

THE MARXIAN THEORY OF CLASS STRUGGLE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This research investigates the enduring relevance of Karl Marx's theory of class struggle for the socio-economic framework of Nigeria. The Study confronts the persistent problem of socio-economic inequality in Nigeria, Karl Marx was against the inequalities and exploitative nature of capitalism during his time, Capitalism which was in trend, is a system that encourages class division, The Owners of means of production which are the bourgeois and the proletariats who are the workers are in constant strife. The bourgeois are interested in maximization of profit through the extra labor of the proletariats and this is the sheer imbalance of the system. The case of the Aba women riots of 1929, when the Market women protested against the oppressive rule of the colonial government, Also the numerous times, when the Academic Staff Union of Universities embarked on strike due to the poor working conditions and The Labour Congress, has countless of times push for balance in the policies of the government through strikes, rallies, and protest. The Researcher employed the method of Analysis, the findings of this study explicate the unequal distribution of wealth and resources in Nigeria, as well as the exploitation of the working class. This understanding can inform policies addressing economic disparities and promoting social justice.

Keywords: Class Struggle, Socio-economic, Development, Political Class, Working Class.

Introduction

Karl Marx believed that the history of human societies is fundamentally shaped by the struggle between different classes. He posited that in capitalist societies, the relationship between workers and capitalists is typically exploitative, workers are compelled to sell their labor for less than it's worth to survive. Karl Marx's ideas were influenced by the German scholar Georg Hegel, who developed the idea of dialectical thinking, He was also influenced by the British political economist David Ricardo, who propounded the idea of the labor theory of value. Charles Fourier and Robert Owen influenced Karl Marx through their advocacy of communal ownership of property and production.¹ Hegel was a major influence on Marx's ideas, mostly his dialectical approach to understanding history and society. He believed that history is the result of a dialectical process, in which opposing forces or ideas came into conflict and eventually resolved into a new and higher stage of development. "In every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economics production and exchange and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch."²

Karl Marx adopted this idea of dialectical materialism, which holds that the conflict between different classes was the driving force of history. The development of socialism in Nigeria was greatly influenced by Marx's ideas. In the 1960s and 1970s, socialist ideas gained popularity among students and intellectuals in Nigeria, and they propagated the adoption of Socialism as State Policy. This led to several socialist ideas inspired programs and policies being implemented by the government, such as the creation of a national oil company and the nationalization of some industries. However, these policies were often poorly implemented and did not yield the desired results. The failure of socialist policies in Nigeria did not repudiate Karl Marx's idea of Socialism.

Rather, it may have been due to a variety of factors such as corruption and mismanagement by the government. Despite the setbacks, Karl Marx's ideas about class struggle and inequality continue to be influential in Nigeria and other countries around the world. For example, in recent years, Nigerian activists and scholars have drawn on Karl Marx's ideas to critique the country's current political and economic system. They have argued that the country is still largely divided along class lines, and the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. They have also highlighted the importance of addressing issues of inequality and injustice to build a more just and equitable society.

Nigerian activists and scholars have raised in recent years some issues like the high level of poverty and unemployment, the lack of access to basic services like education and healthcare, and the increasing gap between the rich and poor. They have argued that these issues need to be addressed to create a more equal society. Karl Marx's ideas have had a significant impact on the development of socio-economic philosophy in Nigeria. The idea of historical materialism is one of the exceptional ideas is been drawn from Karl Marx's works. This is the idea that the economic system of a society decides its political and social structures. It has been used to analyze and critique the capitalist system in Nigeria and to proffer the need for social change. The history of social

movements has been the history of class struggle. Accordingly, Karl Marx in his communist Manifesto declared that:

The history of all existing society is the history of class struggles, freeman and slave, Patrician and Plebian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman in a word oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another to carry on uninterrupted now hidden open fight, a fight that each time divided either in a revolutionary reconstitution of a society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes³

Capitalism survives on the exploitation of wage labor; this invents the struggles of the working class against the bourgeoisie in all societies with the consciousness for social actions and revolution.

The Political Class in Nigeria are known to be inconsiderate to the plight of Citizens, this explains the abject poverty of the Citizenry. For instance, the current fuel subsidy removal of the Tinubu's administration at its early days of assumption of office without consideration of its effect on the Nigerian masses on the effect such would have on the masses, the removed subsidy created hyperinflation in the economy to the detriment of the poor masses, if the Political Class in Nigeria have the masses at heart, they would have devised a credible measure to cushion the effects of this current situation. At least doubling the wages and salaries of the workers will ameliorate the hard times, rather all we have is lips talk from the leaders and the labor congress have tried to bring to their notice of the prevalent situation through official writs, protests, rallies, strikes but to no avail. Its crystal clear that the elites are intentional of the hardship they are causing to the people. The funds recovered from the removed subsidy is presume to be used for developmental projects that will benefit the public and also for the fixing of the dilapidated refineries but all their claims are plot planned for embezzlement and exploitation of the public funds. The system of governance in Nigeria should work on how to rightly influenced the social-economic well-being of all and not prioritizing activities that engender gains to the few ruling class.

Class struggle is a social phenomenon in economic development in Nigeria, and it has been studied from diverse perspectives. "The struggle for power in Nigeria has been a class struggle, with the elite controlling the means of production and using that control to keep themselves in power"⁴ The implication of Karl Marx's theory of class struggle on Nigeria's socio-economic development is that the country's ruling class has reproduced capitalism and ideological repression of salary workers and the masses, "As capitalism develops in Nigeria, the gap between the capitalist class and the working class widened."⁵ some organizations like the Nigerian Labor Congress and Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities are Marxist groups, they always criticize the government and make proposals based on a Marxist developmental structure.

"There are thousands of companies and industries owned by individuals in Nigeria, governments, and expatriates which thrive from surplus value accrued from underpayment of the workers. United Africa Company (UAC), Lever Brothers, PZ industries, Nigeria Breweries, etc. have numerous workers of the lower and middle class that are underpaid monthly"⁶. The Capitalist socio-economic system of Nigeria today confirms Marxist theory to the effect that under such conditions, Life is miserable for the common person in Nigeria.

The theme of class sees the socio-economic development in Nigeria as the question of class identity. The idea of class is not just about economic status but also about social identity. In Nigeria, there is a strong sense of identity based on class with different groups seeing themselves as belonging to different classes. This can be seen in the way people identify themselves as 'elite', 'middle class or 'working class.' The theme of exploitation and oppression plays the role of shaping the identity of the working class. Marx believed that the working class was not only exploited economically but also socially and culturally. This led to a sense of alienation among the working class, In Nigeria, this was reflected in the way the working class was often marginalized and excluded from the political process and also the poor economic condition. The theme of Revolution: Marx believed that the working class would eventually rise up and overthrow the capitalist system. In Nigeria, this was reflected in the various uprisings and protests that took place over the years.

Graeme Duncan in his work, *Social Conflict and Social Harmony*, holds that J.S. Mills's analysis of class and class interest sprayed directly from the utilitarian background when he was writing about representative government.

The Times indicted how pejorative the term 'class' was, the writer referred to the terms 'class prejudices' and 'class legislation', classic and appropriate chartist phrases of the thirties and forties, and concluded that's we inveigh against the selfishness of class interest,

For Mill, classes or groups smaller than the society itself, characteristically revealed sinister interest. he was extremely concerned at the strength of class interests which were major obstacles to the realization of the common

good, Class and Class conflict were great social evils especially. When the members of the class were ignorant and aggressive .⁷

Mill can be criticized for his view of the evil nature of the class division, class can be seen in a positive light just like the view of Aristotle who submits that the best brains (elite) in the society should be the ruler of the societies, through such means the best form of government can be achieved. He defined classes loosely and pejoratively as any number of persons who have the same sinister interest, whose direct and apparent interest points towards the same description of bad measures,

According to David Fern Bach in his work *Survey from Exile*. The Ideological representation of class interests defines a distinct stratum of Ideologies attached to each class, writing about Montagne, Marx stresses that what made the democratic ideologists representatives of the petty bourgeoisie was not that they were themselves shopkeepers, but their minds were restricted by the same barriers which the petty bourgeoisie fails to overcome in real life and they are driven in theory to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social situations drive the latter in practice. This is the general relationship between the political and literary representation of a class and the class which they represent.

In the text Marx distinguished a much richer variety of classes and fractions of classes of which great Landowners, financial bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie (of various graduation), industrial proletariat, lumpen proletariat and small peasant proprietors are only the most prominent. The German Fraktion has the primary meaning of a parliamentary party but Marx also uses it for section of a class that are the basis of different political parties.⁸

Given this plurality of classes, it is not surprising that Marx had to qualify the simple model of one ruling class presented in the Manifesto. Marx's analyses of France imply rather the existence on the one hand, of a ruling bloc composed of a plurality of classes or fractions of classes on the other hand, within this ruling bloc of a single dominant class or fraction.

S. P. Varma's opinion in his book *Modern Political Theory* contends that Elite theory was based on the idea that every society consists of two broad categories (1) The selected few, who are capable and therefore have the right to supreme leadership, and (2) the vast masses of people who are destined to be ruled. Even though this theory was first started in central and western European countries as a critique of democracy and socialism, "These groups were engaged in a process of balancing and limiting each other through which harmony between the various interests in a society of which groups were the exponents, could be maintained".⁹

Bade Onimode's book *Class Struggle and Economic Development in Nigeria* contains arguments that hold that the crisis in Nigeria is not simply a matter of economic problems, but rather a result of the struggle between the ruling class and the working class. Second, he argues that the ruling class has been unable to address the country's problems because they are more interested in preserving their own wealth and power. "The Nigerian ruling class has been incapable of carrying through a transformation of the productive system which can generate conditions for sustainable growth and development."¹⁰

Marx's concept of class struggle in the context of Nigeria is found in "*Marxist Political Economy in a Third World Country*" by Michael Fabey. He argues that Marx's ideas are particularly relevant to the analysis of Nigeria, as the country has a long history of economic exploitation by foreign powers. "Marx sees the necessary condition for the existence of the bourgeoisie as the condition of proletarianization or the creation of the proletariat."¹¹ This emphasizes the importance of understanding the class structure in Nigeria in terms of the relationship between the ruling class and the working class. Feuer explains the exploitation of the Class system in his book 'Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy'. He states that after the July revolution of 1830 when the liberal banker Laffite led his godfather, the Duke of Orleans, in triumph to the Hotel de Ville, he let fall the words "from now on the bankers will rule".¹² It was not the French bourgeoisie that ruled under Louis Philippe, but one section of it, bankers, railway kings, owners of coal, and stock exchange kings that rallied around them. The so-called finance aristocracy.

Muhibu-Din O. Mahmudat in his *Intra-class struggle in Nigeria* argues "As Britain began to devolve political authority to native politicians, the competition among educated elites who wanted the new positions of power and prestige increase."¹³ The elites constitute the few and they are reared by colonialism. They comprise essentially those in the professions, middle and upper sections of the civil service, the middle and upper ranks of the army, petty contractors, and independent artisans. Just like their colonial predecessors, the elites manipulate ethnicity to forge seeming differences and raise fear of domination and marginalization by the other in their struggle for control over power and resources.

In *The Political Economy of Nigeria Since the Civil War*, Peter Lewis looks at the political and economic history of Nigeria since the end of the civil war in 1970. He argues that the war left Nigeria with a weak state, a corrupt political elite, and a dysfunctional economy. He also looks at how these issues have been perpetuated by military rule and economic mismanagement. He argues that the country needs to make serious reforms to improve its political and economic situation. "The military intervened in politics not to build democracy or implement any coherent vision of social and economic development, but to capture state power and access its material resources."¹⁴ One of the key arguments that Claude Ake makes in his book is that the elite class in Africa has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo because they benefit from the current system. He argues that this is one of the main obstacles to development in Africa. One of the ways that the elite class benefits from the status quo is through the control of natural resources. In many African countries, the government and the elite class have a lot of control over natural resources like oil and minerals.

This allows them to control the economy and keep the majority of the population poor. The elite class also benefits from the lack of democracy, because it allows them to stay in power and maintain their privileges. "The state is an instrument of domination and exploitation, and its policies tend to favor the interests of the ruling class."¹⁵ The gap this research intends to fill is based on the advantage that can be garnered from the class struggle, the ruling class should embrace the struggle in the system as an instrument of check on the performance of government, whenever there is an outcry from the masses on certain idea or policies of the government, it is the responsibility of the ruler to manage such situation to favour the poor masses so that there will be an equilibrium and progress in the state. The activities of the elite in the political scene of Nigeria have caused the deplorable state of socio-economics development of Nigeria especially the living conditions of the poor masses who are the majority of the population. The exploitative activities of these greedy political elites are the fundamental cause of the socio-economics vices in the country.

This research was organized into three segments, the introduction, main body and conclusion. The introduction contains the purpose and problem that spur the research, the literature review, contribution and the gap intended to fill. The second segment is the main body of research, then finally the conclusion and references.

Implications for Nigeria Socio-Economic Development

The echoes of class struggle reverberate through Nigeria's history, a persistent melody woven from the threads of colonialism and amplified by the jarring shifts of a post-colonial economy. Early notes of this struggle were captured with poignant clarity by literary giants like Chinua Achebe. In his seminal work, "Things Fall Apart," Achebe paints a vivid portrait of the clash between the traditional Igbo social order and the imposition of British rule.¹⁶ This disruption, with its dismantling of established hierarchies and the introduction of new economic realities, laid the groundwork for the stark class divisions that continue to resonate in contemporary Nigeria. Independence from colonial rule in 1960 marked a turning point in the nation's narrative, but it did not herald an era of automatic social and economic parity. The Gini coefficient, a statistical measure of income inequality, paints a grim picture. According to the World Bank Nigeria's Gini coefficient stood at a concerning 35.1 in 2019. This seemingly abstract number translates to a vast chasm between the wealthy elite and the millions of Nigerians mired in poverty. Aliko Dangote, Africa's richest man, serves as a potent symbol of this inequality. His immense wealth, amassed primarily through the oil and cement industries, surpasses the combined wealth of a staggering number of his countrymen.¹⁷ This concentration of wealth in the hands of a few stands in stark contrast to the daily struggles of ordinary Nigerians forced to navigate a precarious existence marked by limited access to necessities like education, healthcare, and sanitation. However, amidst these challenges, Nigeria's spirit of resilience shines through. Grassroots movements and civil society initiatives have emerged as powerful forces for change. Organizations like the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) have championed the cause of workers, securing improvements in labor conditions and social protections. Through strikes, protests, and collective bargaining, the NLC has challenged exploitative labor practices and advocated for a living wage.¹⁸ Likewise, community-driven development projects, such as microfinance initiatives and cooperatives, empower marginalized communities to achieve economic self-sufficiency. By providing access to small loans, training, and market opportunities, these initiatives allow individuals and communities to break free from the cycle of poverty and chart their own path towards economic empowerment.¹⁹

"An understanding of the vertical dimension of political and social mobilization in Nigeria can help explain why the dominant class in Nigeria is unable to rule effectively even in its own interest."²⁰

The political class capitalizes on the mindset of the people playing to the gallery of ethnicity, tribalism and ignorance of the people to circulate, recycle them in power for selfish and personal interest, all in the name of fighting the cause of a particular ethnic group.²¹

It is therefore essential that the country's government is reformed to ensure that it is more responsive to the needs of the people and that it is held accountable for its actions. Without this, any reforms or policies that are put in

place will be undermined by a lack of trust in the government which will stir up struggle against the ruling class. The issue of youth unemployment is a major challenge, but there are some potential solutions. For example, the government could invest in vocational training and apprenticeship programs, which could help to provide young people with the skills they need to find jobs. Additionally, the government could work with the private sector to create more job opportunities. It's clear that there are several challenges facing Nigeria's economic development, but there are also potential solutions. The key is for the government and other stakeholders to work together to find effective solutions. When these measures are taken, there will be a quell in the class conflict in the system,

Which will part way for a progressive state.

Until political and higher bureaucratic appointments ceases to be a means to easy accumulation of illicit wealth and a new political culture that abhors corruptions in public life and humiliates corrupts public servants emerge in Nigeria, the country cannot escape the inevitable disastrous consequences that comes with pervasive corruption.²²

Class struggle can hinder economic growth by creating instability and uncertainty. Businesses are less likely to invest in a country that is experiencing social conflict, and this can lead to a slowdown in economic activity. Economic inequality can be caused by many factors, including differences in access to education, employment opportunities, and social networks. These factors can create a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break.

This cycle of poverty often leads to a sense of frustration and resentment among the lower classes. They may feel that the system is rigged against them, and this can lead to social unrest and conflict. Economic inequality can lead to a lack of social cohesion, which makes it difficult for society to function effectively. "These social economics issues have also expanded inequalities among the wealthy and the poor."²³

Conclusion

This study has embarked on a profound journey, delving into the complexities of Karl Marx's theory of class struggle and its enduring relevance to understanding Nigeria's socio-economic development. The investigation began with a stark question: Can the ideas of a 19th-century European revolutionary shed light on the challenges faced by a contemporary African nation? The answer, as we have discovered, is a resounding yes. Marx's scathing critique of capitalism, with its inherent inequalities and exploitative tendencies, serves as a powerful lens through which we can analyze Nigeria's socio-economic landscape. The vast wealth concentrated in the hands of a select few stands in stark contrast to the daily struggles faced by millions of Nigerians who toil for meager wages. This fundamental class division, as Marx argued, breeds resentment and fuels the fires of social unrest.²⁴ The path forward necessitates a commitment to social justice and a concerted effort to bridge the widening economic gap. Policymakers must prioritize policies that promote inclusive growth and empower the marginalized segments of society.

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