

CRITICAL THINKING AS A TOOL FOR UNMASKING THE IRRATIONAL CHARACTER OF THE ESTABLISHED ORDER

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Abstract

This paper explored the issue of critical thinking as a tool for unmasking the irrational character of the established order. The core purpose of every human society is the quest for wellbeing and happiness. However, the established order in society embodies numerous ills that keep the human being enchained even in the face of the professed freedom. These hidden ills that characterise the social and political order can also be unravelled by negative thinking which is critical thinking. Negative thinking which is critical thinking is the kind of thinking that is able to open up the repressive aspects that are hidden in the “progress” and “success” that are often celebrated by the society. The paper, drawing from content analysis, concludes that negative thinking as critical thinking could lead to the unbundling of true human freedom which will consist in true happiness for the person of contemporary society.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Irrational Character, Established Order, Negative Thinking, Human Freedom

INTRODUCTION

Every human society or institution has its dark sides. These are elements that may be hidden, overlooked, or not widely discussed but nonetheless play a significant role in shaping the society. According to Geber, (2023), societies have dark sides that embody systemic injustices and inequalities based on factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity can persist and contribute to a dark side within a society. Corruption within institutions, whether it be political, economic, or social, can undermine trust in governance and hinder the overall wellbeing of the society. Violations of human rights, including issues such as discrimination, persecution, or abuse, can cast a dark shadow over a society. The stifling of free speech, liberties, political dissent, or opposition can be indicative of a dark side where individuals' rights to express themselves are curtailed. Exploitative practices that harm the environment, often driven by economic interests, can have long-term consequences and represent a darker aspect of societal behaviour. The exploitation of vulnerable individuals through human trafficking represents a dark and often hidden aspect of societies. There also be the suppression of cultural expression, language, or identity can be indicative of a society's darker side, where diversity is not embraced but instead stifled. For any society or institution to remain on its toes, there has to be conscientious efforts at unravelling some of these ills.

Unravelling these hidden ills within societies and institutions requires a careful and critical examination of various aspects, often going beyond surface-level observations. Critical thinking plays a crucial role in identifying, understanding, and addressing these hidden challenges. The application of critical thinking in this context involves challenging societal norms and questioning assumptions. Pel, *et al* (2023) aver that by examining deeply ingrained

beliefs and cultural norms, individuals can uncover hidden issues that might be overlooked. Examining the underlying social structures and power dynamics is essential. This includes investigating how institutions, policies, and societal norms contribute to hidden ills such as discrimination, inequality, or systemic injustice. According to Asiegbu (1973), in his analysis of Marcuse's critical theory, negative thinking is critical thinking. Negative thinking which refers to a mindset that focuses on pessimism, doubt, and critical interpretations of situations by dwelling on potential problems, looking out for failure is critical thinking to the extent it leads to the unravelling of situations that may require solutions. This paper is an attempt to draw from Asiegbu, the view of negative thinking as critical thinking and the employment of this tool in unmasking the irrational character of the established order.

The Established Order

The established order basically, describes the existing social, political, economic, or organizational structure within a society (Fukuyama, 2011). It represents the current state of affairs and the prevailing system of rules, norms, and institutions that govern a particular community or nation. The established order can encompass various aspects of life, including government, economic systems, cultural norms, and social hierarchies. The established order dictates the social structure, including roles, expectations, and relationships within a society. This may include divisions based on factors such as class, gender, ethnicity, or other social categories. The political order defines the system of governance in a country, encompassing the constitution, laws, and institutions that regulate political power and decision-making (Bendix & Huntington, 1971). The established economic order outlines the prevailing economic structure, including systems such as capitalism, socialism, or mixed economies, as well as the distribution of wealth and resources. The established order influences cultural norms, values, and traditions within a society. It shapes behaviours, beliefs, and expectations regarding what is considered acceptable or taboo. Various institutions, such as educational, religious, and legal institutions, contribute to and are influenced by the established order. These institutions play a crucial role in maintaining or challenging the status quo (Fukuyama, 2004). The established order often reflects existing power dynamics, with certain groups or individuals holding more influence and authority than others. This can lead to issues of social justice and inequality.

The established order in Nigeria encompasses a complex and dynamic socio-political environment. Nigeria is a federal republic with a presidential system of government. Nigeria operates as a federal republic, consisting of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja). The political structure includes elected officials at the federal and state levels. The country has experienced periods of military rule, but as of my last update, it was under civilian rule. Nigeria has a mixed economy with a significant dependence on oil exports. However, the country faces economic challenges, including diversification concerns, corruption, and issues related to income inequality and poverty. Nigeria is known for its rich cultural diversity, with over 250 ethnic groups and multiple languages. This diversity is reflected in the social fabric of the country and contributes to its cultural richness. Nigeria has made efforts to strengthen its democratic institutions, holding regular elections at the federal and state levels. However, challenges related to electoral integrity and governance have been topics of discussion. Social structures in Nigeria include a mix of urban and rural communities, and cultural practices vary across regions. The country has a youthful population, and issues such as education and healthcare are significant concerns.

The established order in Nigeria continue to face a number of challenges. Nigeria has grappled and continues to grapple with issues of corruption within various sectors, affecting governance and economic development. Many regions have faced security challenges, including insurgency and communal conflicts. Despite being a major oil producer, Nigeria faces economic challenges, including unemployment and the need for economic diversification. There are ongoing efforts to address infrastructure deficiencies, including power supply and transportation systems. These challenges manifest the irrationality of the established order.

The Irrational Character of the Established Order

Irrationality generally refers to behavior, decisions, or beliefs that deviate from logical or reasonable thinking. It implies actions or thoughts that lack coherence, consistency, or adherence to sound reasoning (Kolakowski, 1985). People may exhibit irrational behavior for various reasons, including emotional influences, cognitive biases, lack of information, or external pressures. In irrational situations, emotions can play a significant role in leading individuals to make decisions that may not align with rational thinking. Fear, anger, love, or other strong emotions can cloud judgment and lead to impulsive or irrational actions. Cognitive biases are systematic patterns of deviation from norm or rationality in judgment. They often result from mental shortcuts or heuristics that people use to simplify complex decisions (Ditto, *et al*, 2009). Examples include confirmation bias, where individuals favor information that confirms their existing beliefs, and anchoring bias, where decisions are influenced by an initial piece of information. Social and cultural influences can contribute to irrational behavior. Groupthink, societal norms, and cultural expectations may shape individuals' decisions and actions in ways that may not be objectively rational.

Making decisions without adequate information can lead to irrational outcomes. Limited knowledge or misinformation can result in choices that are not aligned with the best available evidence. Individual psychological factors, such as stress, fatigue, or mental health issues, can impair cognitive functioning and contribute to irrational behaviour (Ditto *et al.*, 2009). External pressures, such as societal expectations, peer pressure, or economic constraints, may lead individuals to act in ways that are not in their best interest from a rational perspective. Many aspects of the established order are irrational for various reasons, including ethical concerns, injustice, inefficiency, or lack of alignment with societal needs (Ancell, 2020). If the established order perpetuates inequality, discrimination, or injustice, individuals may deem it irrational. For example, Nigeria is a federal republic with a presidential system of government. Nigeria, as a country is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual. In Nigeria today, some ethnic groups are classified as major while others are classified as minor. In Nigeria today, many, if not all of the ethnic groups are crying for one form of marginalization or the other. Protection of minority rights is nothing to write home about. In the country today, in spite of functional political, judicial, and executive orders, what seems to be prevailing are all forms of injustices, marginalization, crimes, inefficiency in government offices, corruption and abuse of human rights. Ethnic and religious tensions have at times resulted in conflicts and challenges to national unity. An established order that fails to address these issues may be seen as irrational in terms of promoting social cohesion

When corruption is prevalent within political, economic, or social institutions, it can lead to irrational decision-making and resource allocation (Tanzi, 1998). Such practices undermine trust in the established order. Nigeria has faced longstanding issues related to corruption within various sectors, including government, law enforcement, and business. Rampant corruption

can lead to irrational resource allocation, hinder economic development, and erode public trust in institutions. Disparities in wealth distribution, access to education, and economic opportunities have been identified as significant challenges. An irrational established order may perpetuate social inequalities, hindering the overall development and well-being of the population. Power dynamics in Nigeria are influenced by factors such as ethnicity, regionalism, and resource distribution. The country has faced challenges related to governance, corruption, and security issues, particularly in regions affected by insurgency and conflicts.

If the established order is characterized by bureaucratic red tape, inefficiency, or a lack of responsiveness to the needs of the people, individuals may see it as irrational and in need of reform (Valentini, 2017). In cases where the established order is characterized by excessive control, censorship, and suppression of dissent, individuals may perceive it as irrational and detrimental to democratic principles. If the established order is resistant to change and fails to adapt to evolving societal needs and challenges, it may be considered irrational. Nigeria has faced security challenges, including insurgency in certain regions. An established order that struggles to effectively address these security concerns may be perceived as lacking in rational strategies to ensure the safety and stability of the nation.

An established order may be deemed irrational if it consistently fails to address pressing societal issues such as poverty, healthcare, education, and environmental concerns. An established order may be deemed irrational if it consistently fails to address pressing societal issues such as poverty, healthcare, education, and environmental concerns. Nigeria has experienced periods of political instability, including military coups and transitions between civilian and military rule. Political instability can be seen as an irrational aspect of the established order, as it disrupts governance and economic development. Inadequate infrastructure, such as unreliable power supply and transportation systems, can be seen as a reflection of an established order that may not prioritize or effectively address the essential needs of the population. The irrational character of the established order mostly come to light through negative thinking which is critical thinking.

Negative Thinking as Critical Thinking

Negative thinking refers to a mindset characterized by pessimism, self-doubt, and a focus on potential problems or drawbacks rather than positive aspects. It can impact various aspects of life, including mental well-being, relationships, and overall productivity. This involves imagining the worst-case scenario in any situation (Villavicencio, 2011). To counter this, try to realistically assess the likelihood of the worst outcome and focus on more positive or neutral possibilities. Assuming you know what others are thinking or that they have negative opinions about you can contribute to negative thoughts. Instead of mind reading, communicate openly with others to understand their perspectives. Focusing solely on the negative aspects of a situation while ignoring the positive can contribute to a negative mindset. Make an effort to acknowledge and appreciate the positive elements as well.

Drawing broad conclusions based on isolated incidents can lead to negative thinking (Villavicencio, 2011). Challenge these generalizations by looking for evidence that contradicts them and considering a more balanced perspective. This is seeing situations in extremes, without recognizing shades of grey. Instead of thinking in absolutes, try to consider the nuances and complexities of a situation. Taking responsibility for events beyond your control or attributing external events to yourself can lead to negative thinking. Practice recognizing when

things are not your fault or are beyond your influence. Holding rigid expectations for yourself or others can lead to feelings of guilt and disappointment. Replace "should" statements with more realistic and flexible goals.

Negative thinking is critical thinking to the extent that it involves a mindset characterized by a focus on potential problems, drawbacks, or unfavourable outcomes. It often involves pessimistic interpretations of situations, self-doubt, and a tendency to emphasize the negative aspects of experiences. It is basically, a cognitive skill and mindset characterized by the objective analysis and evaluation of information, arguments, or situations. It involves being open-minded, considering various perspectives, and making reasoned judgments based on evidence and logical reasoning. Unlike positive thinking, which is a mental attitude and approach of focusing on the good, expecting positive outcomes, and interpreting situations in an optimistic light, negative thinking seeks to bring to light problems or potential problems so that they can become public knowledge. Without exposing the problems, there is no way to know about the problems, let alone solving them. Negative thinking in exposing the problem is aligned to critical thinking which is basically the attempt to break down a problem situation and to find solutions. Negative thinking, which is the same as critical thinking is very important in exposing the irrationality of the established order.

Critical Thinking and Exposing the Irrationality of the Established Order

Critical thinking involves the ability to analyse, evaluate, and synthesize information in a thoughtful and systematic manner. It is a process of actively and objectively questioning and examining ideas, arguments, and beliefs to arrive at well-reasoned conclusions. When applied to the established order or prevailing societal norms, critical thinking is crucial in exposing irrationality and challenging the status quo. Critical thinking helps to identify the assumptions underlying the established order or prevailing beliefs, as well as questioning certain beliefs or practices that are considered the norm to ascertain whether they are based on evidence or tradition (Kiran, 2020). Critical thinking involves the skill of questioning assumptions, especially those inherent in the established order or prevailing societal norms. When individuals engage in questioning assumptions, they are challenging the foundational beliefs and principles that underpin a given system. Critical thinking helps in scrutinizing information and data presented by the established order, as well as evaluating the reliability and credibility of sources, and consider alternative perspectives and viewpoints.

Critical thinking makes one aware of personal and societal biases that may influence your thinking. It helps to examine whether the established order is perpetuating certain biases or reinforcing particular narratives. Critical thinking makes it difficult to accept things on face value. It challenges conventional wisdom and helps to explore whether the established order is based on outdated or flawed assumptions. Critical thinking plays a crucial role in recognizing biases within the established order (Kiran, 2020). Biases, whether conscious or unconscious, can shape policies, decisions, and societal norms. It helps to analyse how decisions are made within the established order. Evaluate whether these decisions are based on evidence and sound reasoning or if biases are influencing the process. By applying critical thinking to recognize and address biases, individuals can contribute to creating more equitable and just systems within the established order. It involves a continuous process of questioning, analysing, and challenging assumptions to promote fairness and inclusivity. Critical thinking fosters a curious mindset, prompting individuals to ask questions and explore the complexities of issues.

According to Schuitmaker, (2012), critical thinking employs empirical evidence to support or refute claims made by the established order. Critical thinking helps to interrogate the historical context from which the established order emerged. It helps to understand how social, political, and economic factors may have influenced the development of prevailing norms. Critical thinking involves the objective analysis and evaluation of information, arguments, or beliefs to make reasoned and well-informed decisions. The use of empirical evidence is a crucial aspect of critical thinking, as it provides a foundation for rational and evidence-based conclusions. Critical thinking requires a demand for evidence to support claims or arguments. Individuals should question statements that lack empirical support and seek evidence-based reasoning. Critical thinking helps in distinguishing between correlation and causation when interpreting empirical evidence. Critical thinkers recognize that a correlation between two variables does not necessarily imply a causal relationship. Critical thinking involves challenging assumptions and beliefs that lack empirical support. Individuals should be willing to revise their views based on new, well-supported evidence.

Critical thinking helps foster an environment where open and respectful dialogue is encouraged. Critical thinking plays a crucial role in fostering societal dialogue by promoting open-mindedness, reasoned discourse, and a willingness to engage with diverse perspectives (Kiran, 2020). It does this by encouraging individuals to question assumptions and beliefs. This questioning fosters dialogue as people explore the underlying reasons behind differing perspectives. Critical thinking helps to nurture the skill of active listening, seeking to understand different viewpoints without immediately dismissing them. Individuals skilled in critical thinking are inclined to respect diverse perspectives, recognizing the richness that comes from a variety of viewpoints. Societal dialogue benefits from this openness to diverse ideas. Critical thinking encourages individuals to express disagreement in a constructive manner. Instead of confrontation, dialogue becomes an opportunity for learning and growth.

Critical thinkers are trained to recognize and avoid logical fallacies in arguments. This leads to more rational and well-constructed discussions, minimizing misunderstandings. Critical thinkers actively seek common ground, even in the midst of differing opinions. Finding shared values or goals can facilitate a more productive dialogue (Schuitmaker, 2012). Critical thinking helps break through echo chambers where individuals only hear perspectives that align with their own. Engaging with diverse ideas challenges preconceived notions and contributes to a more dynamic societal dialogue. Critical thinkers are open to adapting their views based on new information and evidence. This adaptability enhances the fluidity and growth of societal dialogue. Critical thinking skills contribute to informed citizenship, as individuals are better equipped to understand complex societal issues. Informed citizens can engage in meaningful and well-informed dialogue. Critical thinking fosters a culture of inquiry where questions are encouraged, and individuals are motivated to seek deeper understanding. This culture enriches societal dialogue by promoting continuous learning.

Critical thinking employs negative thinking in identifying inconsistencies or contradictions within the established order (Mercuse, 1972). It helps to point out instances where policies or beliefs may contradict each other. Critical thinkers apply logical reasoning to examine the coherence of ideas and policies within the established order. They identify inconsistencies by evaluating whether various elements align with each other logically. When different policies or principles contradict each other, it signals a need for reevaluation. Critical thinking involves comparing stated principles or values with actual practices within the established order. Identifying discrepancies between what is professed and what is implemented highlights

inconsistencies. Critical thinkers consider the historical context to understand how and why certain policies were established. Examining changes over time may reveal inconsistencies in the application or interpretation of established rules. Assessing the outcomes of policies helps critical thinkers identify any unintended consequences or inconsistencies with the intended goals. If policies are not achieving their stated objectives, it prompts a critical examination. Changes in cultural or social norms may expose inconsistencies within the established order. Critical thinkers consider how shifts in societal expectations impact the relevance and coherence of existing policies. Critical thinking involves anticipating and identifying unintended consequences of policies or actions. Unforeseen outcomes can reveal inconsistencies in the planning or execution of established rules. Critical thinkers advocate for accountability in the implementation of policies. Holding individuals or institutions accountable for inconsistencies contributes to the improvement of the established order.

Critical thinking helps to project alternative approaches or solutions that may address the shortcomings of the established order. Critical thinking offers constructive criticism rather than merely criticizing without providing alternatives. Critical thinking is a valuable skill that involves analysing and evaluating information and arguments thoughtfully and systematically. When applied to established orders or conventional approaches, critical thinking can lead to the exploration and projection of alternative approaches. Critical thinking involves considering various perspectives and viewpoints. This helps individuals see beyond the dominant or traditional approach and consider alternative ways of understanding or addressing a situation. Critical thinking involves effective problem-solving. When faced with challenges within the established order, individuals who think critically can generate creative and innovative solutions, often leading to the projection of alternative approaches. Critical thinking involves considering the potential consequences of different actions or approaches. This forward-thinking process helps individuals project the possible outcomes of alternative approaches within the established order. Critical thinking serves as a catalyst for questioning, evaluating, and projecting alternative approaches within established orders. It is a dynamic process that fosters adaptability and innovation, ultimately contributing to the evolution of systems, methods, and ideas

Negative Thinking as Critical Thinking

Asiegbu (1970), dissecting Marcuse's critical theory observes that Marcuse's main objective was the abolition of misery, want and suffering and the creation of happiness and pleasure. Marcuse believed that this would constitute genuine human freedom. Marcuse was writing and contending with contemporary society which he characterised as "totalitarian unfreedom", harbouring misery and unhappiness. Marcuse (1972: p.XV) held that in the contemporary society, affluence was accompanied by intensified exploitation, such that, man in such a society is alienated. Man is not only alienated but also insured to his alienation that he is not even conscious of his condition.

It is against this condition that Marcuse seeks to awaken the critical spirit embedded in negative thinking, that is at the same time, critique, contradiction and transcendence (Asiegbu, 1970). Asiegbu avers that negative thinking could be traced back to the Frankfurt School which is widely considered to be the birthplace of Critical Theory. The Frankfurt School had such personalities as Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and others who were Marxists to different extents, hence, critical theory is linked to Marxism. All of Marx's engagement with philosophy and philosophers could be said to have occurred through critique.

This may be why Marx has been described as the first great user of the critical method. All of Marx's works also seem to flow out of his desire to analyse the despotism of capitalism. This may be why Shapiro (1974: p.1094) held that For Marx, critical reason has always meant critique of ideology. Thus, underlying critical theory was the objective of pursuing social change towards the realisation of a truly human society (Jay, 1974: p.82). No wonder, Marcuse would align with critical theory by arguing that negative thinking is the first and foremost critical thinking. Marcuse writes:

It is not only critique of a conformist logic, which denies the reality of contradictions, it is also a critique of the given state of affairs on its own ground – (a Critique) of the established system of life, which denies its own promises and potentialities (Marcuse, 1980: p. 322).

Asiegbu (1970) maintains that only an analysis which reveals the irrationality of the inner connections between progress in pacification and progress on destruction can provide the possibility for breaking that link. Negative thinking is critical thinking to the extent that it remains a protest against the unimaginable waste of human and material resources and the unhuman use of brute force in contemporary society.

Conclusion

According to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, man is born free but everywhere he is in chains. These chains are captured in the evils that are hidden in the character and operations of the established order. Evils that keep the human person enchained, and still keeps him blind from seeing his condition. Negative thinking which is critical thinking is the kind of thinking that is able to open up the repressive aspects that are hidden in the “progress” and “success” that is often celebrated by the society. Negative thinking as critical thinking could lead to the unbounding of true human freedom which will consist in true happiness for the person of contemporary society.

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