

Chapter One: General Introduction and Background to The Study

1.1 Choice of the Topic

The socio-political mobilisations that are steered towards self-determinations within Nigeria have bred paradoxical and vexed debates in varied Nigerian forums. Due to an upsurge of self-styled civil unrests in Nigeria that demand for self-rule, resource control and political secession, the proceeds are catastrophic. For instance, the economy, security and political stability is faced with chaos. In this pursuit, it is inherent for the extant exploration to delve into the current discussion on people's right to revolt against an unjust government with a keen reflection of Fichte's contributions vis-a-vis the public judgment on the Nigeria's Biafran revolution. The Biafran revolution shapes the current investigation tied to the current discussion on the people's right to revolt against unjust governments.

The right to revolt has been widely documented with a long history within the realm of political theory and has been characteristic of political thoughts in various societies including America and China¹. In places where the right to resist has been experienced, the conception has been attributed to the idea that individuals have the potential to legitimately rebel against a government in specific situations. Ginsburg, Lansberg-Rodriguez and Versteeg² further argue that, in the political-theoretical context, there are external standards against which the people judge the behaviours exhibited by rulers. Razmetaeva³ argues that revitalisation of the global changes and the socio-political processes demands for appeals to support controversial issues like civil protests, revolt against public authorities, rebellion and disobedience. However, the challenges are evinced when these issues intersect with the moral, political and legal themes with distinct social exigencies⁴. Though in legal terms the rights to a revolution, self-defence and rebellion are synonymously recognised, the most agreeable term to use is the right to resist. Ideally, the justifications for these terminologies derive traditionally from the conceptions of human rights, natural law, the principle of the social contract or the lesser evil⁵. In context, a comprehension of the right to revolt inclines towards the translation of law of individuals,

¹ GINSBURG, T., LANSBERG-RODRIGUEZ, D., and VERSTEEG, M., "When to Overthrow Your Government: The Right to Resist in The World's Constitutions", in *Social Science Research Network Electronic Journal*, vol. 60, no. 5, 2013, pp. 1184-1260, p. 1191. Available at: https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1429&context=public_law_and_legal_theory. Consulted on 5 July 2023.

² *Ibid.*, p. 1193.

³ RAZMETAeva, Y., "The Right to Resist and the Right of Rebellion", in *Jurisprudence*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2014, pp. 758-784, p. 758. Available at: Doi 10.13165/jur-14-21-3-06. Consulted on 28 July 2023.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 759.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 760.

which, specifically, is morally justified to self-determination that underscores an unmistakable nature of such rights. As such, it is prudent to examine the current discussions on people's right to revolt against unjust governments by reflecting on Fichte's contributions in the light of the public judgment on the Nigerian Biafra revolution.

Venter and Bain⁶ contend that the specific meaning of revolution within the political context remains semantically discursive and contested. Arslanian⁷ ascertain that the term revolution is generously applied from the sexual upset to the web-based social networking transformation. Brinton⁸ concedes with Arslanian's statement and refers to revolution as a "looser word," which troubles semanticists due to its wide and popular usage and emotional content attributed to it. In the context of revolutionary semantics, Pêcheux argues that language shapes ideological understanding during social upheaval⁹. Revolutionary discourse produces new meanings, exposing and challenging existing power structures through linguistic transformations. Huntington defines a revolution as a fundamental, domestic and rapid change that impact the dominant myths and values of society with respect to the social structure, political institutions, government policies and activities and leadership¹⁰. A revolution is an extremely complex political and historical phenomenon whose philosophical worldview has been presented from different perspectives¹¹. Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia aligns with revolutionary motivation, as both seek the highest good for society, driving rational individuals to challenge unjust systems for collective flourishing¹². The Aristotelian mean between extremes can inform revolutionary rationality, balancing passionate zeal with prudent strategy to effect sustainable change without descending into destructive chaos¹³. Across locations, generations and epochs, several philosophers such as Aristotle, Confucius, Kant, Fichte, Locke, Hobbes and others have posited their theoretical views on the right of a revolution. While John

⁶ VENTER, J.C.M., and BAIN, E.G., "A Deconstruction of the Term 'Revolution'", in *Koers (Online)*, vol. 80, no. 4, 2015, pp. 1-10, p. 1. Available at: <https://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/koers/v80n4/05.pdf>. Consulted on 20 July 2023.

⁷ ARSLANIAN, V.A., "Beyond Revolution: Ending Lawlessness Impunity During Revolutionary Periods", in *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2013, pp. 121-152, p. 121. Available at: <https://lira.bc.edu/files/pdf?fileid=af745e53-abf8-433d-9ac6-f639e7f76981>. Consulted on 20 July 2023.

⁸ BRINTON, C., *The Anatomy of a Revolution. Revised and Expanded Edition*, 1st ed., Vintage Books, New York, 1965, p. 23.

⁹ PÊCHEUX, M., *Language, semantics and ideology*, Springer, New York City, 1975, p. 24.

¹⁰ HUNTINGTON, S.P., *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT: 2006, p. 12.

¹¹ SMITH, M. N., "Rethinking Sovereignty, Rethinking Revolution", in *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2008, pp. 405-440, p. 407. Available at: doi:10.1111/j.1088-4963.2008.00147. Consulted on July 2023.

¹² KIMMEL, M. S., *Revolution, a sociological interpretation*, Temple University Press, Pennsylvania, 1990, p. 54.

¹³ WINTROBE, R., *Rational extremism: the political economy of radicalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 43.

Locke (1632-1704), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Johann Fichte (1762-1814) among others supported the right to a revolution when governments fail to uphold the interests of the people¹⁴. The right to revolution, echoing Locke's social contract theory, posits that citizens may justly overthrow tyrannical governments, asserting their natural rights when rulers egregiously violate the public trust and societal compact¹⁵. As such, the controversies that mar the right to revolt are imminent in the modern societies due to proliferation of unjust governance and revolutions across the globe. The world has witnessed several revolutions. A key example is the Arab Spring uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East which involved a series of pro-democracy protests and rebellions in 2010-2012, challenging authoritarian regimes. It led to leadership changes in several countries, with varying outcomes¹⁶. Furthermore, Orange Revolution in Ukraine was a 2004-2005 peaceful protest movement against electoral fraud, resulting in a re-run election and victory for pro-Western candidate Viktor Yushchenko over Russian-backed Viktor Yanukovich¹⁷. In France there was the Yellow Vest Movement which was a grassroots protest movement starting in 2018, initially against fuel tax hikes, evolving into broader demonstrations against economic inequality and President Macron's policies¹⁸. On the other hand, the Hong Kong's protest movement was a mass demonstrations starting in 2019 against a proposed extradition bill, expanding into broader pro-democracy protests demanding greater autonomy from mainland China's increasing influence¹⁹. These diverse movements illustrate how global connectivity amplifies local grievances, sparking widespread dissent. They showcase the power of collective action, while revealing the challenges in translating street protests into lasting institutional change²⁰. The contention witnessed among the debaters is amplified by the positive and negative lesson drawn from a number of historical revolutions such as the French Revolution (1789-1799), the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Spanish Revolution of 1936.

¹⁴ O'TOOLE, J., *The right of revolution: an analysis of John Locke and Thomas Hobbes' social contract theories*, Lambert Academic Publishing, Port Louis, 2012, pp. 4-6.

¹⁵ LUKE, T. W., *Social theory and modernity: critique, dissent, and revolution*, Sage Publications, Washington DC, 1990, p. 34.

¹⁶ AL-SALEH, A., *Voices of the Arab spring: personal stories from the Arab revolutions*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2015, p. 21.

¹⁷ WILSON, A., *Ukraine's orange revolution*, Yale University Press, London, 2006, p. 14.

¹⁸ POPKIN, J. D., *A history of modern France*, Routledge, New York, 2020, p. 23.

¹⁹ LEE, F. L., and CHAN, J. M., *Media and protest logics in the digital era: the umbrella movement in Hong Kong*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018, p. 39.

²⁰ GOLDSTONE, J. A., *Revolutions: a very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2023, p. 15.

1.2 Initial Philosophical Questions

The philosophical understanding of political instability and revolutions has evolved over centuries of thought²¹. Plato and Aristotle viewed political instability as a consequence of imbalanced societal structures, emphasizing the importance of a well-ordered state²². Machiavelli later argued that political instability was an inherent feature of governance, requiring rulers to master the art of maintaining power²³. Enlightenment thinkers like Locke and Rousseau introduced the concept of social contract, positing that citizens have the right to revolt when governments fail to protect their natural rights²⁴. Hegel saw revolutions as dialectical processes driving historical progress, while Marx viewed them as inevitable class struggles leading to societal transformation²⁵. Modern philosophers have expanded on these ideas, exploring the role of ideology, power dynamics, and social movements in shaping political instability and revolutionary change²⁶. Contemporary discourse also grapples with the ethical implications of revolution, weighing the potential for positive change against the risks of violence and chaos. An important example is policies that have been implemented to ensure human right protection during the revolution is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948. According to the *Declaration* drafted by Jefferson²⁷:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights; governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness”²⁸.

Theoretically and empirically, a succession of revolts, unjust governments and hastened reforms, often culminate in societal upheavals. These questions warrant a further philosophical

²¹ CLOSE, D., and BRIDGE, C., *Revolution: a history of the idea*, Routledge, New York, 2019, p. 53.

²² ZIMMERMANN, E., *Political violence, crises and revolutions (Routledge revivals): theories and research*, Routledge, New York, 2013, p. 44.

²³ WALT, S. M., *Revolution and war*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1996, p. 83.

²⁴ ECKSTEIN, H., *Regarding politics: essays on political theory, stability, and change*, University of California Press, Oakland, 1992, p. 74.

²⁵ FRIEDRICH, C. J., *Revolution*, AldineTransaction, Piscataway, 2007, p. 59.

²⁶ ISRAEL, J., *Democratic enlightenment: philosophy, revolution, and human rights 1750-1790*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, p. 38.

²⁷ JEFFERSON, T., *Writings*, Library of America, Ed. Peterson M.D., New York, 1984, pp. 19-20.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

exploration to delve deeper and provide solutions that support rational and fundamental human rights, freedoms, natural rights and natural laws.

Typically, to resolve the aforementioned issues, the masses have established alternatives, which are considered violent and revolutionary. Mahatma Gandhi elucidated that unjust and unlawful governments should be coerced through various means such as strikes, demonstrations, non-co-operation²⁹ and civil disobedience to initiate dialogues for discontent populaces, government change in position, or peaceful abdication from governance. Moreover, vesting on the doctrine of separation of powers, reliance on judicial processes and legislative checks and balances towards the executive, revolutions have been proposed specifically in countries where democratic systems and the rule of law are non-functional. However, there are still many parts of the world where reformation is needed to achieve revolutionary changes both with regard to political ideologies and scientific technologies. Similarly, this study explores the current discussion on people's right of revolution against an unjust government with particular focus on Fichte's political philosophy regarding revolution vis-à-vis the public perceptions on the Nigeria-Biafra Revolution of 1967 to 1970. In particular, I undertake an in-depth look into Fichte's philosophical position on the right of revolution as a critique of Kant's inconsistent position regarding the right to revolt vis-à-vis experiences and lessons drawn from the Nigerian Biafra Revolution. Completion of this study will bolster reforms in the manner revolutionary actions are perceived and handled in the modern society as opposed to other illegal threats like terroristic actions.

1.3 Methodology

In order to establish the intended findings, this study adopts an explorative qualitative approach guided by an interpretive worldview to investigate the nature of knowledge, justification and reality regarding the right of revolution. An explorative qualitative approach is a research methodology that seeks to gain in-depth understanding of complex phenomena through open-ended inquiry, focusing on subjective experiences, meanings, and contexts without predetermined hypotheses or quantitative measurements³⁰. The importance of using an explorative qualitative approach lies in its ability to uncover rich, nuanced insights into unexplored or poorly understood topics, allowing researchers to identify emerging themes,

²⁹ de BONO, E., *Conflicts, a better way to resolve them*, Harrap Limited, London, 1985, pp. 148-150.

³⁰ HENNINK, M., HUTTER, I., and BAILEY, A., *Qualitative research methods*, Sage, Washington DC, 2020, p. 14.

generate new theories, and capture the complexity of human experiences that quantitative methods might overlook³¹.

In particular, I will conduct secondary research through a documentary review of primary and secondary literatures. The information will be harnessed through books, journal articles, seminal papers, case studies, past theses and dissertations, official reports, newspapers, letters, periodicals, charters, constitutions, encyclopaedias, diaries, declarations, professional conference papers and other sources to enable gathering of data or information for this study. The politico-historical information or secondary data collected will be analysed, interpreted, described and critiqued to draw intended findings and conclusions associated with the right of revolution.

The politico-historical approach by Berg and Lune³² and McNabb³³ adopted in this project provoked an in-depth examination of philosophical nuances of the right of revolution. A historical excursus on the human rights helps this study:

- a) To find out how the term 'right' emerged to be useful in the present philosophical inquiry;
- b) To scan the various trends of events and evolutions in the history of right in general;
- c) To identify the relational impact on the right to revolt against an unjust government with regard to the current discussion.

The political philosophers and researchers alike need history to conceive the present and build a better future. Thence, a constant reference to the historical happenings is interesting in the search of better political systems. In this research, every situation presented through historical findings is analysed. The analytical approach is necessary as it guides in the selection, application and usage of findings. In addition, the descriptive approach unveils some of the various relational developments that took place during the Biafra Revolution in particular and Nigeria in general to the present time. This focuses the attention on the intended outcome of the extant research. Should the masses continue to accept an unjust government? Moreover, the exploratory method is a concerted effort to discover how the contribution of Fichte can be applied to the Nigerian Biafra revolution. This effort invites me to explore the various ways of

³¹ MERRIAM, S. B., and TISDELL, E. J., *Qualitative research: a guide to design and implementation*, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, 2015, p. 12.

³² BERG, B.L., and LUNE, H., *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*, 8th ed., Pearson, Harlow, 2011, p. 12.

³³ MCNABB, D.E., *Research methods for political science: quantitative, qualitative and mixed method approaches*, 2nd ed., Routledge, New York, 2016, p. 272.

applying philosophical principles of Fichte rationally and practically to the Biafra's problem in defence of the question: Do citizens have the right to *revolt* against an unjust government?

Overall, the critical overview seeks to determine if citizens must, at all, revolt, how and when. What happens to the government or the act of governance if it becomes obvious from the review that the governed cannot just revolt? What could, in practice, be done to unite theory and practice for a better future? To some extent, the future lies in the people's hands; hence, the need to exercise the right to revolt against unjust and unlawful governments. This study attempts to draw a link between theory and practice, principle and action, which are necessary to show how metaphysical concepts like rights from first principles could be realised in the real-world to build peaceful nations.

1.4 Structure and Partition of the Dissertation

This dissertation is structured into six chapters. The first chapter presents introduction and background to the study, including highlighting the methodology to be used. The second chapter presents the general concepts involving human rights, the historical evolvement of foundations of human rights vis-a-vis modern governance. The third chapter explores varied aspects inherent in Fichte's political philosophy with regard to the right of revolution. The fourth chapter delves into the meaning, concepts and issues associated with revolutions. In particular, the section looks into the Nigeria-Biafra Revolution as a case study. Nevertheless, the fifth chapter delves into justifiability and legality of right to revolt drawing from Fichte's political-philosophical contribution, various concepts of human rights and transnational law. Further, the sixth section presents conclusions, theoretical and empirical implications, recommendations, limitations and areas for further research established during this study project.