

MARXISM AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES OF DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: THE CASE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article examines the tools and philosophy of Marxist political economy and how it can be utilised to position Nigeria's contemporary attempts for development. The Marxist philosophy, which delves into the relationship between human struggles and economic means of production, is germane in an effort to understand contemporary development challenges and the attempt by leaders, policy makers and scholars at proffering realistic and sustainable solutions. Marxism believes that with an understanding of the nature of man and the social and economic foundations that drives his existence, our leaders would be able to realise that policies that seek to enhance development must first address the human angle and then use the new technologies to create a solid economic base to build the productive forces. The paper submits that, applying the Marxist political economy, a few lessons would be germane. These lessons demand first and foremost that Nigeria must do an overhaul of her social and economic superstructure by restructuring and realigning the entire system. The paper argues that this can be done by focusing on the development of the productive sectors of the nation as well as the skills of the individuals to make them more productive. This, the paper believes, is the best approaches to ensure growth and development.

Keywords: Marxism, Development, Contemporary Challenges, Developing Countries, Nigeria.

Introduction

The present global, political and economic systems may superficially look too complex to adopt an almost century-old methodology to study in terms of development. But a more careful examination using the benefit of hindsight of the philosophy and logic of Marxism might give one a background to a better understanding of the present global system. Like Ake (1996) rightly asserts, any attempt to understand any socioeconomic or political milieu, one must first try to understand the bases of history as well as the legacies that have brought it to the present stage of existence. Only then can one go far in such endeavour. This therefore supposes that, Marxism which is a body of ideas, philosophy, methodology as well as theory worked out by Karl Marx, (1818 – 1883) and Frederick Engels in their book, the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) in which they undertook a conscious reformulation of the tradition of classical economist, which concerned itself mainly with economic growth and distribution in society can fit well in an attempt to undertake a conscious study of contemporary society. The Marxist philosophy which delves into the relationship between human struggles to gain control of the economic means of production is germane in an attempt to understand contemporary development challenges and the quest by leaders, policy makers and scholars to proffer sustainable solutions.

Conceptual Clarifications

Marxism

In an attempt to define Marxism, the definition offered by Frank would suffice. According to Frank, (2005, p.34):

Marxism or scientific socialism is the name given to the body of ideas first worked out by Karl Heinrich Marx (1818 – 1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820 – 1895). In their totality, these ideas provide a theoretical basis for the struggle of the working class to attain a higher form of human society – socialism and the economic, social, political, pseudo-scientific philosophy, theory, belief, or system. According to Karl Marx the theory seeks the removal of the notion of private property in order to gain control of the economic “means of production” by taking it from the bourgeois which is the wealthy for the benefit of the proletariat which is the working class.

This definition shows that Marxism is the embodiment of the doctrine, philosophy, method as well as approach first developed by Marx and Engels in the explanation of their doctrine of social change. It shows how a society would rise from the primitive stage through struggle to a stage of prosperity and freedom. The progressive evolution of the concept of Marxism towards the notion of political economy was the result of the conscious development of the doctrine which was first coined by classical economists such as Adam Smith and Ricardo etc., which they called classical political economy.

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Hundeyin and Momo (1999), opine that what is referred to as economics today was generally known as *political economy* during the 19th century, when it was more of a mixture of the descriptive and the prescriptive approach to the study of society. Classical political economy was basically concerned with the growth and development of economic systems and societies. This forced them to place their searchlights of operation mainly on the socio-economic and political factors that may impede or facilitate the growth of the economy. This was the case with processes of growth and development of different social groups and classes within the socio-economic system.

Pointedly, classical political economy was more involved in ways that would guarantee fruitful engagement in the production, distribution, exchange and consumption of goods and services; as well as the role of governments and the markets in growth and development; among the classical or bourgeois political economy theorists were Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mills, Hegel etc.

Marxist's exposition on the political economy is largely a rejection of the classical perspectives on economic analysis. Viewed in this direction, political economy can also be seen as Marxism in practice. This is so because it is technical and yet a useful tool of scientific analysis. It provides a holistic study of issues, phenomena and policies in any society (Momo, and Hundeyin, 1999). It is concerned also with the relations of production between people. Therefore the Marxist political economy approach has two main features: (a) The dynamic character of social reality, and (b) The relatedness of the different and complete elements of the society (Ake 1981, Momo, and Hundeyin, 1999).

Viewed further, one of the key features of the Marxist political economy approach is its assumption of the primacy of material conditions of life in determining the behaviour of social groups. Thus, economic issues are central constituents of the primary focus of analysis. Special attention is given to the modes of production in the society (The organic unity between productive forces and the social relations of production), the class structures of the society, and how these sub-structural factors determine the political, legal and ideological aspects of social life in the society.

The Marxist theory of history and the development of society constitute an integrated and unified treatment of various factors: economic, social, political, legal, and moral or religious in the development of society. Through this theory Karl Marx, gave a road map to an understanding of the state, class struggles, and the organic relationship between the sub-structure, (economy) and the super-structure, (polity). Marx consequently used a number of theories in explaining this philosophy: Historical materialism and dialectical materialism, which we shall highlight presently.

Historical Materialism

The concept which emphasises that social structures in any given society derive from economic structures, and these structures are changed through class struggles, each ruling class producing another class that will eventually supersede it is the main idea behind historical materialism. The theory posits that at the stage of primitive communism humans found it necessary to work in common to survive, and class formation was absent. But during the slave era, weaponry and products accumulation was in the possession of the military caste. Feudal relations were characterized by the military protections of serfs in return for a proportion of their surplus agricultural products. Capitalism, in turn, saw a characteristic emergence of bourgeoisie class, using the labour (proletariats) to operate machine technology to produce an ever greater surplus product. Socialism was expected to succeed capitalism through a revolutionary process where the proletariat will rise up against the bourgeois, and will also dictate the actions of the state, and ultimately the state will wither away as a course of historical necessity.

Dialectical Materialism

Dialectical materialism states that all phenomena consist of matter in motion. Motion itself is the result of the contradiction inherent among elements in all objects. Mankind is considered to be at the highest stage of material development. As with nature itself, so human development is subject to dialectical process of development.

Understating the nature of the Nigerian economy and its challenges.

As we attempt to see how far the theory and practice of Marxism will help us in understanding Nigeria's development, we must not forget to consider a few approaches that various theorists have attempted to proffer to solve her development challenges. In this work, the analysis would use Dialectical Materialism as a method, and will briefly show why it is most suitable in an attempt to analyse Nigeria's situation. Dialectical materialism gives primacy to material conditions particularly economic factors, in the explanation of social life, Ake (1981). This is so because economic factors are most fundamental issues in the existence and survival of both man and the society, and thus, the primary need of man and society. Therefore, as Ake, (1981) argues that the student of society:

Must pay particular attention to the economic structure of society and use it as a point of departure for studying other aspects of society. Once we understand what the material assets and constraints of a society are, how the society produces goods to meet its material needs, how the goods are distributed, and what types of social relations arise from the

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organization of production, we have come a long way to understanding the culture of that society, its laws, its religious systems, its political system and even its modes of thought.

This way, we would be able to engage in a better analysis of the inherent contradictions in the Nigerian economy; we would be able to see how Nigeria's economy could still be tailored towards achievement of development and future growth targets that are realizable.

Ake, (1981), argues that economic conditions help us to understand in the first place why the colonizing powers came to Africa, why they established the capitalist political systems etc. This is possible because the methodology looks at the dynamic character of reality, and the world is seen in terms of continuation and relatedness which is clearly complex and problematic. Most importantly it sees the world as something which is full of movement and dynamism. The model looks at the world dialectically.

Nigeria's economy, like many other less developed countries (LDCs), is a product of the colonial imperialist superstructure with all the trappings and contradictions that impede development and growth. At this juncture, suffice it to give a brief background on how Nigeria found herself with the nature of economy it now has.

During colonization, the colonial imperialists deliberately created the capitalist system, which they envisaged, would enhance their quest for total control over the economy of Nigeria so as to ensure its systematic and sustainable exploitation even after colonization. And at the same time expropriate the excess surplus to their home land. Various methods and strategies were adopted to create the bourgeois class that would take over from them and maintain the system of exploitation they established. The strategies were deployed towards education, the public service and other economic strategies, to advance this. They therefore succeeded in creating a satellite pseudo-capitalist nation that was an appendage of the Western world, with a disarticulate economy that would only service the interest of the metropolitan (Rodney, (1972). Rodney further states that:

Colonialism was not merely a system of exploitation, but one whose essential purpose was to repatriate the profits to the so-called mother country; from an African view-point that amounted to consistent expatriation of surplus produced by African labour out of African resources. Rodney, (1972,p. 22).

This process showed that the development of Europe was part of the same dialectical process in which Africa and indeed, Nigeria was underdeveloped, and is now being perpetrated by the bourgeois class that they created and left behind as leaders.

Ake (1981) states that the colonial economy was characterized by disarticulation or incoherence. The various sectors of the Nigerian' economy were not complementary to one another. The sectors did not complement one another in such a manner as to ensure reciprocity and internal linkages. Such an economy does not guarantee national development and growth. It only creates a good environment for the exploitation of resources.

The colonial capitalist government only invested in sectors that they desperately needed to enhance maximum exploitation. Thus, convenient collecting centres were established in Kano, for the collection and transportation of groundnut to Europe; and Lagos was prepared for the processing and evacuation of other commodities. Generally speaking, all such centres had factories for the processing of raw materials to be shipped to Europe. This kind of disarticulation, created by the colonial government could also be seen in the transport system where roads and rail system were not built in conformity with national economic demands, but rather to favour the fast and convenient transportation of processed products and raw materials to Europe.

This is even similar in the development of export commodities the colonial govt made sure that the production of crops that had value for their factories in Europe were promoted and encouraged, for instance, Cotton, palm oil, ground nuts and cocoa. This was the case in the development of education, the type of schools, the entire curriculum was developed and tailored towards creating the educated elites that would soon take over from the colonial imperialists government, but would still maintain the imperialist stranglehold on the economy which would equally ensure that the exploitation of these post-colonial countries is perpetrated.

Above all this, Nigeria was left with an undeveloped and highly disarticulated capitalist economy. A pseudo-capitalist economy was therefore created in Nigeria. The type of capitalism that is at the periphery of the metropolis, thus lacking the capacity to drive home enough 'capital and surplus resources' for the national economy, but only end up servicing the interest of the imperialist. Having accomplished the creation of this kind of economy during the colonization process, the imperialists created other instruments (capitalist watchdogs) known as the Bretton Woods Organizations – the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank – whose role it is to tailor the economies of the third world countries in a manner that would perpetually swallow the pills for economic miracle they would always concoct for the development-hungry third world (Nigeria inclusive), and thus place them at the exploitative mercy of the developed capitalist enclave. At the end of the second world war, the European and American powers met in the city of Breton Woods to charter an economic masterpiece that would proffer solutions to the post-World War II challenges of development that were faced by the European countries. These institutions have since then become veritable tools of the imperialists for economic exploitation of the developing world including

Nigeria through the strings that are always attached on the instruments, 'sound economic policies,' loans, aids, etc.

From the foregoing analyses, we have attempted examining the Marxist political economy perspective, the Nigerian colonial economy and how and why it was created. This will now lead us to a better understanding of the present challenges and how we can surmount them to land safely as a developed economy in the nearest future. Nigeria is currently faced with challenges of development that cut across key sectors of the economy such as education, health, poverty, employment, etc. It is a paradox, rather to believe that Nigeria which is arguably the 6th largest world oil producer is still categorized under the poorest countries of the world. Barely a decade after independence, Nigeria entered a period of oil boom when she witnessed unprecedented foreign exchange earnings from crude oil. Oludoyi, (2006) states lamented that the Oil windfall apparently misled Nigeria into thinking that its socioeconomic woes were over and it had become a wealthy nation. The Nigeria thereafter entangled itself various economic activities ranging from oil exploration/refining, iron ore mining and steel production, power generation, transmission and distribution, telecommunication and distribution of goods; among others; these activities did not arise out of well thought-out plans for future prosperity (Oludoyi, 2006). These unwholesome economic activities were all aimed at investing positively for Nigeria's future but there was no corresponding consolidation on the gains that agriculture, which was the mainstay of Nigeria's economy (owing to the peasant agricultural production since colonial to the post-colonial period) brought to the nation.

At the time of independence, Nigeria was heavily dependent on agriculture as the mainstay of her economy, but shortly after independence about 64% of GDP originated in agricultural sector. The combination of this sector systematically declined; however, it reached an all-time low of about 17% in 1982. Sadly, however, agriculture lost its import in Nigeria's economy at the peak of the oil boom in early 1980s. Revenue from crude oil plummeted at the same time. But no serious economic and social reforms were put in place on a sustainable basis. The Obasanjo regime launched *Operation Feed the Nation*, while President ShehuShagari launched the *GreenRevolutions*. Both programmes were aimed at stepping up the framework for agricultural development to complement the oil sector but they failed as a result of poor management, and corruption, leaving Nigeria with what looked like the proverbial "Trojan Horse" in Greek legendary story; in our own case, it meant that oil which looked much like a good gift suddenly became a curse to Nigerians. Oil came with all the potentials of turning around the economy for the better but only eluded us killing agriculture and further disarticulated the productive capacities of Nigeria citizens with its easy, cash and high oil prices at the international market.

Using the Marxist perspective, one would realize that the inability of Nigerian leaders to utilize the revenue from the oil boom to entrench the

agricultural sector was a function of the attitude of the local bourgeoisie whose actions and inactions towards this direction was just typical of the colonialists. One they could not create an economy that would make them irrelevant. A self-sustaining economy would not give them the ability for primitive accumulation and the need to maintain their bourgeois class. They need to characteristically create hiccups that would pave way for the advancement of the interests of their foreign counterparts in the metropolis.

They had to plunder the oil resources at the neglect of investing in areas that would enhance the productive capacities of the Nigerian citizen. It is also convenient to accept the view that the first military intervention in our democratic experiments in the sixties and seventies were linked to the agenda of the imperialist enclave. It is most easy for the military without an established democratic institution to be manipulated by the foreign power as it were. That is why most civilian regimes in Africa were toppled. You could see where they were acquiring arms and other war strategies if not from the sophisticated weaponry of the west.

Corruption

Closely linked to the above challenge is the issue of corruption. This is a creation of the colonial capitalist economy. As has been analyzed earlier, corruption was brought about by the creation of a bourgeoisie class who took over at the end of colonialism. This has largely made Nigeria to lose her dreams for decades. The leaders who took over the helm of affairs of politics and administration suddenly discovered that though they were in charge, they had no economic power to ensure their continued perpetuation of their class. Sorkaa points out that:

Given the peripheral capitalist system that evolved out of our colonial experience and given that we have had a leadership that prefers to consolidate rather than change this unproductive economic system... to understand the nature of leadership in Nigeria we are bound to rely mostly on this disarticulated capitalist system (Sorkaa, 1999, p.58).

A capitalist system that maintains corruption and is against all efforts towards productive change. Okpaga (1999), has opined that the colonial powers allowed them (Nigerian leaders) to use the political power, earlier conceded to them to accumulate wealth so that they could have a stake in the colonial economy. "Thus, Nigerian leaders, as they did at independence having realized that they had political power without economic power... decided to use political power to engage in primitive accumulation." Okpaga, (1999:5). It is therefore no surprise then that we have corruption everywhere, and the country is finding it difficult to develop due mainly to corruption by its leaders. This problem has persisted through both military regimes and civilian administrations. Corruption, when perpetrated sustainably creates in its wake poverty and many other unethical behaviour that are highly antithetical to growth, development and poverty eradication.

Other Challenges include poverty, energy crisis, class struggle, communal conflicts and political instability and poor leadership. It is very important to emphasize that these challenges are all interrelated and as such constitute important factors in the sustenance of the others. For instance, while corruption exacerbates poverty and the other problems of poverty on the other hand, tempts public officials to engage in, what I may call *petty corruption* – (kick back that junior civil servants collect from the public to treat their files and transact other public service functions for them). It could be recalled that during the military era, when very senior academics were collecting a partly N5, 000 Naira per month as salaries, it was difficult to effectively discourage the production and sale of handouts on campuses of higher institutions.

Furthermore, corruption and mismanagement of the energy (electric power) sector has completely eliminated the public power sector from the dictionary of Nigeria's public service system. The revelations that arose from the power sector probe recently undertaken by the Federal House of Representatives is a case in point. Ugbudu (2017, p.118) reports that “there exists a yawning gap between the public resources expended on the implementation of the National Integrated Power projects (NIPPs) and power supply in Nigeria.” His investigation revealed that between 1999 and 2007 power supply ranged between 2,500 to 2,840MW completely lower than the 10,000MW projected by government through the NIPPs (Ugbudu, 2017). The implication of lack of power on the economy is manifold; there was a collapse of many industries and several others folded up and left to other countries thus creating a huge shortage in the products and services they were rendering to the economy. There was also another profound implication on the economy as there was a general increase in cost of products and services when analyzed using the perspective of the social relations of production in the Marxist political economy.

This means that the transport sector, the health sector, the education sector and agricultural sector are all affected. A major dislocation in one or two of those sectors causes enormous distortions and imbalances in the others thereby leading to a distortion in the development of the national economy. Just as the colonial powers were 'wise' to use all the sectors to perpetuate imperialism, Nigeria needs to also use the same approach to touch all the sectors in her quest to advance her economy. By this I mean a comprehensive reform and reorientation is imperative for any meaningful change to take effect. It must be noted that corruption is a creation of the colonial capitalists in Nigerian economy. Corruption aids capitalism that is why it is oiled by the international capitalist enclave. Stolen funds from the underdeveloped nations are laundered but end up in European and American banks – with the consequent advantage to their economies.

Towards a Sustainable Approach for Development

Using the Marxist's political economy perspective, it is clear that while Nigeria cannot put to practice the tenets of the socialist and communist system of government, Nigeria can use the Marxist methodology as an instrument to glean

the best development strategies which cut across middle of the road between the capitalist and the socialist paths where in both cases the best development models would be adopted. Nigeria must avoid digging a national grave by continuing with a monolithic oil economy, and must go all out to diversify the national economy. Even though, for the past five decades, the petroleum sector sustained Nigeria's economy, it did create negative imbalances in the economy which their devastating impacts almost overwhelms their benefits. Odu and Agida, (2003, p.22) point out four negative aspects of petroleum in the Nigeria Economy:

- (1) The dominance of petroleum in the Nigerian economy has led to instability in the economy, national development plans and budgets, since 1970 have been based on the fortunes of oil or otherwise of the oil sector, it has been a disappointing experience.
- (2) Development of the oil industry has led to the neglect of agricultural sector.
- (3) Mono-economy has caused a very serious imbalance in the economy resulting in unemployment.
- (4) Oil spillage in oil producing areas constitute a serious problem to agriculture and the fishing industry and its environs.

Suffice it to point out that, the Niger Delta question has grown into a demon of gargantuan proportions in terms of its threats to national security as well as the negative international image, the hostage-taking generates on the country.

Apart from addressing the monolithic economy by engaging in aggressive mechanized agricultural production, deliberate efforts must be made to expand the productive capacities of the citizens and the national economy generally. Employment generation through training the citizen to acquire skills in technology and small scale enterprises which have a productive orientation, and not just the development of trade as it were. There is a difference here. Petty trading which is buying and selling does not support production in the economy as such. The production in technology as china, Japan and Korea have done have improved their means of production.

Nigeria can attain the economic miracle like the other third world countries of China, Korea and Malaysia if the Marxist theory would be used as a point of departure for a serious study and understanding of the society in that case Nigeria – and the contradictions that brought it to the present level of development. Adopting the practice of Marxist socialism at this point as Nigeria's system of government would not be a practical reality as the judgment of history has proved that when the necessary measures are taken to remove or play down the contradiction of the capitalist economy entrenched by colonialism, reasonable escape routes are routed for a nation's development dilemma. It is now clear that the following measures must be taken in preparation for the journey towards sustainable development.

- (1) Overhaul of Nigeria's political economy and its inherent contradictions. All the sectors of Nigeria's national life must be re-examined. The orientation of

the citizens – their attitudes (beliefs) about 'foreign' things or objects must be expunged from their psyche. This can be done through leadership by example. When leaders lead faithfully and honestly, abiding by the tenets of rule of law it engenders faith, pride and patriotism which restore pride in the citizenry towards their nation.

- (2) Overhaul of the national infrastructures amenities: Transportation system, roads network, wage increase, transport, air transport etc. these must be serviced and made to be efficient.
- (3) Energy (Power) sector is at the centre of development of the economy. The power sector need emergency measures to come back to life. This is next to nothing because it is capable of galvanizing every sector for the overall development of the country.

In conclusion, we have been able to use the Marxist political economy to examine the background, nature and character of the Nigerian state and why it has remained undeveloped. As a theory of analyses and change, the approach has enabled us to discover areas that need fine-tuning in order to commence a successful journey towards sustainable development.

It is imperative for scholars, policy-makers and leaders to stop blaming Nigeria's backwardness on the colonial contradictions in our economy. Rather the knowledge of these contradictions through Marxist's political economy should spur them to positive action as has already been suggested above. Through the great works of Karl Marx, as well as the great contributions by Rodney (1972), Claude Ake in his many works (1979, 1981, 2003) etc., much can be studied with a view to acquiring the background in order to blend a system that is neither socialist nor a purely capitalist; but that which would chart a course for Nigeria's dream to be a developed economy in the near future.

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