

# INTERROGATING MARXIAN ALIENATION VIS-À-VIS NIGERIA'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIO-POLITICAL DEFICIT

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## Abstract

*The philosophy of Karl Marx revolves around one fact, "matter is the basis of reality". In connection with economy and thought, Marx posits "economy is based on labour, which specifically is the human activity that puts us in touch with reality". Therefore, when a human being is alienated from labour, the necessary implications include the extinction of life, nature, self, relationship and the conception of human beings as tools, which to very good extent remain unjust and unnatural. This idea of alienation is substantiated by the ill-treatment of workers, poor payment of salaries or total non-payment, inadequate remuneration, et cetera. Taken the other way round, we see the dehumanization of workers in most societies both in the private and public sectors through the lenses of egoism occasioned by capitalism. The effect of such egoism is not far-fetched. Ideologically, money takes priority, and man serves labour instead of labour serving man. The value system of both private and government entrepreneurs gives no hope at all. Things have fallen apart and the centre of most economies cannot hold anymore. This article proposes to present the thesis that there is a need to awaken the consciousness of the proletariat and by extension, the workers (labourers) on the need for economic and political emancipation in our contemporary socio-political paradigm. This emancipation will trace the form of mental decolonization existing in forms of alienation in our various sectors.*

**Keywords:** Alienation, Pauperization, Labour, Nigeria, Capitalist, Workers

## Introduction

It is a common belief in nature that every existing situation or event has an organic link to something that existed earlier. Hence, there is always a background to any subject under study.

History has it that Karl Marx, though very famous and influential in his time, could not be identified with a particular philosophical system. Instead, what later emerged, as his philosophical thought was the synthesis of his predecessors' philosophical thoughts. Perusing his method, the Hegelian categories of dialectics as detected by scholars were purged out of their idealism (Chiaburu et al, 2014). Likewise, Feuerbach's materialism lost its metaphysics and contemplative approach in place of socio-political struggle and

refutation of idealism and religion.

The concept of alienation is as old as the world and this is simply because human beings are at the centre of every form of alienation. The idea was however made popular by Karl Marx as he elaborated it in his philosophy. Irrespective of the Marxist conception of the term, the term has its application in most discourses which shall be the focus of this article. To begin with, efforts will be made to define and conceptualize the term before briefly looking at its origin and how it has been conceived from culture to culture; from Christian theology to Hegel, Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre's conception of the term. The article will also focus on what is termed "social alienation" and its varied interpretations; specifically, the Western and the Eastern conception.

Marx's achievement in social and political thought was based on a transformation and synthesis of two traditions: German idealism as exemplified in the work of Hegel, and philosophical radicalism as expressed in the materialism of Feuerbach. Nonetheless, such philosophers like Heraclitus, Democritus, Epicurus, Kant, Francis Bacon, Machiavelli, and his father, a lawyer and intellectual with strong rational inclinations, and Ludwig Von Westphalia, a distinguished Prussian government official, all had influences on Marx (Chiaburu et al, 2014). From F. Bacon, Marx was able to see knowledge from a practical perspective and Machiavelli saw that "the end justifies the means". Kant's ethics, which admonishes that one should always act in a way that one's action could be universalized and that human beings should not be used as a means to an end also caught the sight and interest of Marx (Foster, 1999). From these different philosophical thoughts, Marx was exposed to the psychological and social humps of alienation in labour, which accounts for the historical change (**Muhammad Iqbal Shah, 2015**).

Tracing the historical process of formation in economic factors, according to Karl Marx, that has gone through the economic stages, ranging from "primitive communal, slave society, feudal society, and capitalism", one could assert that Marx's study of this process of formation of the economic factor in various pre-existed epochs that necessitated his view of the classless society (communism) as forthcoming, enormously contributed in the make-up of Marx philosophical thought (Chiaburu et al, 2014). Hence, the researcher wishes to view the aspects of the above-mentioned epochs that outstandingly seem very influential in Karl Marx. Before identifying the place of Alienation in Marx's socio-political project, it is important to briefly reflect on the goals of the communist manifesto. The Communist Manifesto reflects an attempt to explain the goals of Communism, as well as the theory underlying this movement. It argues that class struggles or the exploitation of one class by another are the motivating forces behind all historical developments. Class relationships are therefore defined by an era's means of production. However, the relationships eventually cease to be compatible with the developing forces of production. At this point, a revolution occurs and a new class emerges as the ruling one. This process represents the "march of history" as driven by larger economic forces.

Modern Industrial society is characterized by class conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. However, the productive forces of capitalism are quickly ceasing to be compatible with this exploitative relationship. Thus, the proletariat will lead a revolution. However, this revolution will be of a different character from all previous ones: previous revolutions simply re-allocated property in favour of the new ruling class. However, by the nature of their class, the members of the proletariat have no way of appropriating property. Therefore, when they obtain control they will have to destroy all ownership of private property, and classes themselves will disappear. This is indeed the birthplace of alienation.

### **Alienation Conceptualized**

At the heart of Marxist Philosophy is the concept of alienation. Karl Marx believes that alienation is responsible for the deteriorating state of institutions within society; thus, it became a central theme in his philosophy. The treatment of the concept of alienation in German idealism emerges from the diagnosis of the needs of post-revolutionary European humanity, confronted with the ideals of rationality, ideas that underpinned the Enlightenment and the expressionist impetus of Romanticism (Tomas Lima Pimenta, 2020). The concept has been famously described as;

The feeling of being a stranger or sense of loneliness, strangeness or sense of having no belonging in the surroundings is termed 'Alienation'. The Latin term *alienare* means, 'to remove or take away'. So, to separate legally a person's possessions or rights to property (or liberty, in the case of slaves) becomes a kind of alienation, and because some kinds of property or rights could not be taken away, they came to be known as inalienable (Muhammad Iqbal Shah, 2015).

There are limits to what can usefully be said about the concept of alienation in general; that is, what can usefully be said without getting involved in the complexities of particular accounts, advanced by particular authors or associated with particular intellectual traditions. However, there is a basic idea here which seems to capture most authors and traditions, and which is not unduly elusive or difficult to understand. Kenneth & Topik, (2018) observed: "This basic idea of alienation picks out a range of social and psychological ills involving the self and others. More precisely, it understands alienation as consisting of the problematic separation of a subject and object that properly belong together". That formulation of the basic idea is perhaps too abbreviated to be easily intelligible and certainly benefits from a little elaboration. The characterization of alienation offered here as a social or psychological ill involving the problematic separation of a subject and object that properly belong together involves three constituent elements: a subject, an object, and the relation between them.

In a capitalist society, Marx argues that the workers are bound to sell their power, strength, expertise and skills to the capitalists. Consequently, the workers have no control over their product of labour and over the labour itself which is their life activity and this

becomes only a means to an end of the capitalist. So, they got estranged from it and fall prey to alienation. Due to these circumstances, the workers became estranged from their own-self and their own-nature on the one hand and also alienated from other human beings as well as from their work (Muhammad Iqbal Shah, 2015). This situation creates two classes viz: *The Worker Class* and *The Capitalist Class*. The former is labouring and alienated and the latter is non-worker but controls the workers and gets the profits of others' labour. In *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Karl Marx described the course and methods through which the workers were exploited by the capitalists as alienation by exploitation. He also elaborated on how the Capitalists adopt such modes of production which can benefit them and cause exploitation of the workers. Due to that exploitation, the Capitalists and the Worker classes were estranged. Marx heralded the process and occurrence as *Alienation*. That means that working people put everything into their jobs but get little in return. That causes class conflict and estrangement between the both. So, Marx claimed that under capitalist rule or in a society of capitalism, the workers and the workers' class become alienated. This alienation is multi-dimensional and encompasses all areas of life; religion, politics, social and economic relations (Muhammad Iqbal Shah, 2015).

#### **Four Forms of Alienated Labour and Their relationship to Capitalist Modes of Production**

Marx differentiates between four different dimensions of alienated labour: The alienation of the worker from the product of his labour, alienation from the activity itself, alienation from humanity as a species-being, and alienation from other individuals. In the upcoming sections, the four different dimensions of alienated labour are portrayed in brief. There then follows an in-depth analysis of the third alienation form and the anthropology connected to it, since this plays a vital role in the further investigation.

Through the alienation of workers from the products of their labour, the labourer generates an alien objectified world for himself and becomes internally impoverished. To survive, the worker must produce goods through the utilization of the property of others and thus (re)produces a goods-shaped objectification of the world and his own (goods-shaped) objectivity. Instead of an appropriation of the product, alienation on the part of the worker follows as the product is objectified. In this context, Marx picks up on the projection theory of Ludwig Feuerbach and translates this within a socio-economic context (Held, 2009).

#### **Alienation from Economic Activity**

The second dimension of alienation describes the alienation of the labourer from the act of production or economic activity. Here, it is necessary to differentiate between two distinct forms of alienation from economic activity. The first form describes the external character of labour, which is not part of human nature and does not generate spiritual and physical energy. This type of labour is intrinsically alien to the worker and is not practised or affirmed during leisure periods. To the worker, it is "forced labour" (Marx, 1968), an agent without an end: "It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to

satisfy needs external to it." (Marx, 1968) The second form of alienation from economic activity deals with the separation from private ownership and wage labour. Since labour belongs to the owner rather than the labourer, the economic activity of the labourer is abstract, determined by others, and not liberating. Here too, Marx compares the alienation of labour to the alienation in religion where human independence is confronted by an external, divine or diabolical activity (Marx, 1968).

### **Alienation from Species-being**

For Karl Marx, the human is a species-being. In contrast to animals, humans act not only in their interests but also towards their species. To Marx, the human is a social and working being, created as a representational species-being. Labour and productive life - freely practised - is for Marx not merely a means of self-sufficiency but an essential genus lifestyle. As labour evolves into simply a means of self-preservation and supply of food, the labourer becomes alienated from his species and the genus lifestyle becomes merely "an agent of individual life" (Marx, 1968).

### **Alienation of the Individual from Other Individuals**

The fourth dimension of alienation is a direct consequence of the other three dimensions of alienation, in particular the third form of alienation: "In fact, the proposition that man's species-nature is estranged from him means that one man is estranged from the other, as each of them is from man's essential nature" (Marx, 1968). Labour, human potential and the genus lifestyle become the means of self-preservation. Just as human interrelationship becomes a means rather than an end in itself, so are individuals alienated from one another. As a result of alienated labour, the relationship of humans towards products, production, and other humans is self-reproducing (Marx, 1968).

### **Alienation: Some Historical Perspectives**

Although the philosophical notion of alienation was not fully developed until the modern period, it has its roots in classical thought. In *The Republic*, for example, Plato considers the psyche of the human soul as being a tripartite relation between reason, emotion and the senses (Plato, 1992). A human being, then, only achieves psychological harmony or happiness through a rightly ordered soul that appropriately balances these parts. Plato develops this ideal order not only psychologically, but socially and politically as well. In the ideal Polis, there should be a similar harmony or order where each part is in concord with the whole, and so members of each class maintain their proper station (Plato, 1992). The Neoplatonists, such as Plotinus, push this Platonic notion further in an ontological and quasi-mystical direction, where the rightly ordered soul is properly attuned to the Good or One. For this reason, whenever the soul directs its reason, desire, or attention to lower things, it results in a form of alienation.

### **Alienation and Christian Theology**

In the classical Christian tradition, alienation is developed even further in a theological direction. Here, alienation is understood as the estrangement of the individual soul from

God, which initially occurred through original sin and the fall of humanity. Saint Augustine succinctly captures the basic idea in his famous phrase in the opening of *Confessions* where he states, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” Throughout *Confessions*, Augustine offers a philosophical autobiographical analysis of his own self-estrangement in which his will is divided or torn in many directions. Throughout the work, St. Augustine describes his process of conversion or transformation in which both the will and reason are redirected toward their proper origin and end, namely, God. Only in this way, then, is the alienation of self and the dividedness of the soul finally overcome (Immanuel, 2018).

### Hegel and Dialectical Alienation

In Hegel, the notion of alienation is developed through his interpretation of history as a dialectical unfolding of Spirit (*Geist*). In its initial historical stages, Spirit is understood as divorced from the objective world and so suffers a kind of alienation from itself. In other words, to view the world as an “objective reality” separated from my consciousness is merely a form of alienation (Hegel, 1977). Likewise, to view my consciousness as separate from Universal consciousness (rather than being a “moment” of it) is also a form of alienation. The overcoming of alienation occurs, then, as self-consciousness increases by recognizing that the external world is not separate from the interiority of consciousness (Hegel, 1977). Over time and through the development of cultures, Spirit realizes itself through higher forms and manifestations of consciousness and self-knowledge. This same dialectical relation holds in the development of the social, political, and ethical domains as well. Here too, alienation is overcome in the increasing recognition of the unity of relations which culminates in the recognition that the “I is the We and the We is the I.” Ultimately, though, Hegel gives priority to philosophy and thought such that the highest unity and self-fulfilment occur in the absolute knowledge of self-consciousness (Hegel, 1977).

### Kierkegaard and the Existential Alienation of Self

Although inheriting certain aspects of Hegel's dialectical philosophy, Kierkegaard strongly objected to Hegel's rationalism as well as his subsuming of the person within the collective or social whole (Kierkegaard, 1980). In contrast, Kierkegaard emphasized the existential singularity of the human person and argued that the task of the self is the overcoming of alienation through its self-becoming. Kierkegaard too considered the individual as alienated, but not because he or she has not been properly amalgamated within the collective whole. Rather, Kierkegaard argued that such social amalgamation is itself a deceptive form of alienation (Kierkegaard, 1980). For more often than not, the uniqueness of the individual in his or her particularity is stifled or suppressed by the demands of the social structure. Here, then, a deeper form of alienation is exposed as the self's conformity to social demands. In becoming an authentic self, then, Kierkegaard hearkens back to a more Augustinian Christian theology where faith is understood as the

absolute relation to the Absolute. This relation, which is the immediacy of faith, transcends the individual's relation to society as a social self. In contrast, this absolute relation to the Absolute sets one on the road to attaining a higher selfhood made possible only by God.

### **Heidegger and Ontological Alienation**

In the twentieth century, the notion of alienation assumed much attention, particularly in existential philosophy. Martin Heidegger, for example, focused on a kind of “ontological alienation” in which human beings are often “fallen” in their own modes of understanding (Heidegger, 1962). Heidegger analyzes certain phenomena such as “idle talk,” “everydayness,” and “the they”. Briefly stated, idle talk or chatter occurs whenever a topic or subject is discussed in the everyday attitude of 'they'. In other words, the subject is talked about as “the already known”; for instance, as in, “you know what *they* say.” 'The they', then, represents a kind of anonymous authority who are “in the know” (Heidegger, 1962). In such a mode, there is nothing new to question or discover for it has all already been said and so merely needs to be repeated. Heidegger contrasts this alienated or fallen understanding with his concept of authenticity. In authenticity, a more original mode of questioning occurs as a kind of openness or wonder to that which is under discussion (Heidegger, 1962). The alienation of idle talk is overcome through an authentic discourse which makes the subject under discussion one's own. As Heidegger says, “Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one's own.” (Heidegger, 1962)

### **Sartre and Ethical Alienation**

Like Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre speaks of alienation and authenticity but interprets the terms more ethically. For Sartre, alienation occurs in the “bad faith” that refuses the responsibility and freedom of human existence (Sartre, 2003). As an outright atheist, Sartre argues that because God does not exist, human beings are free to create the meaning and value of their lives. Such freedom, however, is initially experienced as a tremendous burden when they realize that they have no one but themselves to rely on. Only humans, then, can be praised or blamed for their successes and failures in life and whatever meaning they do or do not achieve. Alienation occurs when humans refuse to accept responsibility for this freedom. They can either deny the actuality of whom they are based on their past choices or else deny the possibility of who they might become through their future choices. Authenticity is achieved (and so alienation is overcome) by not taking flight in the face of this existential anxiety or dread. Instead, humans assume responsibility for their choices and in turn the creation of their selves (Sartre, 2003).

## Religion and Overcoming Alienation

It can be understood from above that a variety of views of alienation have historically been suggested, ranging from Christian to Marxist views. All of them, however, seem to be able to be put under three main categories: alienation from one's own self (Plato, Augustine, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre); alienation from one another (Hegel, Marx); and alienation from all things (Hegel, Marx). According to a 2004 Vatican statement," (Stewart & Barron, 2006) the three categories of alienation can be explained in terms of the lack of the "image of God," a biblical notion in Genesis 1:27-28. This understanding of alienation has become widespread in Christianity. Alienation from one's own self occurs when one fails to accomplish an authentic self in the image of God, often mistakenly clinging to an "objectified" God.

Alienation of humans from one another, according to Hattam stems from the failure of human beings to realize their social relationship with one another in the image of God. Oftentimes, it means sticking to an externalized structure or system in society (Lee, 2012). Alienation from all things is the absence of one's genuine relations with all things in the image of God, not being able to claim true stewardship. Hence, the key to solving the problem consists in restoring the image of God, damaged by the human fall, at three different levels of relationship: one's relationship to oneself, one's human relationship to another and one's relationship to the creation. This presupposes that the image of God is a real source of relationship, being "essential dialogical or relational in its ontological structure," (Hattam, 2011) and that Genesis 1:27-28 talks about the three levels of relationship based on this image of God when it says: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (NIV). Restoring all three levels of the relationship is important, and none of them should be excluded in favour of the others. But, there seems to be some need for prioritization, because restoring the last two without first realizing the first would be difficult. Thus, for example, it would be hard to solve the type of alienation in an unjust society pointed out by Marx without first accomplishing an authentic self in the image of God. Existentialist religions such as Buddhism agree on the priority of the enlightened self before tackling the other two kinds of alienation (Pappenheim, 2013).

## Social Alienation

Social alienation refers to the lack of cohesion among groups or individuals. The low level of integration may arise from the lack of common values or beliefs among people (Ilardi, 2015). Social alienation is a growing problem in modern society and it exists in different contexts. Racism and class differentials are the most common denominators for defining social alienation today.

For example, some sociologists (Immanuel, 2018 & Ilardi, 2015) believe that racism is the most divisive social factor today. However, other researchers, such as Morrison

(2016), argue that 'class' overrides racism as the most divisive factor in modern society. For example, many Americans understand social stratification along three lines: the rich, the middle class, and the poor (Immanuel, 2018). Szirmai (2015), a sociologist, for example, uses six criteria for defining human societies: upper class, upper middle class, middle class, lower middle class, working class, and lower working class. He says many societies use such divisions to alienate people (Szirmai, 2015).

America leads most countries in practising social alienation (Immanuel, 2018). Ilardi quotes a survey from Duke University, which reported that social alienation has worsened in the past two decades. Statistics show that a quarter of the American population feels segregated from the community (Ilardi, 2015). Such people do not have anyone to confide in. Duke University further reports that 50% of Americans do not have a close "confidant," besides their family members (Ilardi, 2015). Statistics collected in 2013 reveal that this trend has worsened over the years because only 10% of the American population felt isolated at the time (Ilardi, 2015). Social alienation has spread to almost all aspects of society. For example, Ilardi (2015) says social alienation exists even in the highest and most prestigious educational institutions.

Although Henion (2019) is of the opinion that many people understand the need to eliminate social alienation, non-western societies (notably, Asia) do not have a problem with the practice (Mishra, 2012). For example, social alienation exists as an acceptable social practice in many Asian societies, like China and India (Mishra, 2012). Moreover, such societies do not experience the same effects of social alienation as Western societies do (for example, social alienation does not cause divisions among people in such societies) (Mishra, 2012).

### **Western Perception of Social Alienation**

Although studies show that the prevalence of social alienation is higher in Western societies, it is important to point out that social alienation is undesired by Western societies. Ilardi (2015) says most Western societies consider social alienation as an unwanted and negative practice. Western societies often associate social alienation with personal "emptiness". Szirmai (2015) argues that specific Western liberties and rights have contributed to this perception. Notably, the quest to be free and independent has made most people individualistic (Szirmai, 2015). This fact stems from the Western view that most people are private citizens and responsible for their destinies. There is therefore little concern regarding what other people do or need. Particularly, this view explains the quest for individual success in Western societies. Individualism is at the centre of this analysis because success shares a close relationship with individualism.

Certainly, most Westerners believe people should take ownership of their mistakes and successes (Szirmai, 2015). To avoid the pitfalls of failure, people, therefore, strive to make individual decisions, thereby fuelling the spread of social alienation. There is therefore a strong sense of indifference to people in Western societies because of this fact.

An example from the work of Pappenheim (2013) highlights an example of indifference towards people in Western societies when he explains an incident where a man attacked a woman with a knife in Kew Gardens, New York. In front of other people, the man wounded a woman with a knife and killed her, without experiencing any opposition from dozens of onlookers who witnessed the incident (Pappenheim, 2013). In fact, 38 people witnessed the incident and none of them helped the victim, even as she cried for help. This example shows the extent that social alienation has permeated Western societies and almost like a plague, it has made people less "inhuman." Consequently, Szirmai (2015) says people who are aware of social alienation in society (in the Western world) are few because many people have become immune to it. Of the extreme nature of social alienation and its undesirable effect on humanity, western societies consider it an undesirable concept (although few people do anything about it) (Pappenheim, 2013). Nonetheless, as shown through the analysis below, most non-western societies do not experience the extremes of social alienation, as witnessed in Western societies, because they have a different view of the practice. Indeed, such societies embrace social alienation as an acceptable social practice.

### **Eastern Perception of Social Alienation**

In the context of this study, the Eastern perception of social alienation mainly refers to the social, cultural and economic systems of Asia and similar subcultures shared by societies in the geographic Eastern region of the world, which inform their understanding of social alienation. Unlike Western countries, most Eastern societies support the existence of social alienation in society. A deeper comparison of Eastern and Western philosophies shows that both paradigms perceive social alienation differently. Western societies conceive social alienation as an undesirable practice, while Eastern societies perceive the same practice as an important tool for self-growth. These differences manifest in different ways. For example, Henion replicates the same differences in explaining American and Chinese lifestyles. He says Americans love a culture of self-promotion, but China prefers a society that promotes the "collective good" (Henion, 2019). A study by Michigan state university affirms the same view after it reported that many Americans preferred having virtual friends, as opposed to spending quality time outside the realms of the virtual world (Henion, 2019). Their comparatively high presence on social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, shows the extent that mass cultures prevail in American society.

Comparatively, the same study found that Chinese people preferred to have many real friends, as opposed to virtual friends (hence their fewer numbers on social networking sites, compared to America and other Western countries) (Henion, 2019). The same study affirmed that Chinese people dislike a "me too" culture, which characterizes Western society. Henion says these differences show the individualistic nature of American society, which strives to take credit for all good things that happen while avoiding blame for any wrongdoing that may occur. The Chinese culture fails to mirror the same

philosophy because people take responsibility for whatever wrongs may happen and attribute successes to teamwork and group effort (Henion, 2019). The public indifference to social alienation in the East stems from the political organization of Eastern States (Gluck, 2013). In China, for example, political mobilization occurs through the creation of an atomized society (Ernest & Breuilly, 2018). This situation is often normal for authoritarian regimes because it enables leaders to consolidate power (Wong & Bo, 2010). Moreover, in such countries, the government does not recognize the distinction between public and private life. People live in atomized systems that pledge their loyalty to a central power (Henion, 2019). Therefore, such societies regard any type of social organization that does not follow this structure as subversive to the goal of social cohesion. Wong & Bo argue that this situation is conducive to social alienation, but interestingly, they add that social alienation is a normal characteristic of such societies (Wong & Bo, 2010).

### **Alienation in Africa: Its Manifestation in Nigeria's Socio-Political Structure**

Our discussion so far has revealed that Karl Marx was not the originator of the idea of alienation. Karl Marx philosophical predecessor, Friedrich Hegel conceived alienation as part of the development of the human mind. Ludwig Feuerbach on the other hand, attributed his materialist alienation to religious colouration which he argued emanated from human's transfer of the will-power to change the world to a supernatural god. Having examined various forms of 'alienation' from socio-historical parlance; starting with Marxian conception to Weberian rationality, one key fact that subsists in every philosophical writing on the concept of alienation is the fact that, there are always two classes constantly in conflict with each other. The 19th century Europe in which Karl Marx lived and died was a century of great hope, of a dream of the perfectibility of man, of new religions of science and humanity, when men were eager to reform the world to solve the problem of poverty. But it was also a violent and volatile century, characterized by strong feelings of nationalism and revolutions in Germany, Italy, France and England. It was a period when capitalism had emerged as the dominant mode of production and prevailing economic order, following the breakdown of Feudalism and its Absolutist Monarchy; and thus had created new wealth and power all over Europe as a result of the Industrial Revolution, (Inyikalum & Uranta 2017).

But this new-found economic wealth in Europe, Asia and even elsewhere has created socio-economic conditions such that there was social differentiation among the people in terms of social inequalities in status, wealth, power, privileges and opportunities, and more importantly, in the control of economic, political and social resources. It was a time when the European Society had already been bifurcated into two classes namely, the working class and the capitalist class. The working class served basically as elements of manipulation and exploitation in the process of capital accumulation while the emergent middle class (i.e. the capitalist class) enjoyed its glorious moments in wealth and power, and thus, wanted to consolidate its position in both economic and political scheme of things, by rationalizing with some principles and ideas be it that of liberty, reason or material progress (Rodee et al, 1972).

Karl Marx, while describing this state of constant war between labour and capital noted:  
 Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, that each time ended, either in the revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of contending classes.

This conflict which dominated the socio-economic sphere of the centuries before now overwhelmed the 21<sup>st</sup>-century political order. Ironically, even the eastern bloc, the very end to which it was founded fell victim to its own medicine. The common citizens in China, North Korea and even Russia are sharply alienated by the economic and political oligarchs. This economic monster that has traversed Europe, Asia and America crept into Africa's socio-political fabrics, manifested in the few elites, and sometimes the military knights who high-jacked public offices on the promissory note of democratic and good governance and thus, circumvented the socio-economic interests of the general populace. In the words of Abdulrasheed Abdulyakeen, the economic and socio-political alienation in Africa, as manifested in full-blown mixed capitalism (mixed-economic) breeds economic dissatisfaction amongst the people in a bid to seek equality and justice in the distribution of political power and economic resources. This precarious situation as evidenced in Nigeria's elite attitude geared towards corporate self-interests of the few ruling minorities as against the view of the general populace. This trend calls for urgent attention if Nigeria ever wishes to witness any meaningful socio-economic emancipation and development of her citizenry through viable policy decisions. Succinctly put, a better approach to this is to create a mechanism to open up the utilization of people's potential and subsequently empower them with income and improved living conditions. (Abdulrasheed Abdulyakeen, 2022:1). This in large part reflects workers' and union's outcry in Africa that oftentimes, an African leader continues to turn deaf ears to.

### **Alienation: The Misery of the Masses and Nigerian Workers**

Throughout the various phases of Nigeria's political and socio-economic history, Nigerians had it so rough. Although the seed of alienation was sown a long time ago, even at periods preceding the first, second, third and fourth republics. In Nigeria, we have different forms of alienation but in this paper, we shall focus on two main forms of alienation, namely:

- i. Alienation of the masses by a few political elites
- ii. Alienation of workers by the government

### **Alienation and Pauperization of the Masses**

In Nigeria, and most African countries, the elitists' theory says, "The masses can be controlled if they are made to cry, laugh, angry, hungry and depressed". This is possible when the masses are constructed as identities fated to be crushed, ripped, and alienated from basic socio-political opportunities and equal access to the commonwealth. The masses are helpless from the misery of the powerful elites who have stolen and stored up Nigeria's commonwealth and only sprinkle as it were, fragments of it during elections by

inducing and buying the masses' votes (Olumuyiwa et al, 2019). What would a political inheritance mean in the face of hungry Esau's masses? They would, gladly sell, as we often do in Nigeria, our political birthright to the few elites. Thus, voting during an election becomes a reward or an inducement which is necessary to satisfy the requirements of a working democracy for America and her democratic allies (Olumuyiwa et al, 2019:32). Unfortunately, the social gap will continue to widen between the elites and the masses day by day. Consequently, more people are getting poorer and the few rich are getting richer. Labour thus becomes cheap commodities to be bought at the mercy of kind-hearted rich elites.

So, the greatest favour you can get is to get hired. You may need to spend your last blood to keep your job or get fired. And when you're fired, millions of unemployed and timing youths are waiting to take your place. You cannot negotiate your pay and you cannot ask for a pay rise. The protest would be the last thing you will ever dream of even in government parastatals. You cannot owe but you can be owed months of salary arrears. You are at liberty to seek redress in the court of law, but getting justice is fast becoming a thing of the past. What appears the only viable way of escape is to challenge the status quo by demolishing the political and socio-economic super-structure that supports the elites. This type of alienation is different from Marxian market-based capitalism. This type of alienation has characterized Nigerian political realities in the post-colonial era till the 21<sup>st</sup> century democratic system. According to Oluwamuyiwa:

The unequal distribution of societal wealth which has created a class of *haves and have-nots* is a continuous phenomenon in Nigeria's social strata as some set a few (sic) cabals have monopolized the wealth to be enjoyed by the masses while backing the injustices with the instruments of force derived from the government security agencies and institutions (Olumuyiwa et al, 2019:3).

Nigeria's economic and socio-political situation was foreshadowed by Karl Marx when he posited in *Das Kapital*: "The state is but a committee for managing the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie, the form in which the individuals of a ruling class assert their common interests. A biased umpire whose interest is to protect the properties and uphold the opinions of the bourgeois class over that of the masses." To move from the non-elite class to the elite class would be a herculean task. Only a few masses who accepted the elites as rightful heirs to the commonwealth are candidates admissible as legislative members of the economic and socio-political kingdom of the end. It is disheartening that this type of alienation works within a skewed democratic system where election takes place every four years. The election thus becomes a democratic stamp to legitimize alienation as the political elites will always have their ways since poverty, hunger and economic deprivations are potent weapons to get the masses' votes via vote-buying and all sorts of financial inducements.

### **The Alienation of Nigerian Workers**

Another form of alienation other than political alienation as discussed above is social alienation. Social alienation takes the form of workers' objectification. But for Karl Marx, wherever there is the objectification of labour, there exists alienation. The

manifestation of social alienation reflects the helpless condition of Nigerian workers who became objects in the hand of their masters. This condition characterized Nigerian workers' experience in this 21<sup>st</sup> century political order as reified in the present political administration's pauperization of workers through various ill-informed economic policies that objectify workers.

As if that was not enough, the galloping and skyrocketing inflation have added salt to the workers' injuries. The kangaroo 40/30 percent pay rise and the minimum wage quagmire have equally been eroded by the excruciating impacts of the madding inflation. The consumer price index as reported by the National Bureau of Statistics in March 2023 indicated that Nigeria's inflation rate accelerated to new 17years high of 20.04 percent. According to the World Bank index, Nigeria has one of the highest inflation rates globally, and the seventh highest in Sub-Sahara Africa in 2022 (World Bank Economic Report, 2022). When Muhammad Buhari took over in 2015, petrol was sold at ₦ 87 per litre. But presently, fuel is officially dispensed at ₦ 196 per litre. That is approximately about 60 percent inflation rate. Cooking gas prices also shot to ₦ 822.16/kg from ₦ 256/kg in 8years. While electricity tariffs were hiked to ₦ 68 per kw/h from ₦ 27.20kw/h despite constant power outages in most parts of the country.

Although the government increased the minimum wage to ₦ 30,000 from ₦ 18,000, the fry-pan theory of economic vaporization has taken its toll. Life of Nigerian workers has become brutish, nasty and short. In fact, the only dividend is objectification and estrangement. Your wages and salary are designed to keep you alive but impoverished. You are condemned to work and work for the political slave-master. It is in the light of this foregoing that Hakeem Ambali, the National Treasurer of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) declared:

Under the present administration, just like every other successive administration, we have witnessed so many losses of jobs. Some governors laid off so many workers in the North, East and West... Working is a hardship because of incommensurable income to the cost of living and backlog of salary arrears... rest is no longer sweet because of the backlog of pension arrears owed retirees (Punch Newspaper, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2023)

Festus Osito, the President of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) while lamenting the pitiable working conditions of Nigerian workers described it as dehumanizing; "The plight of Nigerian workers has not been good if you consider the price of things in the market since 2019 that alone speaks volume, not to talk about the purchasing power of an average Nigerian... Nigerian workers have been battered (The Nation, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2023).

### Conclusion

Karl Marx's reflections on workers' condition in the *Manuscripts* are extremely powerful indictments of the system: Labour indeed produces marvels for the rich, but it produces privation for the worker. It produces palaces, but hovels for the worker. It procures beauty, but deformity for the worker. It replaces labour with machines, but it casts some

of the workers back to barbarous forms of labour and turns others into machines. It produces intelligence, but it produces idiocy and cretinism for the worker (Marx, 1976). Democratic mechanisms have been circumvented to serve the interest of the political elites. Electioneering is a mere political charade to receive domestic and foreign political acceptance. Alienation has crept into Africa's economic and socio-political life. Every meaningful step must consider revolution and total restructuring of our economic and socio-political superstructure.

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