still, errant and insensitive leaders that failed to gauge the pulse of the governed. Despite efforts by the previous and present government to make popular protests appear as something akin to committing felony, Nigerian youths have now succeeded in perfecting protests as an agitation tool for socio-political and economic change. As a matter of fact, the renewed zeal by youths to hold government accountable and cause them to effect changes to anti-people policies and programmes, represents watershed in the country's history, (Eno-Abasi, "#EndSARS: Youths Reshaping Protest as Tool for Socio-Political Change").

Thoreau's theory of civil disobedience becomes relevant in Nigeria just as it is in other parts of the globe because of the vices that abound, viz. injustice, corruption, unemployment, embezzlement, violation of human rights, restriction of freedom, god-fatherism, obnoxious polices, etc. Things are this way because the Nigerian state is not governed by the principles of reason. According to Thoreau, "if a State is governed by the principles of reason, poverty and misery are subjects of shame; if a state is not governed by the principles of reason, riches and honors are the subject of shame" (Thoreau, 2014: 17). Besides physical brutality, oppression, etc., the Nigerian state has, through laws, policies and programmes, inflicted untold hardship on the citizens such that protests and agitations are imminently needed.

On the basis of the lapses in governance, Offiong Asukwo advises that Nigerian leaders should not be a liability to this country. He appealed to them to be assets that the nation can depend on and to contribute towards her development and not to her ruin. He adds that what our leaders owe this country is their good ideas and better vision and not corruption (Offiong Asukwo, in A. F. Uduigwomen, 2006: 213). Human life no longer seems to have value in Nigeria as security

agents waste human life anyhow, on one hand, and herdsmen, unknown gunmen, bandits, and terrorists, on the other hand, butcher their fellow human beings with careless abandon.

In the midst of disregard for human life, insecurity of life and property and other abnormalities, should the citizens fold their arms and gaze at a government that appears indifferent to the plight of the people? It is expedient and moral that people should take positive actions hence, it becomes necessary to agitate for something better, but the agitation should take the form of civil disobedience as outlined and practiced by Thoreau, Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi, both of whom were tremendously influenced by Thoreau. Agitators or protesters must also be play by the rule; not chickening out even in the midst of adversity, and must not sell out to the powers that even when the bait is excessively tempting. The focus must always be to bring about political and social change that will be in the best interest of the whole society. Physical combat must be avoided by all means because the government and owners of holders of power have all the security apparatus and weaponry to inflict injuries on protesters. Besides, it is said that you cannot use bare hands to catch something that bites.

Conclusion

In a country like Nigeria where every citizen does not have equality of rights, obligations and opportunities and where the sanctity of human life is not recognized as such, and human dignity is not maintained and enhanced, the citizens should not sit down and watch the government trample them under foot. Since the welfare of the people seems not to be the primary purpose of Nigerian government, the citizens should stand up for their rights and oppose those government laws and policies that are injurious to their wellbeing. Instead of fighting, killing, dying and destroying government and private properties, protesters should resort to civil disobedience. It may be perilous and tortuous but it surely will yield the desired goal. The political leaders on their own should understand that adopting peaceful means does not mean that the citizens cannot resort to violent means. The preference of civil disobedience is based on better reasoning, so, they should always listen to the peoples' out cries and complaints. Let us try by all means to eradicate injustice which is caused by bad governance globally. Where any exists, let us adopt civil disobedience to bring about political and social change.

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