

Class Analysis in Disarray: Exploring The Relevance of Class in Understanding Group Cleavages and Conflict in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study critically examines the dynamics of social class in Nigeria's complex societal landscape, emphasizing its significance in understanding group cleavages and conflict. Despite traditional paradigms in sociological studies, contemporary Nigeria presents a multifaceted scenario where traditional markers of class have become entangled with ethnic, religious, and regional affiliations. This research delves into the intricate relationship between class structures and various identity-based divisions like the Boko Haram sect, indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) Niger delta militancy, trade unionism, and women's rights group, shedding light on the evolving nature of socio-economic stratification and its intersections with other cleavage lines. Through an analysis of historical contexts and contemporary socio-political realities, this study investigates how class distinctions intertwine with ethnic, religious, and regional identities, contributing to tensions and conflicts within Nigerian society. Furthermore, it explores the challenges of employing a class-based analytical framework in a milieu where diverse identity factors often overshadow purely economic categorizations. By exploring these complexities, this research aims to elucidate the limitations and potentials of class analysis in comprehending societal divisions and conflicts in contemporary Nigeria. Further research is needed to identify other factors causing class conflict in Nigeria.

Keywords: Class analysis, Conflict, Socio-economic stratification, Ethnic identity, Trade unionism, Women's right, Boko Haram sect, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Niger Delta Militancy

Introduction

One of the most powerful sociological explanations of class and class conflict is that of Karl Marx. He posits a class struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie, which is intrinsic to capitalist industrial society (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008). This notion is powerful in being dynamic, intuitively persuasive, and appears to fit well with history. It is powerful in providing in one package a description, an explanation and a prediction of contemporary problems as well as a remedy. In outlining this view of social conflict, it is important to recognize that Marx viewed the structure of society in relation to its major classes and the struggle between them as the engine of change in this structure. His stance was not on the basis of equilibrium or consensus theory. For him, conflict is not deviatonal within society's structure or are classes' functional elements maintaining the system. The structure itself was a derivative of an ingredient in the struggle of classes. His view was a conflict in modern (nineteenth-century) society.

The term class was not really defined by Marx, but it is assumed to mean a group of people that are categorized on the basis of their control of the means of production (So & Sawarsono, as cited in Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014). Class, for Marx, cannot be comprehended without its potential for conflict. For Marx (1867, as cited in Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014), the existence of class is the people's awareness of their conflicting relation to others. The absence of people's awareness of this conflict constitutes class in itself, but in a situation where people are aware of the conflict, there is a true class which is a class for itself. Class is determined by property, not by income or status. Also, it is determined by distribution and consumption, which ultimately reflects the production and power relations of classes. The social conditions of the bourgeoisie's production are defined by the bourgeoisie's property. Such ownership vests a person with the power to exclude others from the property and to use it for personal purposes.

With reference to property, there are three great classes of society: the bourgeoisie (who own the means of production such as machinery and factory buildings, and whose source of income is profit), landowners (whose income is rent), and the proletariat (who own their labour and sell it for a wage). The force transforming latent class membership into a struggle of classes is class interest. Out of similar class situations, individuals come to act similarly. They develop a mutual dependence, a community; a shared interest interrelated with a common income of profit or wages. From this common interest, classes are formed to the extent that their interests engage them in a struggle with the opposite class.

The struggle between classes was initially confined to individual factories. Eventually, given the maturing of capitalism, the growing disparity between life conditions of the bourgeoisie and proletariat and increasing homogenization within each class, individual struggles become generalized to coalitions across factories. Increasingly, class conflict was manifested at the societal level. Class consciousness was increased, common interests and policies were organized and the use of struggle for political power occurred. Thus, classes become political forces. Exploitation and domination are unequal distribution of wealth and power in capitalist society. In a capitalist economy, exploitation is a necessary aspect of the system. Exploitation is less carried out on the aspect of power but it is more perpetrated on the basis of economic charts and figures. This is actualized through an impersonal and objective economic system (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014).

Finally, the division between classes will widen and the condition of the exploited worker will deteriorate so badly that social structure collapses. The class struggle is transformed into a proletarian revolution. The workers' triumph will eliminate the class division in property through public ownership of the means of production, and a classless society will emerge. Since political power to protect the bourgeoisie against the workers is unnecessary, political authority and the state will wither away.

Marx's Analyses on Alienation and Alienated Labour

Marx believe that the history of mankind had double aspects. It is a history of increasing control of man over nature as well as the history of the increasing alienation of man (Ollman as cited in Salawu, 2003). Marx argue that there is an inherent relation between labour and human nature. He opines that this relation is perverted by capitalism. He called this perverted relation *alienation* (Beilharz, 2005a; Cooper, 1991; Meisenhelder, 1991). The first major topic of the Manuscripts is alienation, a term that has many interpretations. Alienation has technical and legal meanings. It is often used to describe how someone is or feels about being separated from activities or situations for which he or she does not like the separation. A dictionary definition is withdrawing or separating a person or his affections from an object or position of former attachment. In the case of involvement of property, it is a conveyance of property to another. The notion of separation or transferring something to a new owner is one way of considering alienation. This is the way Marx coin the term. For Marx, the main aspect of alienation is the separation of work or labour from the worker, as well as the separation of the products of labour from the worker. Both aspects are taken and controlled by employers, thereby dominating the worker.

Marx used alienation in several ways. Initially and as part of his historical and philosophical concerns, Marx refers to religion whereby "*God ... had usurped man's position*" (McLellan, p. 106). Marx began his analysis of alienated labour by noting what happened to workers under capitalism. As the worker creates wealth, the wealth is created for the capitalist and not for the worker or direct producer. Thus, the condition of the worker deteriorates. The worker produces commodities and out of these commodities, capital is created which later dominates the worker. The worker becomes devalued because of the worthless-lower wages he receives and the domination of capital created from the commodities he produces. The worker becomes poorer the more he produces wealth and the more his production increases in power and extent. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more goods he produces. The devaluation of the human world increases in direct relation to the increase in value of the world of things. Labour does not only create goods; it also produces itself and the worker as a commodity, and indeed in the same proportion as it produces goods (Manuscripts, p. 13). For Marx, there are four aspects to alienation: (1) Alienation from Products of own Labour, which is the separation of the worker from the products of the worker's labour. (2) Alienation from the Process of Production

or from Work Itself. (3) Alienation from species-being or humanity and human potential. (4) Alienation from other persons.

Class Analysis in Disarray

In capitalism, two primary classes of bourgeoisie and proletariat are discovered by Marx's analysis. The bourgeoisie is the capitalist in the modern economy that owns the means of production and employs wage labour. The conflict between the bourgeoisie and proletariat emerge as a result of contradiction between the labour and capitalism. Marx maintained that society is polarized into these two major conflicting classes (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014). Marx's emphasis on class conflict as constituting the dynamics of social change, his awareness that change was not random but the outcome of a conflict of interests and his view of social relations as based on power were contributions of the first magnitude.

However, time and history have invalidated many of his assumptions and predictions. Capitalist ownership and control of production have been separated. Joint-stock companies forming most of the industrial sector are now almost wholly operated by non-capital-owning managers. Workers have not grown homogeneous, but are divided and subdivided into different skill groups. Class stability has been undercut by the development of a large middle class and considerable social mobility. The economic factors are used by Marx as the basic criteria for differentiating classes, but Anthony Giddens, a British sociologist, maintained that in an advanced capitalist society, there are three major classes. These major classes are upper class, middle class and lower class. The upper class are owners of property in the means of production, the middle class are those that possess educational or technical qualifications while the lower class or the working class are those who possess manual labour power (Haralambos & Heald, 1980). Marx argued that there is an increasing homogeneity within the working class, but Ralf Dahrendorf argues that the manual working class has become heterogeneous as a result of changes in technology. Hence, qualified builders, maintenance, designers and repairers are now needed to handle complex machines. Dahrendorf claims that there are three levels of working class such as unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled manual workers (Haralambos & Heald, 1980).

According to Miller (1991, as cited in Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014), he maintains that;

There is no rule that could, in principle, be used to sort out people in a society into classes without studying the actual interactions among economic processes on the one hand and between political and cultural processes on the other.

For Ojie (2002), in Nigeria, many classes exist such as the upper, middle and lower classes. Each of these classes could further be divided into upper-upper, lower-upper, upper-middle, lower-middle, upper-lower and lower-lower-middle classes. The upper class individuals are the rich or the advantaged group (even some of the upper-middle class individuals) while the lower class are the poor masses or the disadvantaged group. Individuals of the upper class (even upper middle class) enjoy power, prestige and wealth. Thus, they make discriminatory policies to enhance their socio-economic and political domination of the disadvantaged class. Also, they dominate in high employment positions, appointments and political positions. Members of the lower class cannot be appointed as commissioners, ministers, senators, or managing directors of federal parastatals, among other high positions and appointments. The lower class individuals are denied employment opportunities, award of contracts, and admission into federal colleges and universities except into these institutions by merit admission opportunity which is sometimes denied. Thus, there exists domination, discrimination, marginalization, alienation and unequal distribution of wealth and power. Some people see power as their birthright and occupy high positions to share the national cake. The bid to control the sources of power, and the national government, and gain prestige and wealth resulted in group cleavages and conflict in Nigeria. Similarly, Osaghae and Suberu (2005) posited that in Nigeria, as a result of the strong influence of Marxism and radical political economy perspectives class identities can be said to be the dominant or elite class which is also referred to as the ruling class, the political class, the privilege class or the hegemonic class while the dominated class is known as the masses, ordinary people or the non-elite. Although, class categories exist in Nigeria, the issue of consciousness of belonging and acting on this class basis are not really applicable in Nigeria.

Relevance of Class in Understanding Group Cleavages in Nigeria

The main classes in capitalism by Marx are the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. However, other classes such as landlords, petty bourgeoisie, peasants, and lumpenproletariat also exist but are not primary in terms of the dynamics of capitalism. These can be explained as follows:-

Landlords: Marx mentioned landowners or landlords as a class in Britain. While this is historically important, many still retain their wealth even today, for example, the Royal Family. They were considered by Marx to be a marginal class and were once powerful and dominant, but have lost their central role in the production and the organization of society. To retain their wealth, some of these landowners were able to transform their wealth in the land into landed capital. While this constituted a different form other than industrial capital, this meant that the land was also used as capital. Labour may not be directly employed by landowners, but the land is used as a means by which capital can be expanded.

Petty Bourgeoisie: The lower middle class or the petty (petite) bourgeoisie constitutes the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan and the peasant (Giddens and Held, p. 24). The characteristic of this class is that it does own some property, but not sufficient to have all work done by employees or workers. Members of this class must also work to survive, so they have a dual existence as small-scale property owners and as workers. Because of this dual role, members of this class have divided interests. They usually wish to preserve private property and property rights, but with interests often opposed to those of the capitalist class. This class is split internally and as well as being geographically, industrially and politically dispersed. So, it is difficult for it to act as a class. Marx expected that this class would disappear as capitalism developed as members moved into the bourgeoisie or the working class depending on whether they were successful. Many in this class have done this, but at the same time, this class seems to keep recreating itself in different forms. Marx considers the petite bourgeoisie to be politically conservative or reactionary, as they prefer a return to an older order. This class has been considered by some Marxists to have been the basis of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s. At other times, when it is acting in opposition to the interests of large capital, it may have a more radical or reformist bent to it (anti-monopoly).

Lumpenproletariat: Marx also mentioned the dangerous class or the social scum. Among the members of this group are ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, ex-convicts, pickpockets, brothel keepers, rag-pickers, and beggars among others (Bottomore, p. 292). Offshoots of political thuggery, unknown gunmen and terrorists are to be considered as lumpenproletariat. Marx does not consider this group to be of any importance in terms of potential for creating socialism, if anything, they may be considered to have a conservative influence.

Peasantry and Farmers: Marx considers the peasantry to be disorganized, dispersed and incapable of carrying out change. Marx also expected that this class would tend to disappear as most of them were displaced from the land and joined the proletariat. The more successful among them might become landowners or capitalist farmers. More recently, Prairie farmers are often considered to be split into different groups or strata depending on the type of farming, size of the farm and whether they employ labour or not. Farmers have not been able to act together as a class in political and economic actions in recent years. Lobbying by some farm groups has been successful, but this does not usually represent farmers as a whole. For example, in Nigeria, agricultural loans become hard to access by some regions that are considered to be alienated from government proceeds.

For Marx, there will be proletarianization because of the increase in the proletariat and as a result of competition and shutdown of small-scale independent businesses that are knocked out of business by megastores, chains stores, departmental stores, replacement of skilled artisans with mechanization, establishment of monopolies and mergers. As mechanization becomes easy, workers are reduced to labour performing simple operations and more people are put out of work, being redundant and pushed down from the proletariat into a huge industrial reserve army, masses that would revolt and overthrow capitalism is created (Marx, as cited in Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014). According to Bienen (1985, as cited in Adebisi, 2002), he stated that; “*Classes are weakly defined in Nigeria and elites are fragmented by language, group membership, place of origin and institutional identity*”. In the view of Salawu, (2003), a group can be seen as persons who interact with one another in a given context more than they do with others. It is more than coincidental coming together of individuals. Ferdinand Tonnies’ *gemeinschaft* type of relationship with regards to group is based on smallness of size, people’s awareness of similarity,

caring for one another, simple nature and value for personal qualities while that of *gesellschaft* is based on impersonal relationship. Also, the group world is divided into “us” as against “them” or “in-group” as against “out-group.” Conflict among groups underlines social cleavages which is the negative attitude and perception of one group against another in social relationship in a large segment of a population for example, in Nigeria (Lipset & Rokkan as cited in Salihu, Dayan & Ozden, 2021). In Nigeria, group cleavages could be found among the various groups such as Trade Unionism, Women rights and representation, Boko Haram, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Militant in the Niger Delta. These groups could be analysed as follows:

Trade Unionism

Marx believed that work is the production of goods and services, as well as the yardstick for human happiness and fulfilment. Thus, work as a primary human activity is important because it is a means to fulfil basic needs. For Marx, the integration of the working class into capitalist society is not complete because the conflict of interest between the capitalists and workers is still present (Haralambos & Heald, 1980). According to Hyman (1989), a strike is the expression of industrial conflict and also an actual as well as temporal stoppage of work. It is an act geared towards expressing grievances and also a collective action by a group of employees that requires solidarity and organization of workers. A trade union, from the plurality perspective, forms the major group that represents the interests of employees and the manual working class. Also, through unionism, there has been integration of the working class into capitalist society and conflict between the two parties is institutionalized based on agreed rules and procedures (Haralambos & Heald, 1980).

According to Sunmonu (1996), the formation of the Nigerian trade union is to protect and advance the interest and fate of workers as well as contribute to efforts being made for national development. Exploitation and injustice were the major reasons for the formation of labour unions. The first union was founded in 1912 under colonial rule and it fought in the forefront in a struggle for independence. But now, the Nigerian government claims that trade unions are anti-nationalistic, non-patriotic and hindrance to economic development. Today in Nigeria, labour leaders are being threatened with death, arrested, imprisoned, harassed, beaten and treated with all sorts of inhumane acts. It is a paramount duty of the unionists to ask and find out whether more employment opportunities have been created by the government, how the government has spent taxpayers’ money, demand whether the fiscal and money policy are favouring the workers and whether per capita income is smaller than a few years back. In recent years, the trade union has lost a lot of strength. The Nigeria Labour Congress was formed in February 1978, and it concentrated on workers' education as part of its human resources development process, but today it is the other way around. Unionism in Nigeria has been politicized.

Women’s Rights and Representation

There is a problem when categorizing males and females into social roles and when some individuals feel that they have been at one end of a linear spectrum while identifying themselves as males or females (Nwobi & Agbodike, 20118). According to Lamptey (2018) the United Nations women solicit media support for Nigerian Female politicians by giving them equal media coverage to enable women to compete favourably. The force of the media should be tapped into to change the narrative as well as experience around women’s participation in Nigerian politics since the power of the media helps to shape and influence public opinion around socio-cultural and political priorities. For Mufuliat (2019), in Nigeria, women in leadership encounter bias which discriminate against women serving in public leadership positions.

For Lamptey (2019), women representation in Nigeria is at the bottom of Africa in terms of the representation of women in elective offices. She argues that globally, Nigeria sits within 0.1-4.9 percent range for women’s representation in government and there has been a steady decline since 1999 Nigeria returned to democracy. She believed that the passage of Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill would provide window opportunity to implement legal frameworks to address gender inequalities and prevent, protect and address gender-based violence that includes disenfranchisement and discriminatory practices within employment and education. For Olumiji (2019), Gender and Equality Bill is a development-oriented and provision for measures to widen the space for women

occupying leadership positions in politics and public offices. In the northern Nigeria, women are denied voting rights as extreme inequality exist between men and women and this disparity is seen in educational, political, economic and social aspects of life. According to Aniekwu (2006), the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action stipulated that human rights of women and girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted on 18th December, 1976, opened for signature on 1st March 1980 and being enforced on 3rd September, 1981 and was ratified by Nigeria in 1985 and Optional Protocol was signed in 2000 and ratified in 2004. In Nigeria, there are three legal (tripartite legal system) systems in operation comprising Islamic Sharia law, customary law and the constitution. These profound misgivings as well as governance process impedes the implementation of the policy.

Although some progress has been made to reduce inequality but discrimination remains the problem and it is exacerbated by culture, religion and discriminatory laws (Okongwu, 2020). For Aniekwu (2006), Nigeria is a society where women are often still considered the properties of their husbands and instruments for childbearing, unequal rights for women would appear to be sanctioned by Nigeria's customary laws. According to Alhassan (2017), the number of female political appointees has risen from 10 percent between 2007 to 2011 and 33 percent between 2013 to 2015 with the appointment of 13 female ministers out of 42, 4 female special advisers out of 18, 4 female justices of supreme court, 15 judges of court of appeal, Nigeria first female chief justice and president of court of appeal, 5 states female chief judges, female head of civil service and acting secretary of the federal government.

Boko Haram Sect

According to Walker (2012), Boko Haram is an Islamic sect that sees politics in the northern Nigeria to have been controlled by a group of corrupt and false Muslims and which the sect wages war the corrupt group and Federal Republic of Nigeria so as to create a pure Islamic state to govern by Sharia law. According to Olaniyan (2014) in Nigeria, there are different perceptions about the attacks of Boko Haram as some individuals see it as a sponsored war by Muslims against Christians while some others view it as northerners war against the then president, Goodluck Jonathan that led to his exit from office. For Hundeyin (2021), in reality, Boko Haram is so much bigger than Mohammed Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau. The sect is being funded and supported by Salafiste pour la predication et le combat, a salafist group for preaching and combat which is an illegal terrorist organization based in Algeria which is also affiliated to Al-Qaeda and the Taliban that specializes in providing training, funding and support to Islamic and Jihad fighters around the world. Boko Haram uses a vast global network of smugglers, money launderers and rat lines. Boko Haram has been incubated and nurtured at the highest levels of theological, economic and political spheres in Nigeria. On 25th December, 2011 bomb blast by Boko Hara at St. Theresa's Catholic Church, Madalla, on the outskirts of Abuja killed 35 people and wounded 52 people. There had been series of attacks by the sect at churches in Jos, Gadaka, Damaturu, Kaduna, Borno and other parts of Nigeria.

Similarly, Walker (2012) posited that the group attacks softer targets. Since August, 2011, the group had planted bombs repeatedly in churches and public places. In March 2012, about twelve public schools in Maiduguri were bombed down. The group has expanded beyond a small number of mosques and its cell-like structure splits into factions making it difficult for dialogue between the group and the Nigerian government. For Hundeyin (2021), during the trial of the main suspect of the Abuja bombing, Kabiru Umar also known as Kabiru Sokoto, a masked witness claimed that forty thousand naira (#40,000.00) was given by Algeria Islamic group for the attacks. According to Umunna (2021), Boko Haram activities pose terrorism challenges in Nigeria especially in the north-east, the Lake Chad region coupled with banditry in the north-west and north-central. Also, there is illicit trading and movement of small arms and light weapon thereby increasing criminality and insurgency in the country.

For Walker (2012), Boko Haram is not in the same global jihadist grouping with Algeria's Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. After attacks on United Nations compound in August, 2011 killing twenty- three people, there have not been any attacks on Western or international interests. But in March, 2012 after the failed rescue of hostages Chris McManus and Franco Lamolinara in the north east, the connections

between the sect and international terrorism was played up by President Goodluck Jonathan. According to Emezie (2021), a significant portion of dollars bought by Bureau de Change (BDC) operators in Nigeria went into illegal importation of arms for Boko Haram.

Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)

This is a separatist organization in Nigeria which its main aim is to restore an independent state of Biafra comprising southeast, south- south regions as well as other Middle-Belt states of Nigeria including Benue and Kogi states through an independent referendum (Allison, 2017).

According to Ugorji (2017), the ugly developments in Nigeria such as the massacre of the ethnic Igbos in the northern Nigeria in 1953, July 29th 1966 counter coup and 1966 massacre, in cold blood, of many Igbo civilians (their bodies were brought back to eastern Nigeria) in the northern Nigeria that made General Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu, the then military governor of the eastern region to declare the independence of Biafra. Ojukwu that since Nigerian government and law enforcement could not protect the Igbos residing in other regions, it was better the Igbos return to eastern region that was safe.

Failure of postwar transitional justice, removal of history education from the school curriculum, regarding the word Biafra and history about the war as taboo as well as citizens born after the war knowing nothing about the incidence of the war reawakened and revamped the old agitation for the independence of Biafra (Ugorji, 2017). The indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) was founded in 2012 by Nnamdi Kanu, a British political activist. Many pro-Biafra groups had been in existence since 1999 such as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) formed by Ralph Uwazurike in 1999 and the Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM) formed in 2012 by Benjamin Igwe Onwuka. The Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra collapsed because of leadership power tussle, state repression and accusation against Raph Uwazurike for associating with the federal government and Nigerian politics as against the furtherance of the realization of Biafra. Biafra Zionist Movement collapsed after the arrest and charge for treason of Benjamin Igwe Onwuka and other members for staging rally in Enugu on 5th of November, 2012. The rise of Indigenous People of Biafra has continued championing the cause of separation and self-determination since its formation in 2012 (Wikipedia, 2021).

Nnamdi Kanu who was born after the war used information technology of social media and multimedia links (radio Biafra) to pull and drive millions of pro-Biafra activists, supporters and sympathizers around the globe to the Biafran cause (Ugorji, 2017). The arrest of Nnamdi Kanu on 19th October, 2015 by the Department of State Service (DSS), resulted to several protests in the southeast Nigeria. On 18th September, 2017, the Federal High Court in Abuja proscribed IPOB as a terrorist organization and the group's effort to reverse the proscription in 2018 was unsuccessful. In April, 2017, Nnamdi Kanu was granted bail on grounds of ill health and medical attention which could not be provided by the correctional institution and was barred from granting interview, meeting groups exceeding ten persons, organizing and attending social functions or rallies. In September, 2017 during an attack by Nigerian Military at Kanu's home country, Umuahia, Kanu disappeared on grounds of plot to assassinate him by the military. Nnamdi Kanu's bail was revoked and Justice Binta Nyako ordered Kanu's immediate arrest. On 29th June, 2021, Nnamdi Kanu was arrested in Kenya and repatriated to Nigeria. Since his repatriation to Nigeria, there have been unrest, security threats, sit-at-home order and wanton killings in the south east Nigeria which the IPO is denying the killings to be politically motivated. Until his arraignment on 21st of October, 2021 and adjournment of trial on 10th of November, there have been tensions in the southeast coupled with November 6th Anambra State Governorship election.

Militancy in the Niger Delta

The origin of militancy in the Niger Delta could be traced to environmental degradation, marginalization, unemployment and underdevelopment of the region. It is a local resistance to repression by the government and its institutions (Ebienu, 2011). The militants in the Niger Delta have been attacking oil pipelines thereby affecting the US and other oil companies exploring oil at the region. The current conflict in the Niger Delta started in 1990 between foreign oil corporations and the Niger Delta's minority groups especially the Ogoni and the Ijaw who claimed they are been exploited.

The Ogoni people accused the government of extracting oil without regards for the despoliation of the region and for no financial compensation. There was a protest led by Ken Saro Wiwa against the social and economic marginalization of Ogoni ethnic group. In May 1994, there was a riot and four Ogoni leaders were murdered in the process. Ken Saro Wiwa and nine other were accused, arrested and tried before Civil Disturbance Tribunal and ad hoc tribunal. The Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), a militant group in the Niger Delta region publicly announced the existence in March 2016. The militia group is known for attacking oil producing facilities in the region and shutting down oil terminals thereby causing fall in oil production and reduced oil output which negatively affect Nigerian economy and budget. The Niger Delta Avengers stated that they want to create a sovereign state in the Niger Delta and therefore threatened to disrupt the economy until their demands are met. According to Ibaba (2008), pointed out that protests and agitations that were initially peaceful degenerated into militancy, violence and hostage taking of oil expatriates and oil workers in the region. More so, alienation, political domination, environmental degradation, and corruption engendered conflicts and violence in the region. Similarly, Wodu (2020) stated that in January, 2006, a group known as Emancipation of Niger Delta People (MEND) kidnapped

Relevance of Class in Understanding Conflict in Nigeria

According to Osaghae and Suberu (2005), Nigeria is characterized as a divided country on the bases of ethnic, religious and regional aspects. Thus, civil strife, minority agitation, violent-conflict, disintegration and secession are the usual occurrences to such a divided country. In Nigeria, there are over two hundred ethnic groups but there are three large ethnic groups: Hausa-Fulani in the north, Yoruba in the south-west and Igbo in the south-east (Ojie, 2002). There are six elements in Marx's view of class conflict: (1) Classes are authority relationships based on property ownership. (2) A class defines groupings of individuals with shared life situation. (3) Classes are naturally antagonistic by the virtue of their interests. (4) Imminent within modern society is the growth of two antagonistic classes which their struggle eventually absorbs all social relations. (5) Political organization and Power is an instrumentality of class struggle, and reigning ideas are its reflection. (6) Structural change is a consequence of the class struggle.

In Nigeria, various ethnic groups exercise a certain degree of prejudice against one another. Every group sees and regards its members as hardworking, kind and loving while members of other group are considered wicked, greedy and wicked. The domination of certain spheres of Nigeria by some ethnic groups entrenches the spate of discrimination among the different ethnic groups (Ojie, 2002). In Nigeria today, ethnicism has permeated the various facets of our national life and made propaganda to become a regular pastime among Nigerians (Adebisi, 2002). According to Walker (2012), Nigeria has had a long history of communal conflicts and ethno- religious violence. There has been bloody violence among the different communities since the return of democracy in 1999. For example, in Plateau State, in urban centers of Kaduna and Kano, Tafawa Balewa district of Bauchi and other parts of the country. It seems that these conflicts boil down to religious difference when viewed from outside but when it is looked deeper, it is also clear that politics especially the control of government patronage is the primary cause of conflicts in Nigeria.

According to Ugorji (2017), many ethnic groups in Nigeria are proposing a more decentralized federal system of government in which the states are given the fiscal autonomy to control and manage the endowed resources and affairs thereby paying a fair share to the federal government. In view of Aghamelu and Aghamelu (2016), despite Nigeria is blessed with diverse ethnic groups, the blessing is turned to a wound which is eating deep into the flesh of the unity of Nigeria. The cause of ethnic conflicts often experienced in Nigeria can be traced to the amalgamation of southern and northern protectorates in 1914 by colonial administration.

Nigeria, as a multi-ethnic entity with political differences, ethnicity has contributed to frequent conflict in the country. Ethnic sentiments from ethnic groups have led to violence as a means to protect and preserve their identities (Adetiba, 2013). For Anuguom (2000), ethnicity in Nigeria has assumed a disturbing dimension that marginalization which leads to agitations by some ethnic minority groups is

the most crucial issue. Thus, ethnic tensions, suspicion, and distrust are the consequences of marginalization which also leads to conflict and underdevelopment

Conclusion

In Marx's analysis, the capitalist class could not exist without the proletariat, or vice-versa. The relationship between classes is contradictory or antagonistic. It is one that has a struggle, conflict and contradictory interests associated with it. The structure and basis of a social class may be defined in objective terms as groups with a common position concerning property or the means of production. However, Marx may not be primarily interested in the definition of class. Unlike much other sociological analysis, Marx's classes are defined by class conflict. The concept of alienation has proved to be a very useful and fruitful one. It is widely used today in politics, social psychology, studies of labour, work as well as in different disciplines. The analysis of alienation allowed Marx to pull together his philosophical background, his observations of early nineteenth-century capitalism, his interest in political issues and his first forays into a discussion of political economy. In the Marxian analysis, alienation becomes transformed into exploitation and surplus value in which the latter is what Marx was more concerned with.

In Nigeria, the two major classes that Marx stated and the issues of class consciousness are not exactly present and application to Nigeria's situation. Nigerian can be said to have categories of classes based on the diversified ethnic groups, cultures and languages that are inherent in the country's geo-political and socio-economic history. Thus, there have been group cleavages and conflict in Nigeria.

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