



REVIEW ARTICLE

MEANING OF STATE AND STATE EXISTENCE IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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ABSTRACT

The world is either globalized or globalizing and the nation state on the wane, this situation has put certain theories on retreat and others defunct. The current phase of capitalist accumulation is both qualitatively and quantitatively different from what was previously obtainable. There is now more than ever, swifter international mobility of capital with its global nature of the social, political and environmental pathologies. It is also indisputable that 'national' boundaries are mere paper works. These realities however, do not suggest the 'death' of the nation state. This paper argues that the form of the state has changed, but its distinctive national character in Nigeria has remained. The paper contends that the processes that shake hands to create a tendential globalization only demonstrates the continuing centrality of the state existence in Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

At a time and in an era that the inexorable force of globalization is seemingly laying waste the nation –state and seamlessly permeating and altering structures and boundaries hitherto considered impenetrable , it is becoming increasingly difficult to define the state. This is made more awful because as it were, Marxism is in retreat across the world as a result of the implosion and disintegration of actually existing socialism. This poses two major problems (i) It has created inner turbo for bourgeois scholars and interpretations(ii)It has also created the platform to wit that Marxist state theory is an anachronism, oxymoron and an exercise in futility (Colin Hay Marxism and the State, 1996). This paper contends otherwise and suggests that Marxist understanding provides powerful analytical tool in understanding the state and its role in Nigeria as elsewhere.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks on the State

- There are myriads of theories on the origin of the state. Hay (1996) has argued and rightly too, that there is no more arduous task in the theory of the state than defining this notoriously illusive and constantly changing target.

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It can be stated that by all odds, the emergence of the state is the most far reaching political development in human history, however, its origin has remained 'deified' in the realm of religious gamut or the confusing perspectives of liberal and sometimes Marxist scholars. Various theories of state origins can be grouped into two general types.i.e the voluntaristic and the coercive theories (Robert L. Carneiro, 1977) as represented by liberalism and Marxism with their different variants.

Voluntaristic Theories on the State

These are a bunch of theories propounded mostly by representatives or bourgeois scholars in their effort to explain the origin of state. These theories suggest that at some point in time, certain peoples or groups voluntarily, deliberately and rationally gave up their sovereignties and combined with others to form larger communities or political units deserving to be called state. Historically, we know that no such compact was ever entered into by any human groups. Of this brand of theories, the commonest and best known is referred to as the social contract theory. Most scholars have dismissed the social contract theory as nothing more than a historical curiosity. Even the social contract theorists themselves have not agreed among themselves on how the state came to be from their often contradictory analysis of life in the state of nature (Shaapera and Simon Aondohemba, 2008).

The 'automatic theory' suggests that the invention of agriculture automatically brought people into surplus food production which necessitated certain people or a group of persons to divorce themselves from food production and specialize in laws and policies that moderated the society. This theory lacks in merit because agriculture does not automatically lead to food surplus. Closely related to the 'automatic theory' is Karl Wittfogel's (Karl Wittfogel *Oriental Despotism*, 1957) 'hydraulic hypothesis'. Wittfogel seem to suggest that the state began in arid and semi-arid areas of the world. He suggests that in such areas, villagers struggled to support themselves by means of small scale irrigation. This theory asserts that it became necessary for villagers to set aside their autonomies and merge their villages to form large political unites capable of carrying out irrigation in broader scale. According to the theorists, the individuals that were saddled with the responsibility of such extensive feats brought the state into being. Recent archeological discoveries have silenced this theory because China, Mexico and Mesopotamia, three of the places cited by Wittfogel are discovered to have had large states before the advent of irrigation in those places.

The divine theory of state's origin was another attempt by the privileged classes to justify their oppression of the oppressed by appealing to divinity. This notion prevailed during the Oriental Empires where the privileged classes regarded themselves as descended from God (Anifowose, 1999). These pretensions were later the middle classes who preferred the option of popular sovereignty. Indeed, there is no any other question that has generated heated debate as the question of the state. This question has been so confused, delivered and unwittingly by representatives of bourgeois science, philosophy, jurisprudence, political economy and journalism. These representatives of the bourgeoisie have confused the question of state with that of religion. They claim that the state is something divine, something supernatural, that it is a force of divine origin which confers on peoples something that is not of man (Lenin, 1919).

This doctrine has been contracted to serve the interests of the exploiting classes. It only serves and justifies social privileges and the existence of exploitation. The vestiges of this doctrine can be discerned almost everywhere especially when reference is made to rulers and the ruled. Carneiro's (Robert and Carneiro, 1977) theory of 'Environmental Circumscription' has added to the discourse on the origin of the state. The environmental circumscription theory is just another variant of the 'automatic theory' and Wittfogel's 'hydraulic hypothesis'. He arrived at this by comparing political developments in two regions of the world having contrasting ecologies- one being a region he describes as possessing 'circumscribed agricultural land' and the other a region with extensive and unlimited land for farming.

According to this theory, environmentally circumscribed areas produced states indigenously compared to those with abundance of farm lands who still remained autonomous. Warfare among those with ample land did not result in conquest but rather more in displacement since there existed enough land for the vanquished to resettle away from the trouble spot.

Those circumscribed environmentally had fewer opportunities to maneuver. It was therefore easy for the warring class to dominate and subjugate the weak especially that they were faced with bleak futures in the face of deserts or mountains etc.

### **Coercive Theories on the state**

To discuss these theories as scientifically as possible, we must take a look at the origin of the state, its emergence and development. This paper intends to approach this question scientifically and to finger the underlying historical connection and examine it from the standpoint of how this arose in history and its principal stages in development and what it actually has become today. We can start by saying first and foremost that the state has not always existed. There was a time when there was no state. At that period, discipline and ordering of work were maintained by traditional affinities, spiritual relationships with nature, customs and the respect for elders. If you take any work whatsoever on primitive civilization, you will always come across more or less definite descriptions, indications and recollections of the fact that there was a time, more or less similar to primitive communism, when the division of society into slave-owners and slaves did not exist. And in those times, there was no state, no special apparatus for the systematic application of force and the subjugation of people by force. It is such an apparatus that is called the state (Lenin, 1919).

In primitive society, when people lived in small family groups, where there was the predominance of custom, authority, respect and the power enjoyed by elders in such societies. Ngharen, (2000) has argued elsewhere, that in most pre-colonial acephalous societies of North Central Nigeria, as elsewhere, there was no any special group of people set apart to rule others and who for the sake and purpose of rule, systematically and permanently had at their disposal a certain apparatus of coercion or violence. If we move away from the voluntaristic arguments, from the subtleties, philosophical arguments of bourgeois scholars, we will recognize and understand that the state amounts to an apparatus of rule which evolves a series of political and economic crisis as the pre-existing mode of intervention within the society and its economic base proves increasingly dysfunctional. Accordingly the crisis in the pre-existing mode of production will rearrange or structure the society. The general mutation will produce or cause a metamorphosis of certain individuals. Lenin has argued that:

When there appears such a special group of men occupied solely with government, and who in order to rule need a special apparatus of coercion to subjugate the will of others by force...then appears the state (Lenin, 1919). The division into classes must be understood as a fundamental fact of history. At the primitive stage, classes do not appear or exist. After that, we had slave owning societies. The slave owners owned the means of production-the land, implements and the slaves. This was the most important class division (Lenin, 1919). This mode of production was followed by feudalism which splitted society into feudal lords and peasants. Under feudalism, class oppression and dependence remained but the feudal lord did not owed the peasants as under the slave mode of production.

The feudal lord however was entitled to the obligatory labour and performances of certain services from the peasants. A new class and mode of production called the capitalist mode of production emerged from the feudal mode of production as a result of trade, appearance of world market money circulation. Major revolutions took place in the world between the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that led to the abolition of feudalism which was replaced by capitalism. Under capitalism, division into classes remained and assumed a different form. The owners of capital, land and emerging factories constituted an insignificant minority of the population who had complete command of the labours of the rest of the society who became wage labourers who must sell their labour to the capitalist. All the liberal or voluntaristic theories we have considered thus far accept this fact but twist such in favour of the protection of privileged classes.

Thus from the above analysis, the state appeared wherever and whenever a division of society into classes appears, whenever exploiters and exploited appear. Lenin has opined that the state:

Has always been a certain apparatus which stood outside society and consisted of a group of people engaged solely, or almost solely, or mainly in ruling.... This apparatus, this group of people who rule others, always possesses certain means of coercion, of physical force.... (Lenin, 1919).

Apart from Lenin, (1917) many other Marxists have seen the state as the repressive arm of the bourgeoisie. This position has been questioned because of its distinctive functionalism, or attempt to explain phenomenon by appealing to its consequences. The 'instrumentalists' sees the state as an instrument in the hands of the ruling class for enforcing and guaranteeing the stability of the class structure. The understanding here is that the state is understood in terms of the instrumental exercise of power by people in government or captains of industries, either directly through the manipulation of policies or indirectly through arm twisting measures since those in power are usually representatives of their class (Colin Hay *Marxism and the State*, 1996).

The conception of the state as 'an ideal collective capitalist' actually sprang from Engels (Engels, 1947). He remarked that 'the modern state, no matter what its forms, is essentially a capitalist machine, the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital'. Scholars of this school of thought argue that capital is neither self-reproducing nor capable of securing the conditions that can guarantee its reproduction; hence a body or institutional ensemble is required to intervene on its behalf.

This institutional ensemble is what this school of thought refers to as the state-the 'ideal collective capitalist' There is also the school of thought among the Marxists that sees the state as a factor of cohesion within the social formation (Nicos Poulantzas, 1984) Poulantzas understood the state in terms of its effects and defines it in terms of its strategic role of ensuring unity and cohesion through the deliberate effort of promotion of class domination. As though supporting Poulantzas postulation of the state as a factor of cohesion, Engels quipped:

In order that ...classes with conflicting economic interests, shall not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a power seemingly standing above society that would moderate the conflict and keep it within bounds of 'order'; and this power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state (Engels, 1884)

Critics of the Marxist theory of the state insist that there is no any single Marxian, far less Marxist theory of the state. It is argued that Marx and Engels adopted different approaches and arguments according to the problems with which they were confronted (Bob Jessop, 1982). This is not necessarily true. For example, Marx and Engels asserted famously that the state is:

Nothing more than the form of organization which the bourgeoisie necessarily adopt both for internal and external purposes, for the mutual guarantee of their property and interests (Marx and Engels, 1964)

This definition is an instrumentalist framework which sees the state as an instrument in the hands of the ruling class. However, the narrow and changing definitions among Marxist theorists has been largely remedied by an attempt to incorporate human subjectivity as a dynamic agent within the Marxist philosophy of history (Gramsci, 1971b) The significant thing about this new approach within Marxist philosophy is that it poses the important question of what gives capital the capacity to reproduce and reassert its dominance over time despite its inherent contradictions.

The search for an answer in the face of changing nature of the state has led to the rediscovery and redefinition of the state to include all those institutions and practices through which the dominant class succeeds in maintaining itself over the ruled. The main key to this is hegemony. The contention is that the dominant class in order to maintain its supremacy and relevance, must succeed in presenting its values, norms and institutions like elections, rule of law, supremacy of constitution etc and in that case creating its ideological common sense.

Hegemony which depends more on resignation than consent, is the capacity of the ruling classes to hypnotize the ruled that whatever they may think of status quo or social order and no matter how much, they are unlikely to change their status, there is no alternative to it.

#### **Fiori has lamented thus**

the (capitalist) system's real strength does not lie in the violence of the ruling class or the coercive power of its state, but in the acceptance by the ruled of a 'conception of the world' which belongs to the rulers. The philosophy of the ruling class passes through a whole tissue of complex vulgarisations to emerge as 'common sense'; that is, the philosophy of the masses, who accept the morality, the customs, the institutionalized behavior of the society they live in (Giuseppe Fiori, 1970).

## The Existence of the State in Nigeria

The petit bourgeoisie in Nigeria has remained dependent on metropolitan bourgeoisie but has adapted in the ever changing circumstances, perfecting strategies of keeping the governed in check. The strength of the bourgeoisie is no longer in the coercive resources that it can muster, as argued previously by Lenin, but in the bourgeoisie's ability to legitimize its domination within civil society which to a large extent has already secured passive acquiescence in Nigeria. Ordinary Nigerians have lost class consciousness as they scramble over each other each time in long queues in the name of elections.

Elections are mere exercises by the bourgeois class to select personnel of the state since military elites are no longer welcome with their uniforms. Hidden away in this capitalist mythology of state and particularly the source of power within contemporary capitalist societies is the relationship between the bourgeois class and their representatives or state apparatus in deciding the content of state policy. In a bourgeois or so called representative democracy as practiced in Nigeria, the electoral umpire is usually not nonpartisan. When there exists a threat to security which is usually seen within the context of the interests or property of the capitalist elites, a new mantra will be sung.

The 2015 general elections in Nigeria, globally acclaimed as free and fair was again a manifestation of the power of the International bourgeoisie to protect its interests and cajole the unsuspecting population into passivity and docility. It was so apparent that capital was no longer safe in the hands of President Jonathan thus the need to bring in a new blood that will inspire hope and pacify the oppressed through promises that cannot see the light of day. For example, the Buhari Government has continued to promise the unemployed welfare allowances while it is incapable of paying salaries. Civil servants are in arrears of salaries in many states for an upward of six to seven months yet the skilled liars and propagandists of the regime are still playing on the psychology of the masses of Nigerians.

The ongoing overturning of election results and victories by various tribunals across the nation with overwhelming evidences of compromise by the electoral umpire, massive rigging orchestrated or supported by security personnel and the shame that returning officers, for example from Kano during the Presidential election returned that not a single invalid vote was recorded in the entire Kano state leaves so much to be desired of the electoral umpire.

This position provides the critique of the bourgeois mythology of the state which sees class in relation to intersubjective relationships instead of objective structural locations within the relations of production, 'and on the state in terms of the interpersonal alliances, connections and networks of the elites' (Miliband, 1969). The state in Nigeria serves the vested interests of the bourgeoisie because it is dominated by them through their agents in what is referred to as representative democracy. The representatives serve their class interest and not the masses. The masses have legitimized this process by participating in it.

They are made to believe that their voices count in the selection of the representatives of the ruling class. In this way, the masses of Nigerians are manipulated and directed towards the interests of the ruling class.

### Someone once suggested that in Nigeria

.....Government (has become) the fastest and cheapest means of making quick money, a rentier state (has) emerged, intensifying the politics of 'sharing' rather than production.....big men without any productive source of livelihood except proximity to state power (Soludo and Charlse, 2005).

The Nigeria situation has been succinctly captured by Finegold and Skocpol who argue that:

An instrument has no will of its own and thus is incapable of action only as the extension of the will of some conscious actor. To understand the state as an instrument of the capitalist class is to say that state action originates in the conscious and purposive efforts of capitalists as a class (Keneth Finegold and Theda Skocpol, 1995)

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is a class document. The masses were neither consulted nor involved in its drafting. It is operated to guarantee the protection and reproduction of capital in the interest of the national bourgeoisie and their metropolitan western partners. This strategic partnership is important because the local bourgeoisie needs the support of their international partners to stay in power. Thus, the constitution and the various agencies that enforce it such as courts, armed forces, police and other civil institutions all act in the interest of the ruling classes. It is evident throughout Nigeria that law and order means different things to different people. There are certain people who are actually above the law. Law is maintained or enforced, often times very harshly too, so that the ruling classes will have order.

The political economy of Nigeria is determined by the state. The state determines the direction of production, distribution and allocation of resources (Omoyibo, ?). The nature of the class that rules in Nigeria as elsewhere is defined by its ownership and control of the means of production which it manipulates and utilizes on a national scale to exploit and hold the masses down. This class creates policies that further the general interests of the dominant class. It is a truism that the production base of Nigeria economy is so weak so the social forces of production cannot support any socio-political transformation. The major activity of the state in Nigeria has been the preservation of bourgeois structures through reforms and new legislations, including harsh suppression of dissenting voices.

For example, during the colonial period, the ruling elites assiduously worked to regiment the external dependence of Nigeria. A neo-colonial state was the only opportunity through which the inheriting elites could participate in the economic processes of Nigeria. The departing agents of metropolitan capital retained the so called commanding heights and or the private sector.

They also carefully groomed an inheriting elite class that was backward enough to maintain status quo. This class could only enter the economic system through the public or service sector. If we adopt the instrumentalist thesis or framework in analyzing the Nigerian situation, we will be right in saying that the mechanisms that ensures or ties this class to the state includes socialization, networks including certain cleavages and institutions like political parties, social clubs, fraternities, alma Mata and interpersonal connections. The state in Nigeria over fifty years after political independence, if we are politically independent, has continued to service or provide infrastructural facilities such as organizing mineral surveys, agricultural support, provision of service oriented policies, maintenance of basic health systems and an endless reform system through legislation to make the situation more favorable for international capital to thrive. This is in the face of increasing hunger, malnutrition, decaying educational system, apathy and rising inflation. The symptoms of this grave disease include widening poverty gaps, insurgency, religious and ethnic violence, clashes between cattle owners and farmers, devaluation of the currency, spiraling graduate unemployment and massive corruption in the fabric of society

### Conclusion

It is not possible to discard the concept of the state in studying politics. In this paper, we have attempted to trace the origin of the state to when the first forms of division of society into classes appeared. We have also seen the evolutionary nature of the state and its role at each epoch. The theoretical extrapolations in this paper reveal that the state is a machine for maintaining the rule of one class over another. In Nigeria, the role of the state has been that of securing International capital and safeguarding of the interests of bourgeois class. The state does not apply coercive tendencies always to maintain its class interests. Social institutions and International propoganda has 'legitimized' the state and concealed its true nature and function. This paper argued that the state in Nigeria as elsewhere is an active reality.

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