

## On the Theory of Relative Inversion of the State

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### Abstract

*This paper interrogates the interface between developmental crisis and the specificity of experience and character of the state in peripheral post colonial social formations. In the main, the paper posits that typically, the state in peripheral post colonial social formation is relatively inverted, and that on account of this inversion, access to state power by the political elite appears to oftentimes guarantees access to economic power. While taking cognisance of the Marxian historical materialism and the place of the state in capitalist society, and also noting the Alavian observations on the state in peripheral capitalism, the paper provides insight into the inherent contradictions in the character of peripheral post colonial states. The main line of the postulation of the theory of relative inversion of the state is that in typical postcolonial political ecosystem, given the wealthmine syndrome, the political superstructure determines the economic substructure in terms of who gets what and when. All these have profound implications, and largely accounts for Lumpendemocracy and wealthmine syndrome, as cogs in the wheel of genuine development.*

**Keywords:** Lumpendemocracy, peripheral capitalism, post colonial state, primitive accumulation, relative inversion and wealthmine syndrome.

### Introduction

Theoretical insight into the real character of the state has been of concern to many perceptive scholars. Incidentally, one of the most profound insight has been historical materialist analysis of the state by Karl Marx. In his analysis, he interpreted history materially, and accordingly opined that the basis of society's life is material production. Thus, for him, the type of production in material life is the *base*. The base determines the general character of social, political, legal, cultural and spiritual processes in life which he identified as the *superstructure*. The base or *sub-structure*, that is, material production determines the superstructure. The implication is that changes in material production also affect or change the character of social relations in life. There is no doubt that his analysis, though influenced by the writing of other scholars before him, is based largely on Marx's study of incipient and metropolitan capitalism of his time.

Given his study of the character of peripheral capitalism, Alavi (1982) posits that in Third World social formations, that there is excessive enlargement of powers of control and regulation that the state has accumulated and elaborated which extends far beyond the logic of what may be necessary for the orderly function of the social institution of the society over which the state presides. In particular, Alavi (in Alavi and Shannin, ed., 1982:301) avers that: "unlike in the advanced capitalist country where the state has developed in the wake of a simple dominant class and there subordinate to it, we find that in peripheral capitalist countries, there is instead a very considerable accretion of power of control." This position is instructive.

There no doubt that the unique experiences through which colonial states evolved and transmuted into contemporary peripheral post colonial states has had significant impact and subsisting consequences on the texture of states in post colonial formations. The import of this is that any attempt to understand social reality in peripheral post colonial social formations must necessary recognize the fact that colonialism imposed heavily on the character of production but also their various contending struggles. Thus, beyond acknowledging the views of Marx on historical materialism and the state in capitalist society, and the observations of Alavi (1982) on the state in peripheral capitalism, this paper posits that typically, state in peripheral post colonial social formation is relatively inversed. The critical question is how? How is state in post colonial social formation relatively inversed? In other words, what is the theory of relative inversion of the state, all about?

In response to the foregoing question, this paper is divided into four interrelated parts. Following this introductory briefs, is the second part, it is on the relevant conceptual issues in relative inversion of the state. The third part is on the postulations and specificities of relative inversion of the state analysis, while the fourth part is on the implications and concluding analysis.

### **Conceptual Issues in Relative Inversion of the State Analysis**

*Relative inversion and lumpendemocracy.* The theory of relative inversion of the state is better understood as an integer of lumpendemocracy thesis. To start with, the term or notion of lumpen is not new in political science lexicon. Relevant literature attests that the term is evident in the views and works of Karl Marx, 1818 – 1883; and has also been associated with the revolutionary thought and activism of Mikhail Bakunin, 1814 – 1876. In the classical Marxian construct, lumpen is used as a prefix to describe a specific segment of micro-class of the proletariat. Accordingly, for Marx *lumpenproletariat* (that is, lumpen + proletariat) is a micro-class or group who have no real stake in the economic system and who are at the same time willing to offer themselves to the highest bidder. Unlike the proletariat, who are characteristically industrial workers that are exploited by the

capitalist, and are supposed to rebel and eventually create a communist democratic system; lumpenproletariat are typically criminals, vagabonds and beggars.

For Mikhail Bakunin, a Russian aristocrat and perhaps one of history's best known anarchists; lumpenproletariat consists of the underworld of the society notably, vagabonds, pimps, thieves, and murderers. Curiously, while condemning the state as humankind's greatest obstacle to attain liberty, Bakunin contends that a successful revolution against the state would come about by arming the lumpenproletariat (Baradat, 2013). As a matter of fact, unlike Karl Marx, whose concept of the lumpenproletariat is a docile micro-class of people, whose docility is attributed to their lack of consciousness; in the case of Bakunin, lumpenproletariat represents a proletariat revolutionary force that requires profound external energy to transform to motive force. Some ideas and notions of lumpenproletariat are useful in our conceptualization and characterization of lumpen democracy and theory of relative inversion of the state.

In the extant literature, we observe that there is little or no attempt to extend the *lumpen* construct to the conceptualization of the state and the conceptualization of democracy and dysfunctional democracy in Thirdworld social environment. This is where the term lumpen construct and theory of relative inversion of the state comes in. Against the backdrop of the foregoing, we recall and note that the key element of the materialist theory of the state is that the necessity for existence, the form and function as well as the inner structure of the state particularly in capitalist society is determined as an essential, integral element of the society by the economic and social production process. It impacts on or determines the existence, the form and function of state in the polity. This entails that meaningful insight into and analysis of the workings of post colonial social formations must necessarily focus not only on the theory of overdeveloped state, whose main proponent, is Hamza Alavi; but also the theory of relative inversion of the state.

*Between substructure and superstructure.* In his analysis, Karl Marx interpreted history materially, and accordingly believed that the basis of society's life is material production. According to Marx, the type of production in material life is the *base*, which he calls the *substructure*. This, is such that the base determines the general character of social, political, legal, cultural and spiritual processes in life which he identified as the *superstructure*. The base or substructure, that is, material production determines the superstructure.

The implication is that changes in material production also affect or change the character of social relations in life. Incidentally, in relative inversion of the state frame of analysis - given the circumstance of wealthmine syndrome and postcolonial political ecosystem - there is what we call relative inversion. We will get back to this. For now let us also explore the concepts of primitive accumulation and wealthmine syndrome as signposts to our explication of theory of relative inversion.

**Primitive accumulation:** in classical Marxian thought and orthodoxy, primitive accumulation is considered a process that begins with:

The gathering together of commodities, then gold and silver, and finally money by which nascent capitalism created the material base – through the systematic exploitation of labour, expropriation of resources, and colonial plundering – that facilitated its dominance in the economic and political sphere (Skinner in Mclean, ed., 1996: 404).

In line with the foregoing, tendencies of primitive accumulation in contemporary post colonial social formations are manifest in several spheres. The first is the systematic exploitation of labour through marginal emoluments, non-payment or delayed pay after work and underemployment. The problem is exacerbated by and the existence of the army of the unemployed. The second is through the expropriation of resources by the functionaries of the state, especially by the federal level in Nigeria. Here the huge amount that go into the servicing of the budget of the legislative and executive arms of Nigeria's federal government, including fat wardrobe allowance, are cases in point. Thirdly, neo-colonial plundering. The act of neo-colonial plundering. The act of neo-colonial plundering is undertaken through the unequal duality of local and international capital. The relationship facilitates neo-colonial dominance in the economic and even political spheres through unequal exchange and meddlesomeness of international financial institutions, etc.

A critical function of the post colonial state is that it mediates between the competing interests of the metropolitan and indigenous bourgeoisie, the state is simply a means of suprentending wealth and source of primitive accumulation. Curiously, the decreasing opportunity available to the members of the dominant class in alliance with international capital, given the overwhelming import of globalization is thus stamping a character of power and powerlessness on the local faction. Compromise is being conceded to big capital leaving the army of anxious and upwardly tensed and bemused local partners in cut throat dance for survival. In such a contest, no institution, process or value is spared so long as it can serve any useful purpose in the process of primitive accumulation for self regarding survival.

**Wealthmine syndrome:** Beside substructure and superstructure concepts, wealthmine syndrome is another critical element in the relative inversion of the state frame of analysis. Particularly in postcolonial political ecosystem, emergent and aspiring ruling class elements merely focus their attention exclusively at the level of superstructure. This is such that what we find is their struggle for control of the state assumes a process for access to the material base. The import is that the ruling or political class see the state as a

wealthmine to be plundered in the process of primitive accumulation. Politics is accordingly seen more as a business with high economic returns.

As argued in an earlier paper titled "*Lumpendemocracy and the Dialectics of Insecurity in Nigeria*", in liberal democratic formations:

the governing elite superintend or husband the state in the interest of the capitalist exploiting elite through the process of production. In lumpendemocratic formations, the situation is totally different. Exploitation through the generation of surplus value in the production process is absent or at best marginal. What we observe is direct and schematic privatization of state resources, the nations' commonwealth, through over inflated contracts, skewed programmes and projects as well as outright scams and the like that guarantee that the state continues to serve as wealthmine to be exploited without reservation or restraint (Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2015: 280 - 281).

In a postcolonial political ecosystem, wealthmine syndrome is often pursued with Machiavellian unscrupulousness in order to capture and retain power; and very importantly, a critical factor in theory of relative inversion of the state or frame of analysis.

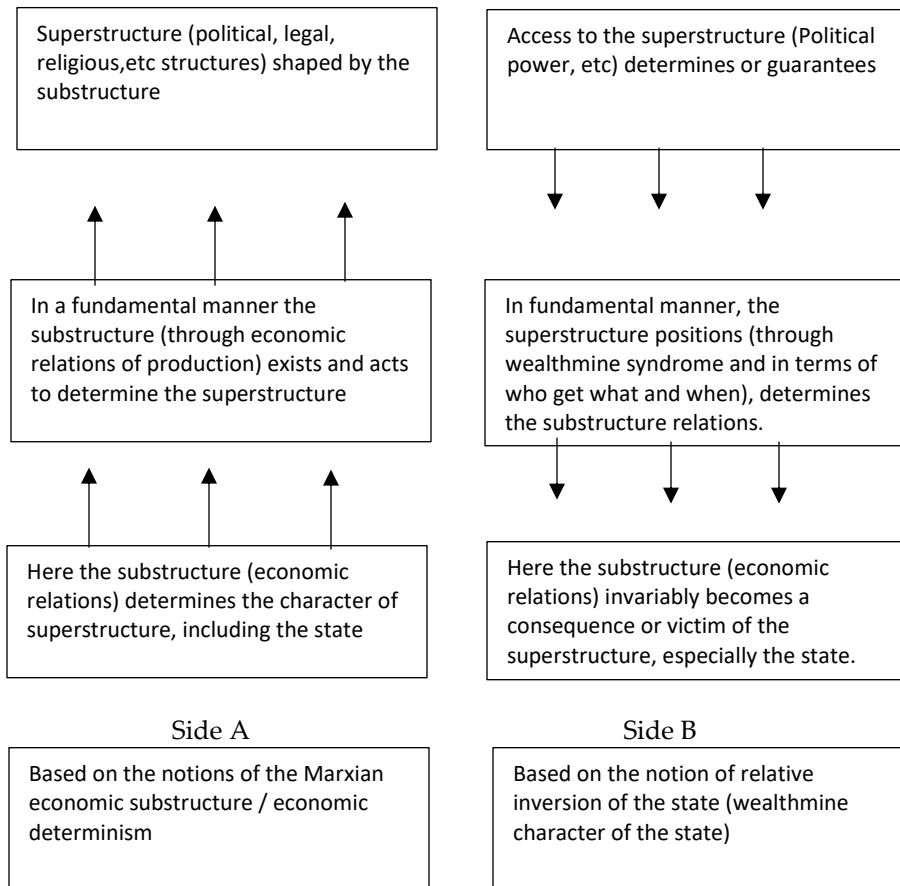
#### **Postulations and Specificities of Relative Inversion of the State Analysis**

The main line of the postulation of theory of relative inversion of the state or frame of analysis is that in typical postcolonial political ecosystem, given the wealthmine syndrome, the political superstructure determines the economic substructure in terms of who gets what and when. In postcolonial states, particularly in the case of the state in Nigeria, which was studied, the state emerged without regard to the inherent social forces, and has remained largely characterized by wealthmine syndrome; this such that access to the superstructure, particularly political power determines or guarantees economic wellbeing. Thus, we find that in a fundamental manner, the superstructure positions (through wealthmine syndrome and in terms of who get what and when), determines the substructure relations.

In the light of the foregoing, the substructure (economic relations) invariably becomes a consequence or victim of the superstructure, especially the state. This is such that access and the quest to occupy political power becomes inescapably a do or die affair, associated with cut-throat struggle, and quest for domination and political power. See Figure 1 below, particularly Side B, which contrasts with Side A. As can be seen while Side A is depicts the substructure (economic relations) which determines the character of the superstructure, including the state; Side B is on the substructure (economic relations) which invariably becomes a consequence or victim of the superstructure. This is achieved through direct and schematic privatization of state resources, over inflated contracts, skewed

programmes and projects as well as outright scams and the like that guarantee that the state continues to serve as wealthmine for the political and governing elites.

Figure 1: COMPARATIVE SCHEMATIC OF THE STATE AND RELATIVE INVERSION OF THE STATE



Source: Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2009:181), with additional insights

Note that while Side 'A' above schematic of the state is based on economic determinism, Side 'B' emphasizes the fact that based on the wealthmine character of the state and impact of primitive accumulation that the state in post colonial state is actually relatively inverted.

The logic of the relative inversion of the state is based largely on the wealthmine syndrome and character of the state, such that the political superstructure determining the economic substructure in terms of who gets what and when. That is to say unlike

conventional conceptualization based on Marxian economic determinism, where the economic substructure largely determines the superstructures (political, legal, religious, etc) in postcolonial political ecosystem, political superstructure determines the economic substructure in terms of who gets what and when.

### **Implication and Conclusion.**

The main line of the theory of relative inversion of the state is that peripheral post colonial states such as Nigeria, which emerged with little or no regard to inherent social forces or consideration of what the people wanted or wished has remained largely inorganic, and at best dysfunctionally organic (Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2009). The state has come to represent a contradiction of sort. It is a source of primitive accumulation for the political class, associates and courtiers and a factor of unproductive exploitation of the gross majority of the people. Here the substructure (economic relations) invariably becomes a consequence or victim of the superstructure, especially the state. This has consequences on the dialectics between the specificity of the state and character of politics in post colonial social formations: characterized by Lumpendemocracy and essentially a cog in the wheel of genuine development.

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