

# NIGERIAN SURVIVAL IN THE EMERGING ‘SAPA’ CULTURE AND ADMINISTRATION: THE MARXIAN INTERROGATION

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## ABSTRACT

The “Sapa” is a socio-economic syndrome of living and existing (situations occasioned by a very high cost of living and the sustainability of institutional corruptions and mismanagement of public funds and resources) that has becoming a culture of survival, as a symptom of Nigeria’s unequal economic structure, which strongly emerged during Buhari’s presidential administration and been sustained by Tinubu’s presidential administration. Such culture of survival in the midst of wants highlights the need for policies that reduce wealth gaps and improve opportunities for young people. Viewing “sapa” through a Marxist lens reveals the urgency for economic reform to address the challenges facing Nigeria’s youth. “Sapa” is more than just slang; it reflects real economic hardships experienced by Nigerian youth due to high unemployment, inflation and limited social support. Existing research on poverty and inequality in Nigeria tends to focus on statistics and policy impacts, but it rarely considers the cultural expressions and language that capture the emotional and social dimensions of these economic struggles. Employing analytic, dialectic and hermeneutics methods of analysis, the conclude by providing a new perspective by examining "sapa" as a cultural indicator of class based frustration and discontent, increasing the understanding of poverty's impact on Nigerian youth, and thenm suggesting the imports of proper management of capitalistic consciousness in government and governance for the improvement of masses’ welfares and development.

**Keywords:** Class struggle, Capitalism, Development, Economic inequality, Marxism, Sapa.

## INTRODUCTION

In a quest to attain and sustain great economic height and stability, man has employed several strategies and approaches. Philosophers have given their views on equality, economic stability and political facts (Isanbor & Izibili, 2024; Isanbor & Ukagba, 2024a). Karl Marx is one philosopher who worked on checkmating the economic and political statues of the state. Judging from the works of other philosophers; John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and Jean Jacque Rousseau who in the social contract theories explained human’s nature in reference or in relations to his or her political will and power, and in industrial relations, his or her negotiating power in trading his or her labour power and values in the means of production (Isanbor, 2023). For some thinkers, the state of nature was and still brutish, selfish and greedy, and like the owners of the means of production who maximize production profits to the detriment of the welfare of the worker. As such, the oppressed masses and workers do whatever they have to just to survive and to get what they have as in ethical hedonism.

*Sapa* is a term coined and commonly used by Nigerians to mean chronic hunger which is as a result of economic hardship and poverty. This kind of hunger entails lack of the basic needs of life as a result of the economic state of the country (Isanbor & Izibili, 2024; Isanbor & Ukagba, 2024a). As a culture, it is a group of signs or symptoms whose appearance together usually indicates a particular social disorder along the courses of living A pattern or series of events, observed qualities etc. characteristic of a particular problem or condition (Isanbor & Ojebun, 2022; Ihensekhein & Isanbor, 2023; Isanbor & Ukagba, 2024b). *Sapa* can now be seen as a sign of the effect of the social class struggle in the country which have led to poverty and economic hardship to those who happen to be in the lower class.

The paper is hinged on analyzing Marx's theories on class struggle and inequality, the socio-economic problems and their effects on the youths and the country at large, including the danger which capitalism as an economic system has posed the nation, on the effects of Sapa culture as an Tinubu's administrative enigma. Though not conclusive, this work will with the theory of Karl Marx attempts an overview of the present economic situation of the country; poverty and chronic hunger being its effects on the citizens.

### **MARXIST THEORIES ON CLASS STRUGGLES, EXPLOITATION AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY**

Marxism is a socio-economic theory developed by Karl Marx (1818-1883). He is the German economist and political philosopher. With his works and public advocacies, he stated that the struggle between different social classes is the main influence of political and social change, and that communism will eventually replace capitalism (Isanbor, 2023; 2024a). Karl Marx in the first chapter of his work, '*the communist manifesto*' gives a grim picture of human history as a continuous struggle between the haves and the have-nots, the exploiters and the exploited (Lawhead, 2015). In the modern era and if brought to the present State of Nigeria, it is between two classes; the bourgeoisie who are the capitalists, owners of production industries as well as the middle class citizens who benefit from the present economic system of the country (Konstantinov, Bogomolov & Gav, 1982). While the second half of the society is made up of the proletariat who owning no property must survive by selling their labor as commodity to the elite class so as to survive.

With the concern Marx had for the children, women and men of the working class of his time who in his work, '*Capital*' he took time to explain how they suffer and fight daily to survive, one would wonder what he would say about the present economic state of Nigeria where the working class do all in their power; working day and night from place to place and are still denied their pay for the job done (Isanbor, 2023; 2024a). The striving of some members of the society always conflicts with that of others. This striving has been experienced through times and geographical locations and the nature of this conflict differ with the various situations, modes of life of the classes into which the society is divided (Lawhead, 2015).

Since the great French revolution through the modern age, the victory of the bourgeoisies has shown itself very obviously to be the main cause of certain trouble in the economic system of the state. Karl Marx also in his *communist manifesto* explains that among all the classes that confront the bourgeoisies, only the proletariat is really a revolutionary (Isanbor, 2023; 2024a). Others are conservative as they only fight to hold the existence of their own means of production or industry as the case may be (Konstantinov, Bogomolov & Gav, 1982). These middle class only act as revolutionary only to protect their future interest and not the imminent interest of all. They therefore fight so as not to fall to the level of the proletariat. Marx explained how every class struggle is a political struggle and the position of each separate class (Lenin, 1930).

In an attempt to define class difference in the society, Lenin held that the most distinguishing factor is their relationship to the means of production (Konstantinov, Bogomolov & Gav, 1982). He refutes the idea of some bourgeois sociologists who hold that the difference between these classes is that the capitalist class (the bourgeoisies) receives profit from the means of production while the workers (the proletariat) work to receive their wage (Isanbor, 2023; 2024a). A capitalist is not who he is because he receives profit but because he owns a means of production and the wage worker also is not such just because he works to receive a wage but because he is denied the means of production and has to work for a capitalist (Lenin, 1930).

The mode of distributing the social incomes and the size of share depends on the relationship with the means of production and this as Lenin noted, is in most cases is formalized by the law (Isanbor, 2023). The relation of the means of production defines the place of a class in a historically determined system of social production and its role in the social organization of labor. The class struggle becomes very evident as the exploiters oppress the exploited while the exploited work hard to get rid of exploitation and the exploiters (Konstantinov, Bogomolov & Gav, 1982). This struggle is at first not seen by the inattentive eyes but with time especially in times of revolutions and counter-revolutions, it becomes obvious and affects both the political, economic and ideological life of the society as it begins to acquire the characters of an armed struggle. These exploiters see the act of exploitation as necessary to increase their wealth and to maintain their social standard (Zotov, 1985: 115).

Some have agreed that the class struggle have done well in the society. For instance, that if not for this struggle, there cannot be transition from the old socio-economic system to the new. Another point is that, though this struggle have claimed lives and led to damaged properties, it has affected the exploiters more than the exploited (Konstantinov, Bogomolov & Gav, 1982). This view, Marx and Engels have totally rejected stating that the inhabitation of the factors of class struggle have greatly motivated the development of antagonistic societies (Isanbor: 2023; 2024a). As also stated in the Marxist-Leninist theory of society, capitalism cannot just collapse automatically but will lead to a fight between the rising members of the working class and the business owners. Here the workers will be fighting to go back to the primitive age the 'golden age' where there was no private ownership of properties while the capitalists will fight to defend and protect their owned properties (Zotov, 1985). This statement towards the fight from the Marxist-Leninist party is soon to be the case of the country Nigeria as the number of the proletariat has now risen to a great number that so many can no longer feed themselves and their families, while a very few members are getting richer by day, acquiring properties worldwide.

## **MARXIST ANALYSES OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS IN DEVELOPING NATIONS**

Marx believed that Western society had developed through four main epochs: primitive communism, ancient society, feudal society, and capitalist societies. Primitive communism is represented by the societies of pre-history and provides the only example of a classless society (Konstantinov, Bogomolov & Gav, 1982). From then on, all societies became divided into two major classes: masters and slaves in ancient society, otherwise known as slave society, Lords and Serfs in feudal society and Capitalists and Wage Laborers in capitalist society (Zotov, 1985: 119). Marx's theory of work and his attitude toward capitalism led him to his theory of human self-alienation. Marx believed that workers became alienated from themselves because of the three exploitative features of capitalism. First, since work can be a form of self creativity, it should be enjoyable, Marx reasoned (Isanbor & Izibili, 2024; Isanbor & Ukagba, 2024a). Yet,

because the capitalists squeeze every possible cent of profit from the workers, they make the conditions of work intolerable (Zotov 1985: 119). Consequently, instead of enjoying work or the act of self-creation, the members of the proletariat grow to hate the very process by which they could refine their own natures.

In all, Marx believed that capitalists must exploit the workers to produce a profit. The capitalists force the workers to sell the product of their labour and then use that product against the workers to exploit them further (Isanbor & Ojebun, 2022; Ihensekhein & Isanbor 2023; Isanbor & Ukagba, 2024b). This, Marx claimed, forces the workers to regard their own product, something that is actually part of them, as alien and even harmful to them; thus, it becomes another form of self-alienation (Konstantinov, Bogomolov & Gav, 1982). Marx must have seen the present situation of Nigeria to have postulated this theory as it gives the exact fate of the Nigerian economy. Alienation reaches its height in capitalist society, where labor is dominated by the requirements of capital, the most important of which is the demand for profit. These requirements determine levels of employment and wages, the nature and quantity of goods produced, and their method of manufacture. Capitalism condemns to beggary and hardship millions of needy peasants and urban poor, many thousands of lumbering proletariats who always suffer more than the proletariat (Konstantinov, Bogomolov & Gav, 1982). Workers see themselves as prisoners of market forces over which they have no control. They are subject to the impersonal mechanisms of the law of supply and demand. They are at the mercy of the periodic rise and fall that distinguish capitalist economies (Mutuila, 2013). The workers, therefore, lose control over the objects they produce and become alienated from their product and the act of production. Their work becomes a means to an end, a means of obtaining money to buy the goods and services necessary for their existence.

## **THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF YOUTH IN NIGERIA**

The socio-economic and political environment in Nigeria poses a great challenge to the youths. Economic and social statistics present a thought provoking picture that leaves much to be desired. Almost half a century after flag independence, the economy continues to be dominated by the primary sectors such as agriculture, oil and minerals. This is partly because the country has not been able to create an environment for high value added economic activities (Isanbor, 2016; 2017, Isanbor & Egbonu, 2024; Isanbor & Edema, 2022). There is low domestic capital formation and declining direct foreign investment, with the exemption of the oil and gas sectors, until recently very heavy indebtedness, high unemployment and the informality of the economy where the majority of its people live in great poverty (Derrida, 1994: 75). Nigeria performs very poorly in terms of global economic competitiveness. The country lacks basic social and physical infrastructure. As a result, most people on the country have no access to basic services such as potable water, electricity, good sanitation, roads and healthcare. All of this is coupled with a high illiteracy rate, especially among women. The lack of access to basic medical care occurs against a backdrop of ravaging diseases; a situation which has become exacerbated with the advent of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The consequences of not fully developing and harnessing youth's potential could be dire, including significant economic losses, armed conflict, and political and social upheaval and instability as demonstrated recently by the Arab Spring. Youths are more likely to become frustrated because of legitimate grievances, including a lack of employment opportunities, low educational attainment, little participation in decision making and low social mobility (Derrida, 1994). In this context, greedy and opportunistic politicians could even exploit these grievances by involving these frustrated youths in violent overthrows of legitimate governments creating massive instabilities that could limit the economic growth of Africa's countries, especially

Nigeria (Isanbor, 2016; 2017, Isanbor & Egbonu, 2024; Isanbor & Edema, 2022). Specifically these challenges are discussed below:

**Unemployment and Underemployment:** A large number of youths are unemployed worldwide. The economic growth rate has not been sufficient to create enough employment opportunities to absorb the increasing labor force of about 500,000 annually. Only about 25% of youths are absorbed, leaving 75% to bear the burden of unemployment. Furthermore, some of those absorbed in the labor market have jobs that do not match their qualifications and personal development goals as highly evident in Nigeria (Mutuila, 2013). This new level of unemployment that is more like a well-calculated deregulation of a new market today deserves another name for it has led to what in French is called the “new poverty” which is in this work termed “Sapa”

**Health Related Problems:** Currently, due to increasing effects of poverty and very lack of the provision of health care facilities, the masses, especially the children and youths, have been very susceptible to various types of diseases (Mutuila, 2013). Young people ages 15-24 have the highest infection rates from HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. The youths face a myriad of health related problems, including widespread malaria, malnutrition, unsafe abortions, HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), drug and substance abuse as well as poor access to health services.

**Increasing School and College Drop-Out Rates:** In the developing world, nearly one-third of youths are illiterate. Many youths drop out of school and college due to the high cost of education and increase in overall poverty levels, poor returns on investment in education and lack of a re-admission policy for teenage mothers, among other reasons (Mutuila, 2013). These reasons for the increased school drop-outs are bordered on the increased rate of the low income earnings by the parents and guardians. These were sustained by the emerging *Sapa* culture.

**Crime and Deviant Behavior:** Evidence suggests that youths with few economic prospects and limited political voice are more inclined to be radical, fundamentalist, revolutionary, or to abuse drugs or commit suicide (Mutuila, 2013). Due to idleness, especially after formal education, the youths become restless and try anything. Some end up in crime or with deviant behaviors; prostitution, fraud, kidnapping, ritual killings. Owing to their vulnerability also, the youths are exposed to sexual abuse, child labor and other forms of economic exploitation under the guise of employment and support. There is currently little protection from the authorities.

**Limited Participation and Lack of Opportunities:** About 17 million women ages 15-19 give birth every year and have more children than women who start childbearing later. The risk of birth complications is 25 times higher for girls under age 15 and two times higher for those between ages 15-19. Despite their numerical superiority, youths are the least represented in political and economic spheres due to societal attitudes, socio-cultural and economic barriers, and lack of proper organization. Not even sport facilities are made available for youths to spend their time productively and finding their talent. The youths cannot exploit career, business and education opportunities available because they lack access to ICT, due to unavailability especially in rural areas, and high costs (Odeh & Okechukwu, 2014). They then make use of their technological knowledge to defraud and steal from people “*Yahoo! Yahoo!*” and they do this using for their justification the unemployment in the country. This extends to the point that they now use fetish means such as going to witch doctors to perform sacrifices for their fraudulent activity, joining different cultic groups and even engaging in ritual killing just for the progress of their cyber crime.

**Limited Social Security:** Many youths, especially those in the urban areas, do not have access to decent housing in environments that favor healthy living. Many of these homeless people are not given the privilege to participate in the democratic life of the state (Derrida, 1994). Among these factors that increase the economic hardship in Nigeria also includes personal greed of the political leaders as seen in; the excessive number of advisers and senior advisers, unscrupulous salaries and allowances paid to them, numerous official vehicles and foreign trips, introduction of security votes for governors, undisclosed extra budgetary expenditure and high payment for all those around them (Ihensekhein & Isanbor, 2023; Isanbor & Onwudinjo, 2024). These expenses have a great deed of effect on the citizens and the civil servants as most times before the payment of salaries get to the, the allocated money for that would have been exhausted by those on the top thereby leading to the civil servants not being paid for various month as though they work for nothing in Nigeria. They are denied their just wage thereby falling into hunger and suffering.

### **CAPITALISM: ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND SUSTAINING THE “SAPA” CULTURE IN NIGERIA**

Capitalism which is an economic system in which the means of production, exchange and distribution of goods and services are in the hands of private persons, providing or borrowing the necessary capital and taking profits after all the costs of the production have been met (Dibie, 1999: 26). Hence, the elements of the capitalist system are the profit motive, wage labor, economic competition and private property which Marx takes to mean the means of production; small or large, owned by these capitalists (Isanbor & Igboin, 2022; Isanbor, 2024b). The goal of these capitalists is to sell their produced commodity so as to get money to produce more to make more profit, then reinvest and keep accumulating wealth by exploiting wage labors. The lower the laborer is paid, the more profit the capitalist makes (Dibie, 1999: 27). This hunger for more by the capitalists does not only bring conflict between them and their works but also an unhealthy competition with fellow capitalists which at the end will fall back to the workers who will be extorted so as to make more profit (Lawhead, 2015: 415).

Hence, the fact that Nigeria as a country also practices or employs this system on its own leads to the retention of this *Sapa* as the bourgeoisie who control production and availability of these goods and services which are essential for human's daily life may begin to hoard them thereby making the people suffer lack (Mutuila, 2013). Other times also, due to their quest for so much profit, they may fix prices that will be too much for the common person to afford and following the economic state of the present Nigeria, people now spend more than they earn. This implies, in the affirmative, the values of the common saying among common Nigerians that, “the rich keep getting richer while the poor keep getting poorer” (Isanbor, 2023; Isanbor & Idemudia, 2024). This saying is now very obvious as the rich and the elite in the society are still able to build expensive houses and live lavishly while the poor are finding it more difficult to fend for themselves and their families. The bourgeoisies continue to compromise their employees by reducing or delaying their payments of salaries and by denying the masses of what they are entitled to.

From analysis, we will understand that Karl Marx must have seen himself as a prophet since almost all he said of the economic system “Capitalism” which Nigeria practices are obviously surfacing. The reality of abject poverty which as currently nicknamed as ‘Sapa’ has become the fate of the common Nigeria. In the name of governance, the rich as the politicians are doing as much as exploiting the poor to increase their wealth (Isanbor, 2023; Isanbor & Idemudia, 2024). This also extends to the country's political system where the electoral commission who should be the accountable to the people is now compromised; these bourgeoisies use their money to make their way to victory in their political carrier then when they get there they loot

as much as they can, to replace their campaign expenses and to make profits. They are the capitalist because when they embezzle public funds they invest them in production processes for profit thereby placing those whose money has been embezzled to be the workers. The youths suffer this since they are the labor force and are employed to work instead of being given the opportunity to be productive.

Many global problems have a particularly strong impact on youths. In some cases, such as the spread of diseases or frustration due to political disenfranchisement, these problems have far-reaching consequences (Isanbor & Igboin, 2022; Isanbor, 2024b). Focusing on youths will substantially boost efforts by Nigeria and other nations to; stop the spread of, and heal the suffering, caused by diseases, create a stable global economic system that equitably benefits people in all nations, both poor and rich, Promote political stability based on participation and human rights, limit the number of economic and war related refugees and internally displaced people, stem the tide of fundamentalism, terrorism, and hatred, Moderate population growth, Promote equal rights for all.

Marxism holds that the capitalist system inherently exploits the working class, creating a perpetual struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. *Sapa* culture as a syndrome, rooted in systemic poverty and economic inequality, can be interpreted through this lens of Marxian conception of alienation, and resulting to the less self-worth of the Nigerian youth in their pursuit of greener pastures in the foreign countries where they are largely unwelcomed. In Nigeria, the vast wealth generated from natural resources like oil is concentrated in the hands of political and economic elite, while the majority of the population remains impoverished (Isanbor & Igboin, 2022; Isanbor, 2024b). The youth, often unemployed or underemployed, experience *Sapa* as a manifestation of this exploitation. The disparity between the ruling class and the proletariat in Nigeria aligns with Marxist notions of economic exploitation. The failure of wealth redistribution policies, coupled with systemic corruption, reflects the dominance of bourgeois elite controlling the means of production and resources.

Marx's concept of alienation describes the estrangement of workers from the products of their labor, their own humanity, and society under capitalism. In Nigeria, alienation is evident in the disconnection between the youth's educational qualifications and the economic opportunities available. *Sapa* syndrome represents the reflections of the alienation of many Nigerian youths, as the promise of upward mobility through education is undermined by systemic unemployment and underemployment. The Nigerian economy's overreliance on oil and the neglect of other productive sectors, such as agriculture and manufacturing, exacerbate this alienation. The youth, unable to engage in meaningful labor, remain trapped in cycles of poverty, mirroring the alienation as Marx described (Isanbor, 2023). Hence, Marx's historical materialism emphasizes the role of economic structures in shaping societal development. Nigeria's post-colonial economic trajectory, characterized by dependency on foreign capital and neoliberal policies, has perpetuated underdevelopment (Isanbor, 2023; Isanbor & Idemudia, 2024). The emerging and sustaining *Sapa* culture as a syndrome is a direct outcome of these structural imbalances, where the majority lacks access to resources and opportunities. Marxism provides a framework for understanding how Nigeria's integration into the global capitalist system has entrenched economic dependency, leading to chronic financial instability for the masses.

While Marxism emphasizes class struggle, it may oversimplify the complexities of Nigeria's socioeconomic landscape, especially in the effectual presence of economic scarcity and high cost of living, as occasioned by the corruption and mismanagement of public funds and

resources by the elites in powers (Isanbor, 2023; Isanbor & Idemudia, 2024). The Nigerian reality is shaped not only by class but also by ethnicity, religion, and regionalism. These factors often intersect with economic inequality, complicating the narrative of a binary struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Marxism's focus on class does not adequately account for the ways in which ethnic and religious divisions are manipulated by elites to maintain power, diverting attention from economic exploitation (Isanbor & Igboin, 2022; Isanbor, 2024b). We can infer so strongly that Marxism as a socio-economic theory of development primarily addresses formal labour markets and industrial production, especially as these factors of development dependence on national interests, but a significant portion of Nigeria's economy operates in the informal sector of the economy and other models of socialization. The informal economy, characterized by small scale trading, artisanal work, and subsistence farming, sustains millions but often lacks stability or legal protections. *Sapa* culture is exacerbated by the precarious nature of informal work, which Marxism does not fully address. The theory's industrial focus makes it less applicable to economies like Nigeria's, where informal labor dominates.

Marxism was developed in the context of industrializing Europe and does not provide clear solutions for post-colonial nations grappling with the dual legacies of colonialism and global capitalism. In Nigeria, *Sapa* culture is tied to Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), debt dependency, and global trade imbalances issues that require nuanced solutions beyond Marxist prescriptions of proletarian revolution or state control of resources. Marxism's prescriptions may be too idealistic or impractical in addressing the entrenched corruption and weak institutions of post-colonial states like Nigeria (Isanbor, 2023; Isanbor & Idemudia, 2024). Hence, Marxism often downplays the role of culture in shaping economic behavior. In Nigeria, societal expectations, such as the financial obligations of extended families, amplify the effects of *Sapa* syndrome. These cultural factors, which influence spending habits and financial stability, are not adequately addressed within a Marxist ideology.

Capitalism for concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a few but does not adequately account for the role of political corruption and institutional weakness, which are endemic in Nigeria. *Sapa* syndrome is exacerbated by systemic corruption, where state resources meant for development are siphoned off by corrupt elite. For example, Nigeria's oil wealth, which could be redistributed to alleviate poverty, is frequently embezzled by government officials. The absence of robust regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms enables exploitation and inequality to persist unchecked. This institutional decay is a legacy of colonialism, compounded by the elite's deliberate undermining of governance structures (Isanbor, 2023; Isanbor & Idemudia, 2024). Marxism's focus on economic systems does not sufficiently address how corruption and weak institutions amplify economic inequality and perpetuate poverty. It offers no clear roadmap for rebuilding governance in nations like Nigeria where institutional collapse has intensified socio-economic instability.

## **CONCLUSION**

The application of Marxism to the *Sapa* culture in Nigeria provides a view for understanding the systemic economic inequalities and chronic financial instability faced by many citizens, particularly the youth. Marxism shows the exploitative dynamics of capitalism, the alienation of labor, and the concentration of wealth in the hands of privileged elite, all of which are evident in Nigeria's socio-economic structure. Through this perspective, *Sapa* syndrome or culture will become a constant reality in the minds of suffering Nigerian youths if the Nigerian political and socio-economic situations remain the same. It can be viewed as a direct consequence of the country's integration into a global capitalist system and its internal failure to equitably distribute resources to affect positively the lives of Nigerians, and which the current Nigerian governments have not to be judged or ready to change.

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