

THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LIBERAL AND MARXIST POLITICAL ECONOMY IN UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEMS OF NIGERIAN POLITICS

Ogoyi Christopher Simon
Department of Political Science
Federal University of Education, Kontagora
ogoyiogoyi@gmail.com
08060142789

&

Okpe James Simon
Department of Political Science
College of Education, Ankpa, Kogi state
08075673337/07061084164

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Abstract

Nigeria and her practice of politics has attracted avalanche of diagnosis and prescriptions by analyst, political and social commentators, scholars and researchers alike. Despite these arrays of explanations none can claim sole proprietorship of solutions to the Nigerian political system. The paper generally x-rayed both the Liberal and Marxist orientations and took a position with the Marxist orientation in providing explanations to the Nigerian state. From the review of related literature it clearly showed there is a problem with the Nigerian political system and the utility of the Marxist orientation is quite appreciated in the context of understanding and proffering solutions thereby. As much as the problems of man and society have not ceased from their free flow, theorists should never rest on their oars in providing lieu way for progress. As a fact of fact Nigeria should and especially our policy makers and implementers of our policies should adopt the prescriptions by the Marxists in bringing drastic solutions to the quagmire we find ourselves in Nigeria.

Introduction

Theories are fundamental for explaining socio-cultural and political phenomena. While they are not the ends in themselves, they are unarguably, pathways or means to the ends. This is because as models and constructs, they explain realities and provide direction for progress, i.e. the attainment of 'the greatest good for the greatest number' in a political system. Consequently, the Bourgeois and the Radical approaches to the study of political economy have continued to provide sources of inspiration and hypotheses to many scholars from different orientations and persuasions on the essence of the state, in terms of production, distribution, exchange and consumption on one hand and the emergent social relations of production on the other hand. The application of these approaches on several occasions has been at cross purposes in terms of their world view and explanatory power on issues aforementioned. It is against this background this paper attempts to analyze the Liberal and Marxist Approaches in understanding the problems of Nigerian Politics on one hand and adopting the Marxist prescriptions in studying and providing solutions to Nigeria problems.

Conceptualization of Political Economy

The meaning of Political economy is one which has undergone changes, from its first recorded usage. Adam Smith (1723-1790) maintains that the key to understanding the development of human society lay in identifying the mode of subsistence which was dominant at each stage. To him, political economy is a branch of science of a state man or legislator concerned with the two fold objectives of providing a plentiful revenue or substance for the people and supplying the state or common wealth with a revenue sufficient for the public service. It proposes to enrich both the people and sovereign. To them the society is classified into strata based on the ability and talent to work, hence, in every inquiry concerning the operation of men when united together in society, the first object of attention should be their mode of subsistence. Accordingly, as that varies, their laws and policies must be different. Political economy is the study of the relationship between politics and economy and the laws governing the production, distribution, exchange, consumption and the attendant social relations of production.

The word liberal/liberalism is from a Latin word '*liber*' which means free. It is viewed as the absence of external restrictions, obstacles, or barriers on the individual. It involves an enthusiasm for freedom, authority, toleration, individualism and reason on one hand, and disapproval of power, authority and tradition, on the other hand (Dunn, 1993). It invokes the

idea of limited government, the maintenance of the rule of law, the avoidance of arbitrary or discretionary power, the sanctity of private property and freely made contracts, the responsibility of individuals for their own fates or actions, complicated by involvement in the economy, democracy, welfare policies, moral and cultural progress(Ryan, 1995). That no one should believe what he does not understand. It rest on the justification of social arrangements that everything has to be capable of being made acceptable to the last individual. So, a social and political order is still illegitimate unless it is rooted in the consent of all those who have to live under it and have a stake in it: the consent or agreement of these people is a condition of its being morally permissible to enforce that order against them. That means every obligation depend on consent (Waldron, 1987). Liberal approach in political economy proclaims the sovereignty of the individual: it sees the individual as an autonomous entity endowed with a set of natural rights over which no person or institution can exercise control without the individual's consent.

For John Locke, these rights consisted of life, liberty and property (Holton, 1992). It envisages a free market and a minimalist state which is the principal means of guaranteeing liberty in a liberal democratic society. A free market system allows individuals to pursue and maximize their own economic interests in competition with others. While a minimalist state limits the scope and power of the government so that it does not intervene in market transactions nor tell its citizens how to live. Taken together these generalizations form the political theory of classical liberalism, which finds expression today as libertarianism or neo-liberalism. The liberal political economy approach is a derivative of the classical, bourgeois or orthodox political economy that was about the study of the growth and development of capitalism which represented the interest of commercial capital, hence, the emphasis on wages, capital, labour, profit, surplus values, etc. Premium is placed on the institution of private property to allow the private sector play its role in economic development. It is concerned with the removal of inhibitions to expansion of capital in the productive process. The point is that, the intervention of government in the production process is rejected or not encouraged. Rather, the state is encouraged to perform its primary function of maintenance of law and order for the production process to thrive. It is also called *laissez faire*.

The Marxist conception of political economy is a science of the development of social-production and the relationship that emanate thereby. It can be seen as a reaction to the contradiction of capital and its many unanswered questions. It views the interaction between

labour and capital, a relationship that breeds inequality, thus places emphasis on the economic factor as fundamental in the society. Thus according to Lenin (1919), it is not with production that political economy deals, but with the social relations of men in production, with the social system of production and uses dialectical and historical materialism in its analysis.

The Liberal or Bourgeois Approach to Political Economy

Political economy traditionally means an inquiry into the nature and causes of wealth of nations. At this time concentration was mainly with the growth and development of the economic system. In this regard, the concentration was on issues relating to production, distribution, exchange and consumption, Grossman (1941). From the bourgeois viewpoint, the term political economy was first used by the French Economist Antonie De Montchretien (1575–1621). He was the first to proclaim the theory of Mercantilism. The Mercantilist concentrated on the study of how to give maximum national protection to the production, distribution and exchange of goods and services. The motive was to create the wealth of the society and the laws of production and distribution and exchange relations. However, the work of William Petty (1623- 1687), Adam Smith (1723-1790) and David Ricardo (1772-1823) marked the foundation of classical/ bourgeois political economy(Lukacs, 1975 and Diamond, 2008)). They opine that government was to make laws for the smooth running of the market, but should not participate or be fully involved in business. They argued that the market should regulate itself because it creates a system of preferment and statuses and also set the agenda for the functioning of the government and also influences the style and character of personal life. Therefore, the work of the state is to ensure that people have the freedom to engage in their pursuit of production, distribution and exchange of material benefit. The classical political economy reject government control of economic activities and that the prices of goods and services should be determined by invisible hands but certainly not government but by the forces of demands and supply.

On the other hand, the liberal or neoclassical political economy as a variant of the classical liberalism gained prominence through the writings of Keynes. It doubts the capability of attaining optimum resources production and allocation within the state without a measure of state intervention. This is because changes in aggregate tend to have a significant and lasting effect on output. Hence, if aggregate demand falls, because of a monetary policy or a falloff in consumer spending power, this will in the short run lead to falling output. As a result of this, it is necessary for a relative level of state intervention in the economic process for the attainment,

control of inflation, and general economic recession. That government control was necessary to regulate the flow of money in the economy and further accommodate the preferences of government's fiscal and monetary policies to national economic development. The government is needed to balance the system so as to prevent the economy from collapsing/sinking.

Generally, liberalism focuses on all aspects of social life – economic, social and political and so on. This is divided into political and economic liberalism. Economic liberalism is committed to free market and minimal state intervention, while political liberalism is committed to individual equality and liberty (Gilpin, 1987). In contemporary society, capitalism has almost subsumed economic liberalism, which is the reason why the system is better known as liberal –capitalism. Similarly, political liberalism is associated with democracy and that is why the system is better known as liberal-democracy. Liberalism is not capitalism only that capitalism can best function in a liberal environment. To this extent we have the classical liberalism, the neo-classical liberalism. Be that as it may, all forms of liberalism are committed to the market and the price mechanism as the most efficacious means for organizing domestic and international economic relations. According to Sinclair, (2010), liberalism is a political philosophy or worldview founded on ideas of liberty and equality. Liberals espouse a wide array of views depending on their understanding of these principles, but generally they support ideas such as free and fair elections, civil rights, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, free trade, and private property.

The liberal approach emanates from the fact of individual emancipation leading to differentiation and stratification. In the society there are those who have the capacity to work and develop based on application of talent and as such society should recognize people based on material contribution to the commonwealth. Liberalism has a close but sometimes uneasy relationship with democracy. At the centre of democratic doctrine is the belief that governments derive their authority from popular election; liberalism, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with the scope of governmental activity (Schell, 2004). Liberals often have been wary of democracy, because of fears that it might generate a tyranny by the majority. One might say, therefore, that democracy looks after majorities and liberalism after unpopular minorities, the minority who owns and control capital and the means of production.

Like other political doctrines, liberalism is highly sensitive to time and circumstance. The historical development of liberalism centuries past has been a movement from mistrust of the state's power on the ground that it tends to be misused, to a willingness to use the power of government to correct perceived inequities in the distribution of wealth resulting from economic competition—inequities that purportedly deprive some people of an equal opportunity to live freely (Heywood, 2003). The expansion of governmental power and responsibility sought by liberals in the 20th century was clearly opposed to the contraction of government advocated by liberals a century earlier. In the 19th century liberals generally formed the party of business and the entrepreneurial middle class; for much of the 20th century they were more likely to work to restrict and regulate business in order to provide greater opportunities for labourers and consumers (Waldron, 1987). In each case, however, the liberals' inspiration was and is the same: hostility to concentrations of power that threaten the freedom of the individual and prevent him from realizing his full potential, along with a willingness to reexamine and reform social institutions in the light of new needs. This willingness is tempered by an aversion to sudden, cataclysmic change, which is what sets off the liberal from the radical (Heywood, 2003). It is this very eagerness to welcome and encourage useful change, however that distinguishes the liberal. Liberalism is defined by its attempt to limit the power of the state for the sake of individual freedom. This does not in any way mean liberalist want a weak state. In fact, they want state power to do a lot of things. They are only opposed to certain kind of authority. They want to ensure competition in the market because it is the most efficient as it promotes freedom. Any other method the state uses to guide economic activities will create huge problems. The role of the state is therefore to limit working hour, require sanitation, provide social services and encourage competition. This is because monopolies limit alternatives for consumers, block competition from entering the markets and therefore block freedom of exchange. To the liberalist, People make rational choices; Rational people create spontaneous markets; Markets are natural and should be free; Free exchange create true prices; State should stay out of markets; Their job is to ensure competition; They will never be powerful or wise enough to suppress natural and spontaneous market.

Tenets of liberal approach

- i. Individual Sovereignty
- ii. Self Interest

- iii. Rationality
- iv. Private Property Rights
- v. Self-Regulating Market
- vi. Spontaneous Order

Criticisms of the Liberal Approach

The bourgeois political economy is rash in generalization and fallacious arguments. This is combined with imperfect analysis of fundamental conception that leads to confusion of thought and selection of false proposition and self-evident postulations. Where deductive reasoning is employed, it is applied without regards to the conditions requisite for their valid application, Ryan (1995) and (Ezeibe, 2016). Almost every problem connected with the bourgeois method of political economy has given rise to conflict of opinion and the resulting controversies have sometimes been bitter. Part of the rationale for this controversy is that Smith did not address the issue of the right method. Method was merely implied in his discussion, attaching heavier importance to either inductive or deductive methods. He accepted every method of inquiry so long as it assisted him in understanding aspects of the wealth of nations.

Despite the eloquent argument of the market system, the great depression of 1920s, 1930s, 1960, 2000s remain the results of uncontrolled market system. These depressions were followed by either small or large scale state intervention in the economy this gave rise to state capitalism – free markets with limit set by government policies. Laski (1980) explains that whenever the capitalist world gets to crisis, it reaches for socialist interventionist measures. In the 1960s governments across the globe reacted to the problem of inflation, balance of payment deficit and flagging economic growth rate by intervening in industries, trades, and finance. For instance, France added new elements to the already existing *dirigistic* system including price control on industrial commodities as part of the 1963 stabilization. Italian government nationalized the power sector and introduced new profit taxes. The United States introduced presidential intervention on process of steel and even attempted to operate a wage policy. Britain introduced the national economic planning and tied public expenditures to four per cent of economic growth rate (Wright, 1980).

Observably, state intervention in the economy has benefited owners of machines and capital than consumers, prices of basic commodities such as cement, agricultural products and fuel

continue to rise after government subsidization of the products creating a system of welfare for the capitalist and capitalism for the poor. Also, proponents of welfare argue that lack of state intervention leads to inequality. For instance, in most African major cities, high cost of housing and healthcare is attributed to lack of appropriate government intervention or policy somersault.

The Marxist Approach to Political Economy

The Marxist political economy started with Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Frederick Engels (1820-1895). To Marx, liberal political economists were unable to discover and treat production as a social activities or process directly related with social formation or material base. There was no articulation of the domestic tension and interaction between labour and capital and the exploitative reward mechanism in favour of the bourgeois class in the outcome of production (Mkor, 2012). To Marx, philosophers of ages past have succeeded in describing and interpreting the world without changing it. For example, Hegel had earlier assigned the role of prime mover, consciousness or reality to ideas or theses. Each idea or theses has its opposite called antitheses. Interaction between the theses and the antitheses result into syntheses. This process is called dialectical method or the law of the contrary. Unlike like Hegel and other classical philosophers, Karl Marx sought to change the world rather than interpret it. Marx set out to achieve this goal in his major work, *capital* by propounding a theory of modern capitalist society that provides models and pathways to economic growth and societal development (basic law of motion) (Milonakis and Fine, 2009). It examines the society in its totality and perceived political economy as the science which study the social relations of production that evolve between labour and capital in the process of production, distribution, exchange and consumption of material benefits.

To Marx, social production necessitates the creation of corresponding relations of production and this change with the development of the productive forces of the society. Thus, when a new system of property relations comes into being, a corresponding superstructure follows suit. The development of productive forces and economic activities is central to historical change and operations through the class struggle over the distribution of the social products. Hence, changes in productive system result from class struggle and the contradictions inherent in social and political lives, (Gilpin, 1986). Thus Karl Marx opines in the communist manifesto in 1884, that the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle, a struggle for appropriation of the surplus values. This is where the evil of capitalism and its exploitative

tendency are exposed. Thus for Marx and Engels the working class or proletariat can overthrow the capitalist only if they allow their shared conditions of material alienation and marginalization to shape their social revolutionary consciousness. Within the Marxist approach are two schools of thought; the **Revolutionary** and the **Evolutionary**. The revolutionary school comprises communism, and syndicalism. They hold the view that revolution or direct action is the only effective way of bringing into existence the socialist society. The evolutionary comprises collectivism and guide socialism which believe that evolutionary method, reforms and constitutional method are not only possible in ushering in the socialist society but have a lasting effect on the society.

Marx maintains that the problem of modern society is traceable to real material sources of life, for example, the structures of capitalism. To Marx, the science production is social the attendant relations of production has naturally divided society into classes of the haves and the have not. The class of the have owns the means of production and determines allocation of the material production by the proletariat or the class of those that have not or only their labour power to sell at any price to the capitalists. The state or politics is therefore organized to favour those in control of this system of production. To the Marxist political economy, the solution to this therefore, would be in the overturning and dismantling of these structures by mass action of the people through class consciousness that will come about by long time exploitation and alienation by the dominant class in the society due to their ownership of the means of production, where also they derived their economic and socio- political relations from.

Marxism as a social process based on the principle of dialectics is to study the past and present in order to understand and predict future social phenomena of inherent historic social realities. So, from the Marxian view point, the only way man can act freely and express himself and potentials is in a classless society where the interests of all would be entrenched and enforced by the rule of the proletariats which is the real democracy. However, this process of democracy is simply a question of enlarging the opportunities for each particular group with common needs and objectives that would serve as a determinant for societal transformation and social change. One thing is sure of this premise, as Vajda (1981) argues that democracy is a social movement, just as Marxian Communism wanted to be, and not a social state of affairs. That there is no perfect democracy due to dynamism of the system (social change), and without leverage on freedom in human society, no social democracy is able to function. We strongly aligned with this views of Vajda because it is only when such group interest are not being

abused and used as an instrument of the state would the proletariat rule be justified as was the experience in the defunct USSR. Take as example, the state in Africa ever since its existence has played an active role in the distribution and redistribution of resources. This pivotal role has stripped it of its necessary democratic principles in some cases. It was so because, the productive forces had not matured before it was integrated into the World capitalist economy. It was therefore difficult for it to perform the functions of distribution of resources through the market mechanism. Therefore, the intended forces of production and the social relations of production are weak, which has hampered the development of a class conscious proletariat that would have ushered in the form of social change Marxist professes, because the totality of the consciousness of the people determines the direction of the state and its attendant structures. The Marxist political economy has as its tenets indialectical materialism and historical materialism, class and class struggle, surplus value, alienation, revolution, etc are components of Marxist approach, but only the first two shall be discussed.

Dialectical Materialism

Dialectical materialism is the Marxist science of economic thought or knowledge production. Dialectis means debate, argument, discourse, disagreement and so on. This method attempts a comprehensive materialistic interpretation of history. Dialectical materialism is the world view of the proletariat and the method of for taking cognizance of the surrounding world, and the strategy of revolutionary action. It is called Dialectical materialism because its approach to the phenomena of nature, its method of studying and apprehending them, is dialectical, while its interpretation of nature, its conception of these phenomena, its theory, is materialistic. Marx views antagonism among social classes as the driving force of history. Marxian method draws extensively from historical fact to substantiate his hypothesis. Dialectical materialism comprises three major canons;

- i. Things, objects and phenomena exist independent of our consciousness. Knowledge emphasizes the critical significance of the material basis which makes production process a primary concern.
- ii. Second there is no difference in principle between a phenomenon and the things in it, the only difference being between what is known and established and what is yet to be known.
- iii. Third, is the necessity to think dialectically and not to regard knowledge as fixed and immutable (Ezeibe, 2016).

Ake (1981) discussed three characteristics of Dialectical materialism. *First*, primacy of material conditions particularly economic factors. This has its roots in the classical debate of philosophy about matter and spirit. The question remains- which is primary? Spirit or nature? All bodies or matter including the mechanical, physical, chemical and physiological process undergo what is described as material phenomenon. Pride, shame, joy, and other feelings supplied by our five senses as well as thought in the mind are described as ideal or spiritual phenomenon or consciousness. In fact, this question is the most fundamental question of philosophy. Those who favour nature or material phenomenon as primary to consciousness are referred to as the realists/materialist while those who favour emotions, feeling and consciousness over matter are referred to as idealists, (Ezeibe, 2016).

Since man is not a machine but thinks and feels, all actions are reasonably or otherwise are prompted by his emotions or ideas – idealism. Desire for freedom propels men to fight a band of invaders to death. Reflecting on these facts one can conclude that material phenomenon is a product of consciousness. Again, believers also argue that spirit is primary to nature because God is the source of every other being. God is an independent source of our sensations. They believe that outside consciousness, there is nothing. In fact, to exist is to be perceived. Hegel contends that all material objects are manifestation of ideas. Hence, most objects are products of man's ideas while those objects that are not man's ideas are ascribed to certain world of spirit (Ramaswamy, 2007).

On the other hand, atheists may immediately say that matter is primary to spirit or faith. They may argue that matter may exist even without been perceived by the senses and that sensations are produced when matter act upon our sense organs, thus the doctrine of materialism by Marx and Engels. For example, how does a blind man know it is raining? Because he feels the drops of rain on his body. Or how does the same blind man know it is sunny? Is it not because he feels the scorching sun? This means that men's economic activity – material production and the social relations formed by people in the process of production are at the basis of men's consciousness expressed via spiritual activity, ideology of the society, political, legal and moral life of a people.

Second, dynamic character of reality – it refuses to look at the world as being static but ever in a state of flux and moving dialectically in terms of continuity, hence, seemingly united and harmoniously prone to contradictions and change. Thus, all things are contradictory in

themselves and these contradictions are at the root all movements. Hegel thus formulated the laws of dialectic which govern all development in human society. These are; (1) the law of transition from quantity to quality, the disappearance of the old for the new (2) the law of negation of the negation, the impermanence of the process of development (3) the law of unity or interpenetration of opposites. *Third* relatedness of different elements of society –this has to do with the interaction say between economic, social, political, and belief system, to say the least.

Historical Materialism

This is the extension of the principles of dialectical materialism to the study of social life, an application of the principles of Dialectical materialism to the phenomena of the life of society and of its history. Historical act is the production of the means to satisfy human needs, the production of material life itself which is a fundamental condition of all history. Historical materialism argue that history evolve fundamentally by economic and technological forces. Hence, the forces of production set the parameters for the kind of society that will prevail. The economic structure that emerges from a mode of production determines the social and ethical structures of the society. Each of the modes of production creates the ruling and the ruled classes. Historical materialism is the Marxist/Leninist science of society. The base of analysis is the historical evidences drawn from long human experience. It draws from the past to explain the presence in order to predict the future. It investigates world history, socio- economic formation and the objective causes of their appearances and disappearances. It is the science of societies that is rooted in the fundamental unity of the material basis or economic foundation and the class struggle. Marx posits that ‘men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered from the past.

The transition from one mode of production to the next higher level occurs due to class conflict. All historical developments are spurred by contradictions in production process. In fact periodization of history is based on mode of production. Conversely, historical materialism is the study of how man has evolved and developed over time. That to understand any society, there is the need to understand the material production of that society, which of course, is anchored on the mode of production and the development of the productive forces. This is what differentiates societies – developed from the underdeveloped, the center from the periphery, technologically advanced and the technologically dependent economies, and so on. For

instance, the classification of the society according to Marx started from the primitive communal stage. Contradictions (even though life was civil and classless) inherent in that society led to the collapse of that society leading to a new one, the slave society with contradiction between the slaves and the slave owners gave way to feudalism. The contradictions between the land lords and the serfs in the feudal society led to the liquidation of the feudal society leading to the emergence of the capitalist society, the socialist and subsequently the anticipated communist society. In a nutshell, Dialectical materialism gives scientific status to historical materialism.

Marxist Conception of the State and Economy

The state is the main instrument for development. The economy is the substructure with which the state responds to in order to enhance development. In this case, the state is seen by Marxists with respect to class and the struggle between these classes for the commonwealth. According to Marx, ‘the state is but a committee for managing the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie..., the form in which the individuals of a ruling class asserts their common interest’ (Engels, 1919). The state is used by the dominant class as an instrument to dominate the other class. This dominance is expressed through laws and policies that are made by the state which represent the interest of the dominant group. The dominant class uses instruments of power like executive instruments, legislature and the judiciary to maintain this setup. This dominance by capital (bourgeoisie), does not necessarily mean that the bourgeois exercise direct power via the state apparatus. Domination is secure at the level of the social organization of production which defines basic rules of governance - what the state can do or not do. Governments in capitalist state may in fact be in the hands of other classes or group, including workers, bureaucrats and petty accumulation of the system. Such groups can be seen as only allowed to participate in government, as long as they “respect” the rules of the games as laid down by the dominant class, as relations of power at the level of production. While the ruling class exploits the poor in the production and distribution of material wealth, by virtue of possession of capital and means of production, they have in turn used the state to allocate the commonwealth and by the same token used the state to give protection for themselves and their property.

This exploitation of one class by another as Marx argued arises as a result of the emergence of the state. Political power is therefore the organized power of one class for oppressing another. Within the Marxian paradigm, the state is essentially a class issue, to continue strengthening the state as a powerful apparatus isolated for the rich and apparently existing above people

under the guise of it being the state of the `whole people` is really to gloss over some real contradictions, even class contradictions, existing in the society. Social Class, Class Struggle, Surplus Values, Alienation are also part of Marxist approach. Marx interest in social structure was social class (the bourgeoisie and proletariat). Social class is the relation men have taken on as independent existence. Class(es) are large groups of people differing from each other according to the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, according to their relations to the means of production, according to their role in social labour and consequently, according to the mode by which they acquire their share of social wealth and the size of that share (Engels, 1919). The difference in the place occupied by class in social production emphasizes one class to appropriate the labour of another, for example, feudal lords appropriate the labour of the serfs.

Criticisms of the Marxist Approach

- i. It is claimed by some scholars that Marxian method of analysis was hardly scientific being that he started with a preconceived dogma that capitalism was doomed to be replaced by socialism and went ahead to look for an explanation in support of his belief.
- ii. Marxian methods are far from being faultless. Marx was allegedly Eurocentric. Thus, Marxian political economy focused on capitalist development in Europe. Today, capitalism has spread beyond Europe.
- iii. Again, Marxian analysis holds the economic variables as dogmatic. Economic factor is too strong in Marxian analysis, to the extent that it is seen as both means and ends, Marx made it seem too absolute to a fault. Akpuru-Aja, (1997) argue that to reduce every social change in human society and history to class struggle within the material milieu is objectionable.
- iv. Marxian political economy has helped to reshape the modern capitalist societies. Much also, the bourgeois political economy has also diluted the Marxian critical theory of political economy. Marxian political economy has become a profession especially in Africa and Asia where it is a preferred explanatory tool for every situation to the extent that national and social movements without the remotest connection with the problems that were Marx's concern claim to be Marxists. These have led to an amalgam of erroneous and contradictory interpretations that beclouds more than clarify Marx's intention for capitalist society.

Marxist Explanation of the Nigerian Politics

Marx theory laid emphasis on economic production of goods and services, that production brings wealth and prosperity to a nation. The state here is seen as the architect of any planned social change, because it has the power to enact a synergy with cybernetic functions in transforming a society. The emphasis by Marxist on the economies of production is that if the economy does not function, there will be no production, wealth would not be generated and there would be no jobs for the masses while the welfare and standard of living of generality of the people will be undermined. The fair distribution of this societal wealth is of importance in the case of Nigeria, since it lacks the basic tenets of production, the entrepreneur and industrial base becomes lopsided, by estimation, only a very few Nigerian population drives the economy. The control of the means of production is the base of its power, and patronage to it means struggling for a share among contending classes but not for productive purpose.

However, the majority of the masses are left out in this scramble and incapacitated in contributing to the economic production of the country; the only opportunity for them is the informal sector of the economy where black market strives. The nature of the Nigerian state holding power for the dominant class is decisive in categorizing a particular mechanism of production in respect of the federal structure it is operating which is defective, but however, the dominance of unitary system (ideology) is glaring in the nature of the attendant social relations. This institutional frame work that saw the federating state relying on the centre (Abuja) for monthly subvention to run their governments and sustain development has contributed to the alarming height of a rentier state and clientship structure that determines and defines the waves and directions of politics and power and state distribution network.

As Joseph Garba (1995) has succinctly analyzed, ‘in a country like Nigeria where the prizes (resources) are so few, and the stakes so high, the fight for booty or ‘national cake’ is fierce and often vicious. It has most times led to a debilitating corruption in the arena of public policy making and implementation. ‘Who gains, who loses in these federal, state and local policy arena is rarely an accident more often than not, a matter of might and not ability of revenue generation. For the entire country, the manipulation of public policy for private purposes comprises yet another disjunction in our fractured history. However, the first opportunity for Nigerians to upturn this order of social structure came in 1987 Anti SAP riot. The General Ibrahim Babangida’s regime introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which

was a macro- economic programme designed to stabilize the economy, and restructure the economic base with emphasis on diversification away from the petroleum (oil sector), which was meant to create foreign exchange to service foreign debt and balance of payment deficit, also to encourage high agricultural productivity. It was also to enhance the private sector role in production (from the supply side) and as a tool for discipline in consumption and stimulating production in the Nigerian economy.

The economic policy tools employed included; devaluation of the Naira (currency), which had a devastating consequences on the Nigerian economy because it is not producing, so it was wrong to devalue the currency when you are not producing anything for sale but for consumption only. This weakened the value of the Naira seriously and the purchasing power of Nigerians. Others are privatization and deregulation, liberalization of foreign trade, elimination of subsidies on petroleum related products, rationalization, tight monetary and fiscal policies. However, these tools were employed in the strongest and most perverse ways. The implementation was half-heated, uncoordinated, non-transparent, insincere and downward dishonest that brought the Nigerian economy to its knees. Continued devaluation of the Naira not only led to high level of falling standard of living, elimination of the middle class and serious dislocation in the social system.

This economic and socio-political tension led to an uprising that was swift and spontaneous, the awareness was great across the federation, and Nigerians spoke with one voice to determine their future and to fight against oppression by the state and the exigencies that affects them. For Marx has said people have to act at the appropriate time and in the appropriate ways to change a particular social order. But this has to be by a class conscious masses that are well informed and has engaged in protracted agitation for mass struggle and emancipation. This social concept is lacking in Nigeria, where it is present, it is naive, because of the naivety, the leaders of the uprising and revolt fails to understand the dynamics that they have already taking and seized power from the state (dominant class). This lack of awareness by the leaders of the revolt and the vacuum created inter-alia led to the failure of the uprising which would have ushered in a Socialist State. The state capitalized on the naivety and crushed the rebellion using state machinery at their disposal. To placate the restive masses, the state brought some incentives to ameliorate suffering and dislocations accessioned by the SAP regime. The economy was opened, state jobs created and Peoples Bank formed for access to the poor masses

to have direct loan without collateral. Such Greek gifts are some of the essence of capitalism in diverting the people's attention against any further form of agitations. But how far this went is a discussion for another day.

Another of such indications was the "June 12" saga that followed the annulment of the presidential elections of 1993, this issue was trivialized and was another opportunity lost in upturning the unproductive Nigerian state system. The saga was an epoch cutting edge for power struggle within intra class that has continued in the psyche of Nigerians and also acting as a stabilizing factor for the State. The supposedly winner of the election, Chief MKO Abiola, an ally of the West and the Nigerian military was never allowed to rule because his views on politics and development has changed overtime. The "pseudo guerilla" tactics used paid off when the then head of state Gen. Ibrahim Babangida stepped aside from power and his colleague Gen. Sanni Abacha died in office due to sustained pressure and organized agitations by pro-democratic coalition and organized civil societies. The continued struggle was what ushered in the present democracy we are now practicing. As Marxist would assert, any zigzag turn in history is a compromise, a compromise of the new which is not strong enough to negate the old, and the old which is not strong enough to negate the new.

According to Nnoli (2011), due to the unsustainability of the Nigeria system, it has led to the emergence of the Niger Delta Militants, Oodua People's Congress (OPC), a militant youth wing of the Yoruba nation, Igbo People of Biafra IPOB, a militant wing of the Ohaneze and Boko Haram group from the North. The production system has placed money in the hands of few elites who do not produce but only consume the wealth of the State. In line with the above, these agitations are drawn from the consciousness of individuals that something is wrong somewhere that has to be put right in the system, because public opinion informed public policies. In Nigeria, the only issues government listens to is violence to address public and form policies in recent times. Billions of Naira now goes into the Niger Delta region unaccounted and a ministry created for tackling restiveness in the area without addressing the basic infrastructural decay. Also, the Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria where billions of naira go for maintenance of peace is another evidence of failed state. These crises have brought to the fore not only the limits of the state activity, but equally the remarkable inability of the state to weather crises.

Lewis Coser (1956) from the Marxian orientation asserts that conflict serves dual purposes in the society, positive and negative. Coser contends that conflict is part of the socialization

process and it is inevitable in human society. That conflict can be constructive and destructive because it frequently revolves disagreements that lead eventually to unity and harmonization of “social groups”. In view of the above, conflict functions as a means of promoting social change. Coser further posited ‘what is important for us is the idea that conflict prevents the ossification of the social system by extending pressure for innovation and creativity’. He argued also that conflict could lead to change in number of ways including the establishment of new social groups and the development of more complex group structures to deal with goals and objectives of societal transformation. In the Marxian orientation, every social system undergoes transformation through conflict. Therefore, conflict is seen as a creative force that stimulates change in the society. Conflicts usually characterize a state that is only interest in distribution than material production as being witnessed in Nigeria today.

In Africa, state has a very limited autonomy. This autonomization is also reflected in the level of development of the productive forces. Some of the implications of this limited autonomization in Africa according to Ake (1985) are:

1. Hobbesian character of political struggle – the struggle for power is everything and it is pursued by all means. Electoral malpractices, coups, counter coups, insurgencies (Niger Delta militancy, banditry, Kidnapping and Boko Haram) and illegal use of the state repressive apparatuses become instrument of retaining or ascending to political power.
2. Problem of legitimizing political power and process – limited autonomization inhibits formal freedom, equality and competition
3. Problem of contradiction and conflict of the socio-economic formation – limited autonomization reduces or eliminates the possibilities of resolving contradictions or differences.

This is expressed in Nigeria especially as ruling party relates with the opposition parties. The former ruling party, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) practically suffocated the opposition parties until the leadership of the four major opposition parties – Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), a faction of All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) and Action Congress of Nigeria (CAN) met and formed the All Progressive Congress which dismantled the PDP from power in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. Again, the new party driven by the ideologies of Mohammed Buhari and Ahmed Bola Tinubu has begun to suffocate the PDP which dominated governance from 1999 to

2015. In Africa, the phenomenon of representative democracy is fast eroding the rights of the people, as power is seen as the ability to control the minds and actions of others (Morgentau, 1976 and Chuta, 2004). To Balaam and Veseth (2005) the state merely decides where the power of collective action is used. Election is one way through which the state determines who has power. Those who have power in the society determine or influence how resources are allocated. Nonetheless, the manipulation of public opinions is crucial in exercise of power and two main techniques are involved.

- i. Propaganda – selective release of information, so that, the public has the data that leaders want
- ii. Censorship – here, the leaders forbid the publication of certain information injurious most often to the interests of those in power.

Most leaders in Nigeria use political status to accumulate wealth by consolidating their position through electoral malpractice and suppression of citizens. Seat tight syndrome among African leaders becomes widespread. For instance, Omar Bongo of Gabon died after 42 years in power; Muammar Gaddafi of Libya stayed in power for 39 years; Teodoro Obiang Mbasong of Equatorial Guinea has held on to power for 30 years; Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe stay in power for more than 32 years before his death; Hosim Mubarak of Egypt stayed over 27 years in power; Paul Biya of Cameroon has been in power for more than 28 years; Yoweri Musevin of Uganda for more 25 years stayed in power; king Mswati III of Burkina Faso for more than 23 years and a host of others (Anim, 2009). Even though the peculiarities of Nigeria will not allow longer stay in office, we still had leaders who over stayed their welcome in power. For example, General Yakubu Gowon stayed in power up to 9 years, Olusegun Obasonjo both military and civilian ruled for 12 years, General Ibrahim Babangida for 8 years, General Sani Abacha did all he could to transform to civilian president rule 5 years, Goodluck Jonathan for 6 years and Mohammed Buhari ruled Nigeria for 10 years. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu since taken over power 2023 has thrown or plunged the state deeper in poverty by adopting hunk line and sinkers, IMF and World Bank Policies of floating the Nigerian currency as a way of reducing government expenditures and attendant corruption.

The saddest side of the story is that these leaders have all shown lack of ability to blend strength and experience to achieve the much desired development in Africa, yet they remain in power for self-aggrandizement. As Mahatma Gandhi correctly observed the roots of conflict and

violence are the tendencies for men to seek wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice, and politics without principle (Anya, 2008).

As with Africa so it is with Nigeria. The state is a key factor in the political economy; it determines the direction of production, distribution and allocation of resources. The fragile production base and the resultant social forces of production have not been able to support any socio-political transformation that would engineer collective mass action of an active society. And the state has been a factor that not only helping in preserving the private bourgeois structures by this act but perhaps also help in modifying them (Vajda,1981). This indicates that the social contract with the Nigerian state has failed because, it works and entrench the interest of elite class. As Marx pointed out, “the state is but for the management of the common affairs of the bourgeoisie”. As state institutions are parts of the super-structure determined by the interests of the dominant class. The state then becomes an instrument of the ruling class as defined in terms of control over the means of production. In Nigeria, according to John Campbell, a former American Ambassador to Nigeria (1998-2000), those that holds power do not want it to change they wants to hold on to it to impoverish the people so as to determine and define the waves and directions of politics, since they do not have jobs, factory or industry, its only politics the job they can do best.

To the Marxist therefore, the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie is the driving force of development, which Nigerian economy lacks. Rather we have the non-productive compradors, consumerists who often are criminally minded and destructive in nature. They are ruthlessly led by selfish interests. Theypursuetheir own interest over general ones. They are not nationalistic in character neither arethey socially irresponsible. They are blind servants of foreign capital, ruthless in the exploitation of the domestic workforce and dictatorial in relation to their fellow countrymen. They are agent of the mega capital in the function of global economy. It is the ‘Trojan horse’ of the Multinational Corporations (MNCs). Their god is the god of mammon, the capital and their aim is to amass capital by putting profit above individuals. They are predatory class and parasitic and operate a bandit economy. Anything can go.

Conclusion

The liberal and Marxist approaches in the explanation of socio-political phenomena is outstanding especially as it affects the third world societies, acceptance of and application of

any of the school of thought shows the philosophic orientation of the scholar using them. On the other hand, using the Marxist approach, the Nigerian State lack a productive base on which the productive forces and social relations of production can be anchored to produce an economy that would transform the society and people. The state on several occasions has shown clearly its lack of interest in helping the masses. Large numbers of the population are peasants who live in the rural areas have a weakened class consciousness and social awareness which is an imperative tool of social change within the Marxian paradigm. In Nigeria, we do not create wealth, we share the wealth been accrued to the state from oil revenue among the political elites who are constantly fighting among themselves to have a share not for production, or for general appropriation and consumption but for primitive class accumulation which has made the State a rentier one based on clientship patronage. The State needs an institutional frame work of policies coupled with strong political will to tackle this dysfunctional economic system it operates if it does not want to be among the list of failed Nations of the world.

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