

CLASSES, CLASS CONFLICT (CLASS ANTAGONISM) AND CLASS STRUGGLE: A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF MARXIST THEORY IN THE CONTEXT OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Since the days of Aristotle and up-to the present day, class, class conflict (class antagonism) and class struggle has represented an important theoretical approach to the study of social, political and economic systems. The basic units of analysis in the class theory is aggregated to the individuals or groups who hold similar positions with regard to the possession of values such as power, wealth, authority or prestige. The relations between the political system and class is one of the most critical factor of analysis, who get what, where, when and how. This review presented in the context of Marxist theory was therefore carried out taking into cognizance the prevailing crises in Nigerian society today. Although Marxist class theory posits that people's actions and inactions are governed by their material interest, yet the study revealed that when people of the poor class do rise up, it will be because they have finally gained sufficient number to be a social force powerful enough to achieve higher state of civilization. Consequently, it is expected to be a policy response by government and other relevant authority to the envisaged conflicts facing Nigeria.

Keywords: *Class, class conflict, antagonism, Marxist theory*

INTRODUCTION

Class must be understood along the processes of material production to strictly moving towards self sustenance to production. Therefore, the division between classes has widen and the condition of the society had almost deteriorated so badly that almost all the economic, social, and political structures in Nigeria had collapsed. The class struggle has never and will never transform the Nigerian proletariat into revolution as advocated by Marx. Consequently, the Nigerian workers' triumph instead of eliminating the basis of class division in the ownership through public enlightenment, the basis of classes thus wiped away, and a classless society had ensue. This then became inevitable the clash of interest between the basic and the dominant. The basic classes are those that are directly connected with the means of production prevailing in the society. The productive forces, their nature and levels of development determine political, social and economic relations among people and above all ownership of the means of production.

Scholars in their response have found it useful to develop specific tools of investigating various issues in the society they live in. It has been a yardstick as well as a device of dissecting the society in order to understand its inner connectivity and help proffers solutions to its problems. In this way the tool become useful only to the extent in solving the problems of linking up one variable to another. It must also be capable of predicting the likely outcome of a given scenario. Class theory is one out of the many theories developed by scholars in an attempt at understanding human interaction. Saul Alinsky (2009) put it that the setting for the change of human (mankind) has never varied. The general society has always been divided into three parts: "*the Haves, the Have-Nots, and the Have-a-Little, Want More*". On top are the "*Haves*" with power, money, food, security and luxury. They suffocate in their surpluses while the "*Have-Nots*" starve. Numerically the "*Haves*" have always been the fewest. The "*Haves*" want to keep things as they are and are opposed to challenge and changes.

Stratification by class has been utilized by scholars in order to explain patterns of economic competition, political conflict and social change. Class theory therefore is seen as the science that studies social inequalities that evolve between people in the process of societal development. Therefore, the objective of this study is to understand the class and social stratification in the society. How it came about, what sustains it and how it could be changed are some of the areas of investigation using class theory. According to this theory, society-wide stratification is the fundamental reality of social and political life. This stratification system not only includes all members of a society but also forms the basic determinant of conflicts and change.

A class therefore, emerges in a society where there are high levels of inequality as put forward by Blau J. and Blau P. (1982) that inequality refers to both vertical classifications or bounded by hierarchical relationship which human populations at varying levels of aggregation are differentiated. Here, the concept of class is defining class in terms of distribution of attributes such as education, income, health, information, and influence in a population. This concept is among the oldest and most diversely defined in sociology extending as far back to Plato's conception of the republic and developed subsequently in the social theories of Marx (1976), Marx and Engels (1971), Mosca (1939), Weber (1947). Similarly, class can be categorized into two major parts and can equally be examined from one of two differentiated by the underlying distribution of valued traits among individuals.

In this sense, it is referred to regular differences in power, goods, services and privileges among regular defined sets of actors (Tilly and Granovetter, 1988). The second assumption is that "class created as a result of inequality strictly as a system level property with individual's level differences are defined as derivative rather than generative" Distribution such as the size of the system and its total volume of resources are examined at the higher levels of aggregation, with the goal of determining the overall level of classes created inequality across system and without reference to individual differences.

The basic unit of analysis in the class theory is aggregate of individuals who

hold similar position with regard to the possession of values such as power, influence, wealth, authority, or prestige. These classes always relates to one another in hierarchical patterns of super ordination and subordination. The conflict that evolves out of the relationship between the units linked in hierarchical inequality generates the dynamics that lead to social and political change as put forward by Haralambos (1980) tells us and raises the following kind of questions concerning society and politics.

- What are the basic characteristics of classes and how is class membership determined?
- How does class relates to one another, and what impact do these relations have upon the social structure?
- What is the relationship between class structures and political system?
- What are the essentials patterns of cooperation and conflicts that make class linkage?
- How does class interaction affect the basic issue of continuity and change?
- How and when does class conflict lead to resolution and
- What is the relationship between elites, leaders, groups and classes?

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF CLASS

Although, class scholars disagree concerning the particular basis of stratification, for example, Marxists emphasized the economy as the basis of stratification. While the non Marxists emphasized things other than the economy. Generally, however, they both recognized that the political system as the basis of decision making ultimately shapes the class structure. This is true especially in relation to post colonial states where a state power has become the most sought after commodity.

The relationship between the political system, socio-economy and classes is one of the most critical points of investigation for this theory. In this regard, however, politics could be defined as, “*who gets what, where, when and how*”. Certainly, this is an allusion to a particular class who struggle to get the likely benefits in the politics of a particular environment or society, at a particular time in a particular way. It is in recognition of this fact that politics could logically be viewed as a “class struggle”. As various classes are involved in the struggle for self fulfillment in the society, tension heats up because each class would want to benefit against the interest of a similar class. Conflict is therefore central to this theory. Roy cited in Haralabos (1980) summaries the conflicting nature of this analysis in terms of the following four tenets.

- (i) Every society is at every point subject to the process of change.
- (ii) Every society displays at every point disagreement and conflict.
- (iii) Every element in a society renders a contribution to its disintegration and change.
- (iv) Every society is based on the coercion of its members by others.

As could be seen, therefore interclass relations are dominated by division and conflicts which in turn propels a change in class structure and ultimately resulting into a change in the political system. Within the variety of political class scholars were concern ourselves with the Marxist version of class. Thus, the working class and proletariats will suffice to grasp the meanings attached to the interrelated concepts and phrases. Classes, class relation, class struggles and class antagonism in Nigeria as they are chained together by the common misery of poverty, rotten housing, disease, ignorance, political impotence, and despair, when they are employed their jobs pay the least and they are deprived in all areas basic to human growth." within the Marxist discourse.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF CLASSES AND ITS EVOLUTION

Classes are latent interest groups associated with the authoritative roles of imperatively coordinated organizations in the interest of transforming conflict into situation that is generated by propaganda, contact, communication, leadership, and so on. Class thus is determined by property, income or status. These are determined by distribution and consumption, which itself ultimately reflects the production and power relations of classes. The social conditions of bourgeoisie production are defined by bourgeois property. Class is therefore a theoretical and formal relationship among individuals. The force transforming latent class membership into a struggle of classes is class interest. Out of similar class situations, individuals come to act, they develop a mutual dependence, a community; a shared interest interrelated with a common income of profit or of wages. From this common interest classes are formed, and for Marx, individuals form classes to the extent that their interests engage them in a struggle with the opposite class.

In the Marxist discourse classes are better conceived in a manner that connects those (people) directly to the means and processes of production and is defined by the ownership of property, such ownership vests a person with the power to exclude others from the property and to use it for personal purposes. In relation to property there are three great classes of society: the bourgeoisie (who own the means of production such as machinery and factory buildings, and whose source of income is profit), landowners (whose income is rent), and the proletariat (who own their labor and sell it for a wage). Hence, Lenin in Afanasyev (1980) correctly defined class "as large group of people differing from each other by place they occupy in a community or society in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation to the means of production, by their role in the social wealth of which they disposed and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are therefore, aggregation that must be defined in relation to one another in the whole processes of production.

The explanation for the division of society along class line is to be located in the processes of material production. In primitive society production was at a very low level of sufficiency for subsistence and the instruments of production had not developed sufficiently. Thus man was largely preoccupied for producing essentially

for self sufficiency and sustenance. But as productive forces developed and labor productivity increased people began to move from production strictly for self sustenance to production in excess of what they could consume. It then became simply possible for some to accumulate material wealth and appropriate the means for producing such wealth.

Consequently, private property appeared and with it classes and societal inequality on that basis. Historically, therefore, classes arose when the primitive communal system began to disintegrate and slave owning system began to take root. The antithetical position of classes in society was the source of their bitter struggle Afanasyev (1980) who is this to be understood. When social, political and economic inequality is conceptualized as hierarchical relations, it is treated as a system of interaction or interdependency characterized by equality and inequality among relations. Tilly and Granovetter (1998) argue that persistent inequalities based on exploitation, opportunity hoarding, adaptations and emulation largely take the form of bounded categories such male-female, slave-owner, citizen-foreigner, white-black, among others. Relationship of inequality persists because participants in paired categories adapt to and participated in the perpetuation of those arrangement.

THEORIZATION OF METHODOLOGY

Economic theories of crime, such as that developed by Chiu and Madden (1998), suggest that individuals rationally choose whether or not to commit a crime based on a comparison of their expected profit from the two alternatives. According to this theory, individuals with low expected earnings have a greater incentive to engage in crime than richer individuals. Furthermore, greater inequality may lead to higher expected benefits from crime and hence to a greater incentive to commit crimes. Inequality also creates resentment and frustration and thus contributes to violent crime (Blau J. and Blau, P. 1982). Accordingly, empirical studies on the "immigrants" we mean those who were born outside of France and subsequently acquired French nationality.

The dominant focus on the ethnic (minority) antagonism has been in terms of economic and political factors as the outstanding features. Yet, the up-ward social mobility of ethnic clashes across the country (Nigeria) fits in a broader social movement comprising of class formation, class struggle, class conflict (antagonism). The process largely unfold with certain frame-work that entails and increasing diversity or pluralization within the minority and the dominant ethnic groups and contains the possibility of conflicts and frictions. This is not to say that other forms of culture are taken for granted.

THE EVOLUTION OF CLASS CONFLICTS (CLASS ANTAGONISM)

Classes do not exist because there is a conflict; the conflict exists because there are classes and it is easy for the strong to exploit the weak. However, neither the race nor sex conflict touches directly the class struggle. The class supremacy is in economic discrimination and not in the color of your skin or your gender. Each color and sex can be the oppressor and it is this system of oppression that pits races

and sexes against each other. To take the side of the poor or the rich is to choose against the other, the oppressed against the oppressors, and one class against the other. This is the choice that divides the general society and exposes the nature of that which perpetuates the struggle. The lukewarm attitudes of the bourgeoisies and the working class smug, and will sacrifice truth for comfort. Class conflict emerges out of the logic of the law of dialectics, ie the "law of the opposites," "negation of negation or anti-thesis and synthesis" this was developed by the first German scholar in the 19th century name George Fredrick Hegel, whose central argument could be summarized as follows; reality is in constant motion propelled by opposing forces held together in a delicate balance of negation.

The moment in which one force triumphs over the other it simultaneously attracts the coming into being of another contending force which eventually triumphs over it and the processes goes on and on. With respect to the development of classes in human society it means that with the emergence of each basic class in a particular socio-economic formation there emerges an opposing basic class with conflicting interests from the initial basic class. When their contradictory relationship gets to its peak, it eventually leads to destruction of those particular modes of production and with this as one of the basic class. This would continue until the classes annihilate themselves out of existence. In this case Marxist assumed humanity could have gotten to a stage where by classes no longer exist and the state itself would wither away until the cycle restart again. It then follows those conflicts, between the basic classes in the society; it is the essential characteristic that marks their relations. It then follows that the clash of interest between the basic and the dominant contending classes in a society is inevitable. This stems from their divergent opposing interest that feed on each other. It should be emphasized that apart from the basic classes in a society there are also the non basic classes. The basic classes are those that are directly connected with the mode of production prevailing in the society.

Therefore, as Afanasyev (1980) indicated the basic classes which are not connected directly with the prevailing mode of production might includes free artisans in the slave-owning society, peasants in the capitalist societies and others. This is in addition to other social groups like the intelligentsia, clergy, and others. Given what has been said thus far, it could be contended that the history of all class-divided society is one of struggle between the exploited and the exploiters and the irreconcilable hostile interest of the antagonistic classes lead to class struggle, which results in a change of the class structure of society (Volkov, 1985).

CLASS STRUGGLE IN MARXIST PERSPECTIVES

The classical interpretation of class struggle today is between the capitalist (or owning) class and the proletariat (or working) class. It has been put another way as the haves against the have-nots as earlier indicated. When the poor of the world do rise up, it will be because they have finally gained sufficient number to be a social force powerful enough to achieve a higher state of civilization. Class struggle is the combustible driving force for advancement from one socio-economic formation

to other. It emerges out of irreconcilable hostile interest of the antagonistic classes. The resolution of which often moves the society forward to a higher form of socio-economic formation. Volkov (1985) conceives with each other. He went on to contend that "it is the essential feature and the motive force of the development of all the antagonistic mode of production. Thus, class struggle is instrumental for the transition from old to out-dated socio-economic system to the new and more progressive system. The primacy of matter in Marxist theory is given to the material condition as the basis of both class structure and social change. Engels (1997) states that the mode of production of material life condition the social, political and intellectual life process in general that all the theoretical out look which emerge in history can only be understood" (Marxist (1976). Given credence to this, Plekhanov (1976) submits that "the organization of any particular society is determined by the state of its production forces.

This theory proceeds from the assumption that human society develops according to definite laws that do not depend on the will and the consciousness of people. It is these laws that the development of an industry and agriculture, the relations between classes and the nature of class struggle. They govern the whole course of social development. This development along specific lines necessitates one system of social life given way to another on the basis of the growth forces. In this regard Marx (1976) was able to identify the following modes of production.

- communal mode of production which recognizes common ownership, predominantly on the absence of division of labour, absence of private property, absence of social classes and poor or no developmental technology.
- slave mode of production; the emergence of social classes and social relation, with division of society into slave as well as the emergence of private property.
- feudal mode of production; with its own form of social relation between the feudal lord and the serf, with private ownership and exploitation of the labor of the serf by the feudal lord.
- Capitalist mode of production; predicated on a relationship between the capitalist and the proletarian on the basis of exploitation of the proletariat with development of technology at its best.
- the communist mode of production with differentiate itself only by a change in the pattern of ownership; property is now own in common.

The advancement from one mode of production to the next is predicated upon the struggle between the predominantly classes in each of production. This struggle constitutes the driving force in all human societies. That is why Marxist and Engels (1971) argued that the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle, free man and slave man, in a word, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild-master, in a word, oppressor and oppressed stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, open fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

The productive forces, their nature and level of development determine economic relations among people and above all the type of ownership of the means of production. That is why Marxist says "windmill will give rise to a feudal mode of production" relations of production, in their turn, actively influence the production forces. When relations of production in a given society cease to correspond to the level of productive forces, there appears the objective necessity to replace the obsolete mode of production and more progressive mode. The mode of production of material wealth plays a crucial role in the system of material and spiritual conditions of social life. Society itself, its ideas, theories, political views and institution and above all the state generally depend on the given mode of production.

Production forces are much more dynamic than the relations of the production. The contradiction between the developing productive forces and the relation of production that lag behind in their development, with private ownership of the means of production prevailing, of antagonistic nature manifested in the class struggle. In Marxist view therefore, a definite mode of production, where the superstructure corresponds to the economic base, constitute a socio-economic formation. It must be noted, however, that no mode of production exist alone, it has always been a multiplicity of modes production but in the midst of such, the defining relation is the most basic or predominately one. In Nigeria however, you have rampant of such cases of feudalism and feudal oppressions existing side by side with capitalist mode of production, but the predominant form or features defining the state in their capitalist-proletarians form of relationship.

The further society develops, the greater becomes the importance of the means of production, created by human labor. This means of production embody past labor; they are labor embodied in things; they are what are often referred to as capital and according to the views of Marxist, capital itself "dead labor". A condition essential to any production process is the marriage of the means of production and labor power. This production has always involved the coming together of people to interact. Leontyev (1968) observed that;

"Man has never lived alone....at all stages of his historical development of society of production is always social: it always carried on jointly by more or less large societies, by groups of people".

Furthermore, Marxist (1976) emphasizes and elaborates his position that, "in order to produce, the (humans) enter into definite connections and relations with one another and only within the social relations and connection and their relations does their action on nature, does production takes place. The social relations people enter into in the process of production are invariably linked with their relations towards the means of production.

The question of who owns and controls the means of production is of decisive importance of characterizing the social system of production. The method of which live labor is combined with the means of production creates contradiction and antagonism between classes. This is so because, the explorer who has capital (means

of production) to invest and the exploited that has only his labor power are constantly attempting to get a better deal. This invariably creates sharp class conflicts that are irreconcilable.

CLASS CONFLICTS (ANTAGONISM) IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, the distribution of economic and political power is determined by power over production (capital) as rightly put forward by Rumel, R. J. (2009) that Capital confers political power, which the bourgeois class uses to legitimize and protect their property and consequent social relations. Class relations are political, and in the mature capitalist society, the state's business is that of the bourgeoisie. The supremacy in the current democratic dispensation during and after elections shows a lot to be desired. In some areas where elections were clearly won by opposition candidates, results were declared in favor of the dominant party or interest group whether at federal, states or local government elections. In fact, in Nigeria democracy (election) which is believed to be the hope and tools for the common man to vote and be voted into office had since been replaced by nomination of interest individuals. This is so in almost all the areas of the Nigerian federation. Furthermore, the judiciary which started well in bringing hope is also losing credibility in recent times. Moreover, the intellectual basis of state rule, the ideas justifying the use of state power and its distribution, are those of the ruling party (class) are clearly showed by the government of that state or local government in the areas of distribution of both economic and political powers.

The intellectual-social culture is merely a superstructure resting on the relation of production, on ownership of the means of production. Therefore, the division between classes has widened and the condition of the exploited worker had deteriorated so badly that almost all the social structures in Nigeria had collapsed: However, in Marx view as put forward by Rummel (1977) Class conflict in conjunction with correlated processes (such as increasing worker poverty) leads to the intensification of the dominance of one class, and eventually the disruption of the class society. Revolution brings the proletariat to power, classes are eliminated, and the state that was necessary to protect the bourgeoisie, gradually disappears. The class struggle has never and will never transform the Nigerian proletariat into revolution as advocated by Marx. Consequently, the Nigerians workers' triumph instead of eliminating the basis of class division in the ownership through public enlighten rather, the basis of classes thus wiped away, and a classless society had ensue (by definition), and since political power to protect the bourgeoisie against the workers is unnecessary, political authority and the state will wither away.

The inter-ethnic warfare in Nigeria, according to Oke (2002) exemplified by the carnage and rabid killings serve as a clear example. The recent episodes of Jos ethno-religious crises in 2001, 2004, and December 2009 riots which culminated into the killings of so many Hausa/Fulani Muslims could be seen as a clear example, the 2000 Kano/Kaduna Sharia riots, the countless Tiv-Jukun clashes in Benue and

Taraba states, the 2001 Tiv-Hausa riot in Nassarawa state, including the numerous OPC (the Yoruba sectarian group) - Hausa clashes, the Aguleri/Umuleri war and the Ijaw-Itsekiri riots, Modakeke, Boko-Haram among others, were all indications of how terrible the situation has suddenly become in Nigeria as well as an indication of failure of the Nigerian state.

Furthermore, Oke (2002) stated that this has not always been this terrible in Nigeria. Many years back, particularly after the end of the 1967-70 civil wars, Nigerians had it easier than today, living together relatively harmoniously in any part of the country. The situation at the moment is such that, nowhere in the country can be said to be safe from inter-ethnic/religious/political hostilities. Previously safe havens from secular clashes, like Jos and most parts of southern Nigeria are now regular battlegrounds.

One could, however, regard ethnic conflicts as existing in a continuum, in which minimal ethnic rivalry may be considered as healthy for the development of the society. From such a perspective, ethnic rivalry could be seen as prevalent throughout the socio-political history of Nigeria and even some of the most developed nations of the world. But when this conflict goes beyond the minimal level like the current situation in Jos, it becomes a threat to the survival of the social entity. In this sense, these ethnic conflicts ravaging in Nigeria can be appropriately situated at an extreme position in the continuum. Ethno-religious crises, as experience has shown, is not a phenomenon that can be totally eradicated.

Osaghae (1994) points out that it may be delusive to expect ethnicity to die out: ethnic cleavages simply do not die out in this way as long as scarce resources continue to exist among individuals, groups and society. Similarly, according to Gaye (1999), one of the major factors causing these crises is the ever-increasing level of poverty, typified in joblessness, deteriorating infrastructures and above all lack of transparency and accountability in the public sectors etc. All these clashes are due to the fundamental crisis of underdevelopment; there is widespread poverty and this gives rise to a scramble for scarce resources. Most of these communities are no better than slums. Industries are shutting down with the attendant consequences of job losses; most families find it difficult to feed themselves. There are no potable water, no good roads, proper medical facilities, social infrastructures, and no good schools. Environments such as these generate fear distrust hatred, frustrations, anger among others.

Summarily, Marxist class theory posits that people action and in actions are governed by their material interests. Hence, as equally expressed by Engels (1977) that, "the determining factor in through out the human history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of social life. To add to the above postulations, Borongo (1980) states that "conflicts and antagonism are a reflection of the material interest of the various groups in society that is in the context of scarce resources, manifested themselves in sharp and intense political competition. To back this position, Dr. Ibrahim Fall, the then former UNICEF representative in Nigeria

commented in the partnership magazine (a UN publication) that; "*Poverty in Nigeria has been a long standing issue. Its reality manifests in incidences and severity over the years, Despite vast human and material resources and economic and development potential that the country is blessed with.* Therefore, under such circumstances, it is easier to believe that if the other ethnic group goes away there will be enough. These are some of the factors enhancing socio-ethno crises and class antagonism in Nigerian society today. However, religion and other factors are used in disguise as a reason for so many conflicts and antagonism.

CONCLUSION

This theory brings out the intricate cobweb of interest of a particular group of people which in most cases are deliberately mixed up with other primordial issues creating in the minds of people, what Psychologists refer to as "false consciousness. This paper examined the relationship of classes, class struggle (antagonism) in the Nigerian content. However, it revealed that when the poor of the world do rise up, it will be because they have finally gained sufficient number to be a social force powerful enough to achieve a higher state of civilization. Although, Marxist class theory posits that people action and in actions are governed by their material interests. Consequently, in Nigeria this would continue to be realized and in recent time to come.

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