



Marxism: Essence towards the development of Nigeria's twenty-first century

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Abstract

Marxism is not a religion, but a socio-economic thesis of collectivization, a bedrock of progress for human social formations in the contemporary epoch of Nigerian history. The idea of Karl Marx economic theory of history can be found in his work "The Communist Manifesto" (1848). It makes sense and meaning that no human society can develop without material wealth. The economic factor, or the materialistic well-being of that society, is the basis of development. According to Walt Whitman Rostow in his theory of development, pinned down the five stages of the progress of every social formation is tied to the economy, which is the base of a society's progress. Theorists of underdevelopment such as Celso Furtado, Andre Gunder Frank, Paul Baran, Peter Jalee, Rosa Luxemburg, Marion J. Levy, Samir Amin, Joseph Emmanuel Stiglitz, Walter Rodney, etc., blamed the "core" satellite social circle for the underdevelopment of the social "peripheral" divides. These theorists regarded the material wealth as significant to the development of "backward" societies today. To crown it all, Adam Smith reflected on relevance of the economic structure, hence his work on "The Wealth of Nations". It is in the light of the above that this paper examined the place of Marxism vis-à-vis its essence in the socioeconomic development of Nigeria in the twenty-first century millennium. The pedagogy applied is the use of textbooks, journal articles, conference papers, Internet sources, etc. The recommendations are exhaustively examined before the conclusion.

Keywords: Historical materialism, Social revolution, Class struggle, Dialectical materialism, Economic determinism, Communism, Capitalism

Introduction

The origin of Communism, a Marxist theory of a form of political economy, did not just sprang up overnight. The practice of political economy can be traced to the Medieval period between the 11th and 13th centuries in Europe. This period witnessed Feudalism as land ownership controlled by a feudal lord in charge of fiefs (feuds), where serfs (slaves) worked for the feudal sovereignty. It was a master-land-slave mode of production in the period's political economy. There was no individual ownership of property except the feudal lord (Fadaye, 1976) [15]. By 1750, Britain became the first workshop of the world. That was the ushering in of the Industrial Revolution. Industrialization led to the demise of the feudal system. It was replaced by the capitalist system with its attendant mode of production involving the entrepreneurial bourgeois class and the proletariat in its mode of production, comprising the forces of production and the relations of production. As Robert Brenner (1989) [6] puts it:

For political Marxists, capitalism can be said to have emerged only when the direct producers and appropriators have lost non-market access to their means of subsistence and production, and became entirely dependent on the market for their self-reproduction. Market dependency and the non-concomitant separation of the "economic" and "political" are thereby taken as the sine qua non of capitalism.

Capitalism was a system of exploiters and the exploited. Capitalism involved and encouraged ownership of the means of production and ownership of property by individuals.

The year 1848 ushered into limelight another system of political economy called Communism. This was theorized by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their book, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) [12]. This system of economic advancement condemned capitalism. Communism, or Marxism, believed that capitalism would collapse, that a collectivization principle - communism would take over in the world of political economy of a classless society. This communist ideology is yet to gain ground worldwide, its impact is felt on the historical sands of time among world political communities. It is as a result of this that Francis Fukuyama wrote in his book, 'The End of History and the Last Man', to counteract Marxism. But Marxism is more than an ideology and political economy (Barrow 1956) [10]. Today, its essence can be felt and seen in societies, with this write-up focusing on its influence in Nigeria in the twenty-first century (Sabine & Thorson, 1973) [9].

Conceptual clarifications

It is significant in a write-up of this nature to delve into an examination synoptically on some concepts.

Communism

Communism is a political economy, political and economic

ideology that advocates for a classless society with communal ownership of the means of production, where material resources are distributed based on need. The community, through common ownership, collectively hegemonizes all the means of production of goods and services, exchange and distribution. There is the abolition of class oppression and exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. The foundation of the society is laid on the common possession of the means of production and the equal distribution of goods. Marx averred that Communism can be achieved if the state, conceived as an instrument of coercion and repression ceases to exist. The slogan of the Communists is: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs".

Historical materialism

The foundation of the physical sciences (physics and chemistry) as well as the biological sciences are laden at the base with material conditions. These calls for the survival of these sciences. Under the stimulus of Feuerbach's materialist interpretation of Hegel, Marx later adopted such materialism to social studies, just as it was in the Darwinian Theory of Evolution in 1859.

Karl Marx's Historical Materialism is viewed as the economic interpretation of history, or the materialist conception of history. It is an economic theory of history which rests on the principle that the major causes of any historical occurrence are to be found in the conditions of material existence. All changes in history are due solely to material wealth the economic factor. Marx and Engels believed that the base of society, or the infrastructure of human society, is entirely material or economic, and that other elements like law, arts, culture, political constitutions, philosophy, religion, and a host of others are no more than the superstructure of quite secondary importance to the base, because they all depend entirely on and derive from the economic base (Brenner, 1989) [6].

Social revolution

This is a transitional period that a society passes through from one stage to another. It is a form of social metamorphosis of the human species from a particular social standing and condition to another. An adaptation could be applied here to the social revolution of the Stone Age peoples from the Paleozoic to the Mesozoic and Neozoic epochs of human evolution a social revolution indeed. Marx argued that:

Europe had passed through three different stages. Greece and the Roman Empire first passed through the ancient society, which was based on slavery. The second is the feudal society of medieval Europe, which was based on serfdom and the guild system. The third is the capitalist system, which was based on wage labour.

According to Robin Law:

Since different forms of society were based on different modes of production, changes from one form of society to another derived from changes in the mode of production or, more specifically, from the

progressive development of the "forces of production". Marx and Engels used the term "social revolution" to refer to the period during which the transition from one form of society to another was Marx still believed that social revolution did not stop at the capitalist stage; that the capitalist society of his day will evolve into socialist society, which would be based on communal ownership.

Class struggle

Every human society is a class, each class holistically is one that is structured in class subdivisions or echelons—the Upper, Middle and Lower classes. Even in ancient societies class divisions were explicit. Existence of classes leads to conflict among human species or organism for the sake of progress based on survival of the fittest, but the weak can also become the fittest depending on conditions. Class antagonism is bound to explode with time on the part of the proletariat overthrowing the capitalist bourgeoisie, thus leading to a classless society surviving on a collectivization mode of production communally (Vladimir 1916) [17].

Dialectical materialism

Marx's first statement of dialectical materialism was made in a group of works written between 1844 and 1848 under the stimulus of Feuerbach's material interpretation of Hegel and as incidents in Marx's career as a revolutionist socialist. The interpretation here is that materialist or materialism conditions could be found in every aspect of matter physics, chemistry, Darwin's organic evolution and even in human society, which Karl Marx applied to Economic Theory of History. Marx and Hegel theorized the dialectic as a law of logic. The base of the society and its existence is materialistic as it is in the physical sciences, social sciences and social studies. Without these material bases, no significant development can be made society will remain static. The real motive forces in the history of a society are in the material conditions. Today the material conditions serve as the basis and moving forces towards nation-building in Nigeria.

Proletarian revolution

Marx's social philosophy depended upon and first clearly brought into the forces of attention a social change of absolutely first-rate importance which occurred in the nineteenth century, the rise to political self-consciousness and finally to political power of an industrial working class. This became responsible for changing the course of liberal thought, but Marx perceived its importance far sooner than the liberals. Especially in the historical studies which formed an integral part of his philosophy, he presented capitalism for the first time in what might be called its human aspect, as an institution that had produced and was continually enlarging a class of men who must live wholly from wages and who were therefore related to their employers only by a cash-nexus. The relationship of employer and employee in industry tends thus to be stripped of human significance and moral obligation and becomes simply one of power. With power and the means of production

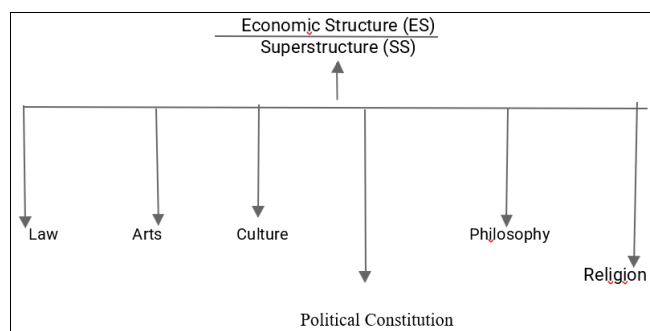
controlled by the bourgeois class as exploiters, exploiting the proletariat.

Economic determinism

The advancement of every human society depends on its material wealth – the economy. Adam Smith regarded this in his book "The Wealth of Nations". The economic growth of society serves as the converging and pivotal point that catapults such a society to economic growth and development in all its entities. The wealth of every society is the bedrock of its economy. It is on this note that Karl Marx stressed:

..that it is in the economic realm that all states of affairs must be finally understood. This is the economic interpretation of history or economic determinism. Karl Marx's economic theory of history rests on the principle that the major causes of any historical occurrence are to be found in the conditions of material existence. Karl Marx and his closest friend, Friedrich Engels, were of the opinion that all changes in history are due solely to material wealth the economic factor. Both Marx and Engels believed that the base of society, or the infrastructure of human society, is entirely material or economic, and that other elements like law, arts and culture, political constitutions, religion and philosophy, and a host of others, are no more than the superstructure of quite secondary importance to the base, because they all depend entirely on and derive from the economic base.

The diagram below is a synopsis of Economic Determinism as theorized by Marxism.



Source: Emphasis mine - Yusuf A. Jimoh 16/05/2026.

Furthermore, on economic determinism, Feuerbach claimed that:

...the motive forces in social history are material meant for Marx, these forces are economic. The economic meant for him the method of economic production, for he was concerned that any system of production carries with it a corresponding way of distributing the social product, the way which alone will keep the system operating, and in turn the distribution creates a structure of social classes, each of which is determined by its position in the system. This method by which a society utilizes natural resources and produces the goods by which it lives is therefore, for Marx, its mainspring of existence [25]. Its mode of production at

any given time explains its political and indeed its whole cultural condition at that time, and changes in the system of production explains the corresponding changes that occur in its politics and culture. This, in bare outline, is Marx's theory of economic determinism, which is the concrete social and political meaning that he attached to dialectical materialism.

This economic theory of history provided Karl Marx with a programme or base for a proletarian revolution, which is to abolish social inequality and finally to create a socialist and classless society. Nigeria has material wealth such as petroleum, gold, columbite, tin, coal, aluminium and many other natural resources that can be tapped and harnessed to improve the well-being of the citizens. The dominant ideologies can also be improved upon to better the lot of man in the Nigerian society on an equal basis. The lack of this has led currently to armed banditry, religious terrorism, kidnappings and other social crises.

Capitalism

The 1750 Industrial Revolution in Britain came and ended the feudal society in Britain. The capitalist system, or capitalism, came into focus with its attendant mode of production involving the entrepreneurial bourgeois class and the proletariat, in which the forces of production and relations of production interplayed with each other amalgamatively. Capitalism involved and encouraged ownership of the means of production and ownership of property by individuals. The Industrial Revolution came with imperialism, which is "the highest stage of capitalist development" and a transitional stage leading to a higher communist economy and society. Vladimir Lenin averred:

Imperialism emerged as the development and direct continuation of the fundamental attributes of capitalism in general. But capitalism only became capitalist imperialism at a definite and very high stage of its development when certain of its fundamental attributes began to be transformed into their opposites, when the features of a period of transition from capitalism to a higher social and economic system began to take shape and reveal themselves all along the line.

Capitalism has grown to be a system encompassing the exploiters (bourgeois class) and the exploited class (the proletariat) who only survive on wage labour. Capitalism is an economic theory in which the bourgeois capitalist hegemonized the means of production using proletarian labour from time to time, depending on wage labour to survive (Marx, 1848) [12].

Marxist ideology: A trajectory towards Nigeria's development in the 21st century millennium

Having identified and examined the theoretical foundations of Marxism, it is significant here to examine certain dominant ideologies of Marx in terms of interpretability, applicability and usability to the current-day Nigerian development.

The Nigerian nation and class consciousness

Marxism has created class consciousness not only in the current Nigerian dispensation but throughout Continental Africa.

Kwame Nkrumah (1972) ^[13] averred:

In many of the African independent states, the absence of large-scale industry and the relatively low skill and educational standards of the workers regard class consciousness; they are often non-revolutionary and have a petty bourgeois mentality. Yet in Senegal, for example, the working class is larger than in many African states and where there is 95 percent literacy among men and 99 percent among women, there is a vigorously working-class movement.

Marxist class consciousness ideology has gone down into the psyche of the working class, educational elites, religionists and illiterates alike, in spite of their low level of education. Today, Marxism has engulfed the masses of Nigerian society in a holistic class consciousness in all segments of society, vis-à-vis the political, economic, social, cultural, religious and educational scale levels of the political community. The academics are engaged in strikes due to class consciousness. Labour unions and other associated groups are not left out in this race. The generation gap due to class consciousness has made armed bandits, kidnappers and terrorists are hovering all over the place in Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, Niger State, and of recent Nasarawa and Kwara States of Nigeria, leading to class conflicts. The role of globalization has also contributed to this awareness. The “clash of civilization” based on Huntington’s theory of globalization has opened the gateway to arms proliferation into Nigeria, thus increasing the dimension of class consciousness based on the frustration-aggression theory. Class consciousness is well proselytized among the religious landmarks of the Nigerian society, with specific reference to Boko Haramism since 2009, the Islamic State for West African Province (ISWAP), Shi’a movements, the existence of Tijaniyyah and Qadiriyyah Islamic creeds, and EndSARS riots, is part of class consciousness and the 1987 Structural Adjustment Programme and the “12 June 1993” annulment of the presidential election riots are felt aspects of class awareness. These riots reared their heads to marshal in a positive manner social transformation and positive change in the Nigerian society. In the Christian terrain, class consciousness has led to the birth and rebirth, or religious renaissance, of Christian religious creeds in variety today in Nigerian society due to class consciousness.

The Nigerian nation and class struggle

The Nigerian nation is not divorced from the ambit of the class struggle, but amalgamated to it. This amalgamation of the Nigerian society scenario is one that has an architectural metaphor to that of Karl Marx (1818–1883). Endre Sik, who wrote *The History of Black Africa* (1966) and *A History of Africa, 1918–1967* (1968), produced by a team of scholars, both works interpret African history in terms of the “class struggle” following the analysis of Karl Marx. Kwame Nkrumah (1972) ^[13] stressed on the issue in his work *Class Struggle in Africa* (1972). Marxism has not removed the

Nigerian nation from the core dimensions and principles of class struggle. Borrowing from Marxist morphology, Nkrumah said:

At the core of the problem is the class struggle. For too long social and political commentators have talked and written as though Africa lies outside the mainstream of historical development a separate entity to which the social, economic and political patterns of the world do not apply..... Class divisions in modern African society became blurred to some extent during the pre-independence period, when it seemed there was national unity and all classes joined forces to eject the colonial powers.

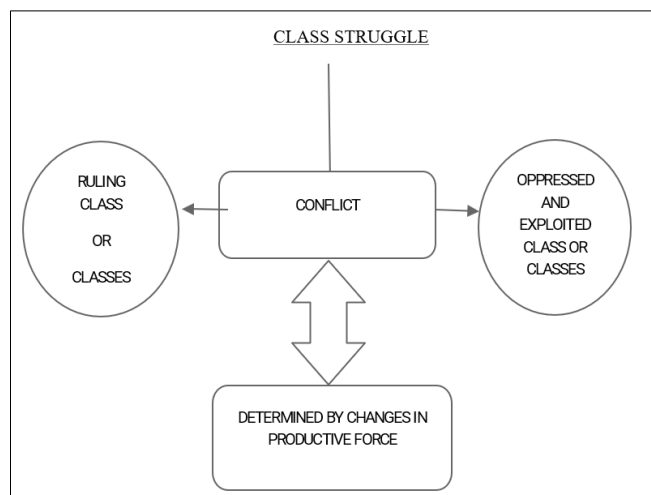
This led some to proclaim that there were no class divisions in Africa and that the communalism and egalitarianism of traditional African society made any notion of class struggle out of the question. But the exposure of this fallacy followed after independence, when class cleavages, which had been temporarily submerged in the struggle to win political freedom, reappeared, often with increased intensity, particularly in those states where newly independent governments embarked on socialist policies.

This idea of Marxists socialist-communism reared its transparent head in Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah, Tanzania under Julius Nyerere with his African Socialism, and in Nigeria, Obafemi Awolowo's socialism inclinations, Aminu Kano and his People's Redemption Party (PRP), Balarabe Musa, was a socialist to the core. Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida as a military democrat founded the Socialist Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Redemption Party (NRP). The historic role of political parties in Nigeria mentioned above depends on which classes such as revolutionary, progressive, conservative, reactionary, counter-revolutionary they represent in Nigerian social life. Marxism has touched the lives of the workers' movement in Nigeria, such as the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), the Nigeria Medical Association (NMA), the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigerian University Commission (NUC). These movements have become a factor of major importance in the struggle to secure the workers' interests.

Nkrumah (1972: 10–18) ^[13] stressed:

Class struggle is a fundamental theme of recorded history. In every nonsocialist society there are two main categories of class, the ruling class or classes, and the subject class or classes. The ruling class possesses the major instruments of economic production and distribution, and the means of establishing its political dominance, while the subject class serves the interest of the ruling class, and is politically, economically and socially dominated by it.

In Nigeria contemporarily, the ruling class(es) are the capitalist bourgeois class, controlling the major instruments of economic production in transportation, agriculture, industry, manufacturing, and petroleum sectors of the economy. The proletariat are just wage-earners being dominated by the ruling class.



Source: K. Nkrumah, *Class Struggle in Africa*, London, Panaf Books, Ltd. 1972

To epitomize, class struggle is fundamental in its analysis. It is not feasible and possible to develop and build socialism in Nigeria, as part of the developing world, in isolation from the world socialist system.

Karl Marx, the Nigerian Nation and Education

Education as a phenomenon has been defined by scholars in various ways. Adeyinka (1990) ^[4] defined the concept as the transmission of culture from one generation to another. Adenunmi saw the concept as the imbibing of habits, attitudes and skills in a learner to make him an acceptable member of the society. It is seen as the transmission of life by the living to the living.

Bloom (1956) ^[7], in his *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, stated that education should develop in the learner the cognitive, the affective, and psychomotor domains in his career to be well-fit to face the challenges of life. Karl Marx (1818–1883), a German social, economic and ideological philosopher, emphasized on education thus: "The ruling class fears education because it makes obedience impossible".

Marx's idea on education captures in altruism that education does not create obedient people but independent thinkers. They have a right to know, to ponder on issues of prime significance. The lettered fight to achieve their goals, aspirations, desirabilities, needs and fight for great expectations from the ruling class. It is a tool for total emancipation in all aspects of life (Vajda, 1986) ^[16].

Education in Nigeria since independence in 1960, based on Marx's paradigm, does not create obedient followers but emancipated thinkers whose philosophical acumen is very logical, aesthetic, axiological, existential, pragmatic, epistemological and metaphysical in philosophical dimensions, to pound on how to ensure nation building in Nigeria. Chief Obafemi Awolowo, with his Marxist inclinations, believed in free education. Hence, in the then Western Nigeria, he introduced the Universal Primary Education in the 1960s, and in 1975 the UPE scheme idea was introduced all over Nigeria. Gani Fawehinmi, based on Marxist lines, has severally challenged the various injustices committed by both civilian and military governments against the poor masses of Nigeria. Gani Fawehinmi (2013:66) said:

"No government can satisfy me if it does not address food poverty of Nigerians, the health poverty of Nigerians, education poverty of Nigerians, the infrastructure poverty of Nigerians, the energy poverty of Nigerians. This is what we have been fighting against in the country, double standard in the application of the law."

Gani was the people's lawyer, the man of the poor masses who at all times criticized governments as the intelligentsia (civil and the military class) per adventure their injustices to the electorate. This was as a result of his exposure to education and the rule of law of A. V. Dicey. Social critic, and T. Solarin, who established the Mayflower School in Ogun State, condemned the various injustices of the ruling class in Nigeria. A space was created in the *Nigerian Tribune* where he expressed "The State of the Nation," a forum to fight for the poor Nigerian masses. Also, Chief Emeka Anyaoku was the third Commonwealth Secretary-General. Ben C. A. (2013:16–17) ^[5] reflected on one of Anyaoku's speeches thus:

"Education plays a pivotal role in the inculcation of values in our young people. Of course, it is at home, from parents, that a child first begins to learn what is wrong and what is right. But it is in educational institutions at primary, secondary and post-secondary levels that values are cemented in the consciousness and being of individuals."

The influence of Karl Marx on Nigerians in terms of educational advancement cannot be over-emphasized. His theory on education paved a trajectory to learning consciousness among millions of Nigerian elites who encouraged their wards and young ones to acquire knowledge as a source of power and light for their future freedoms from all sorts of degradation, discrimination, oppression and suppression from the ruling class of the intelligentsia civil and military class.

Conclusion

Manfred Halper's state of affairs of "frontier states" in the Middle East is equally affecting Nigeria today as a country. Marxism as a social, economic and political ideology can be applied in appropriate terms to transform the Nigerian nation in such a way that citizens will live a better life. The level of class consciousness is at its lowest ebb, can only materialize within the ambit of Marxism elixir to propel the Nigerian nation forward in terms of social and economic realms the forces of production and relations of production must be marshalled using the national bourgeoisie and not the comprador bourgeoisie for a 'mode of production' that would benefit the citizens.

This paper then posits that Marxism should be applied ideologically to ensure the success of the Nigerian superstructure's dominant ideologies to move the nation forward using Nigeria's economic structure, instead of amassing the wealth in the hands of the political class or ruling class. If this situation continues, the country shall know no peace a panacea to sustainable development in all endeavours of life.

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