

Revealing Common Misconceptions in Marxian Sociology

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Abstract

Sociology is one of the social sciences disciplines which analyses various social issues for the benefit of the society. However, for this assumption to materialize, sociologists must consume and disseminate undistorted knowledge. This paper provides a reflection of Marxian sociology by showing how contemporary scholars have tried to produce a misleading version of the same, and therefore, distorts the central argument of Marxian sociology. To reveal these misconceptions, this paper focuses on three common concepts namely conflict, structure and economy. For contemporary scholars, these concepts are said to characterize Marxian Sociology. So, they claim, Marxism is a conflict theory, a structural theory and also a theory of economic determinism. To what extent are these claims true? This paper provides answers by reviewing the original premises of Marxism together with these claims. It then provides the root causes of the misconceptions and advises contemporary sociologists to work on original premises of Marx rather than consume these distorted versions. The author has used qualitative–interpretive methodology and documentary review method of data generation to analyze this complex phenomenon.

Keywords: Marxism, Conflict theory, Structural theory, Economic determinism, Ideology

Introduction

Karl Marx's theorization originates from the 19th century European society. His theorization is dominantly referred to as Marxism or Historical materialism. Though Marx did not call himself a sociologist, his theorization on society provides scientific sociological insights. It is from this background where Gouldner (1973) categorizes sociology into two branches; academic and Marxian. The former belongs to Idealism¹ while the

¹ The philosophy of idealism is categorized into four perspectives (phases) namely, classical idealism (Socrates and Plato), Hegelian Idealism (Hegel), Empiricism (Aristotle) and Positivism (Comte and Durkheim). All these perspectives are regarded as *Idealist* due to the answer they provide on the basic philosophical question which asks; *What is primary between consciousness and being?* Thus, philosophies, theories and ideas in this world become divided into Idealism or Materialism with

latter belongs to Materialism. For Gouldner (1973), Academic Sociology originated from Saint Simon, August Comte, Bazard and Enfantin. All these conceived Sociology as a kind of *priesthood*; a religion of humanity. This kind of sociology was then advanced by Emile Durkheim & Talcott Parsons (Functionalism), Max Weber and then ‘American Sociology’ in general (Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology, Symbolic interactionism, Social construction of reality, Structuration theory etc.). Unlike Marxism, academic sociology is ahistorical, empirical and ideological as it is used to protect both the system and the controllers of the system. It advocates for system reforms rather than revolution/change regardless of rampant miseries brought about by capitalism.

Marxian Sociology, conversely, provides a different kind of theorisation. The basic interest of Marxian Sociology is social change (Gouldner, 1970:112). It views social problems as inherent within the mode of production. Then, through this science, men can solve their problems by changing the mode. In the words of Borisov and Libman (1985), this kind of Sociology is a major gain of scientific thought. It discovered the laws of social development that are independent of people’s consciousness and will, thereby making it possible to scientifically foresee the future of humankind. It is a powerful theoretical weapon of the oppressed in their struggle for social emancipation. It also brings true knowledge of the universe, and armours mankind with the laws that govern its changes.

Despite this scientific view of society, some contemporary scholars who have tried to re-write the work of Marx provide what I call a misconceived interpretation. Through their misconception, Marxism is presented as a structural theory, conflict theory, and a theory of economic determinism. Putting it this way obscures the science of Marxism in analyzing and understanding society. Concepts like economic determinism, conflict theory and structural theory have been used widely to replace or provide similar meanings to modes of production, contradiction, and social relations of production respectively. This paper uncovers these misconceptions. It argues that, the so-called Conflict theory, Structural theory or Economic determinism theory are not part of Marxism; they are different theories, a result of deliberate distortion of the original works of Karl Marx. The following sections provide a review of these new theories followed by the social contexts of these distortions.

Marxism as a Conflict theory

regard to this question (Afanasyev, 1980; Borisov and Libman, 1985; Morrison, 2006; Rose and Brown, 2015).

Many scholars currently regard Marxism and Conflict theory as synonymous (Cuff et al., 1995; Taylor et al., 2002; Laluddin, 2016). However, this position brings many questions to sociologists who read the works of Marx more deeply. Why is Marxism regarded as a conflict theory? Is it synonymous to Conflict theory? What is the position of “conflict” in the entire Marxian theorization? What is “conflict” in Conflict theory? This section attempts to address all these questions in some detail. I start by describing how scholars present the Conflict theory in relation to Marxism, followed by the main premises of the Conflict theory and lastly a reflection of these premises against Marxian original theorization on the same. This will help us understand whether or not Marxism and Conflict theories are synonymous.

Contemporary scholars in sociology, divide ‘macro/systems sociology’ into two branches, conflict and consensus. While Durkheim is regarded as the founder of consensus theory Karl Marx is taken as the founder of the Conflict theory. The following diagram illustrates this kind of classification;

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Figure 1: Illustration of sociological theories (Source: Taylor et al., 2002:14)

As presented in this plate, there are two main categories of macro/system sociology. From this view, Marx is mentioned as the leading figure of the Conflict theory. And in most cases, when scholars write on conflict perspective they refer to Marx, only him. Thus, for these scholars, Marxism is a conflict theory, and Karl Marx is the most influential conflict theorist (Abraham, 1993; Turner, 2014; Laluddin, 2016). Abraham (1993), for example, has come to conclude that Marx is a master and a leading architect of the theory. Here he asserts:

“Conflict theory focuses on the unequal distribution of rewards in society. Karl Marx is its leading architect.... Marx is undoubtedly the master of

Conflict Sociology... Marx had almost no influence on the development of early sociology which was dominated by evolutionist until the mid-twentieth century when Marxist Sociology became the centre of conflict analysis” (Abraham, 1993: 106, 107,118).

Similarly, Cuff, et al. (1995) add;

“Although Karl Marx (1818-83) died a hundred years ago, his work is very much alive today and in fact constitutes the main body of conceptual and theoretical work within conflict theory. Marxism is a living powerful and practical body of thought and doctrine which shapes the destiny of millions of men and women. A substantial part of this body of thought provides sociologists with a systematic and rigorous way of analysing society and forms the core of the conflict perspective. We will therefore devote most of this chapter to Marx’s sociological work as a conflict theorist....” (Cuff et al., 1995:68).

A similar description is also provided by Wallace and Wolf (1991), Taylor, et al. (2002), Ritzer and Goodman (2004), and Laluddin (2016). The following are the main premises of the Conflict Theory as described by Wallace and Wolf (1991).

“People have a number of basic interests, things they want and attempt to acquire which are not defined by society but rather common to all. Power is at the heart of social relationship. It is scarce, unevenly distributed and coercive, thus a source of conflict. Values and ideas are weapons used by different groups to advance their needs, rather than means of defending the interests of the whole society” (Wallace & Wolf, 1991:77).

Main assumptions of conflict theory according to Abraham (1993):

“Every society is subjected at every moment to change; social change is ubiquitous. Every society experiences at every moment social conflict; social conflict is ubiquitous. Every element in a society contributes to its change. Every society rests on constraint of some of its members by others” (Abraham, 1993:114).

These are the main premises of conflict theory as described by Wallace and Wolf (1991) and Abraham (1993) among many contemporary scholars. Their main focus is on basic interests common to all, power as a source of conflict, values and ideas as weapons, and social conflict in a form of violence, war, bloodshed, or fight and other similar notions. To what extent are these premises compatible with Marxian theorisation?

Marxian Theorisation; Historical Materialism

The methodology of Marx is called *Historical Materialism* or *dialectical Materialism*. By starting with the human nature materialism denotes that before anything else, man must acquire the basic economic needs, food, shelter and clothing. These are the material prerequisites of life (Marx & Engels, 1970; 1977).

The term “*Historical*” denotes a process of social development. This means that the society and human existence can jointly be understood as a process of social development. Everything in a social world is changing; it is in constant movement of change (Selsam, Godway & Martel, 1975). So, any phenomenon can only be understood if a historical analysis is applied. This implies that nothing exists outside the society and history. It is only history as a powerful tool of analysis can explain what happened yesterday and many years back. It can also indicate what is happening today and what will happen in the future.

Surely, it is difficult to understand Marx’s Dialectical Materialism without having a look on his intellectual roots. *Dialectic* was a method of getting underlying truth which could not be obtained by observation and sense perception (Morrison, 2006). As used by Socrates and Aristotle, only contemplating can infer that kind of truth. In the “*Science of Logic*” (1812) Hegel employed this method and advanced further. For him dialectic denotes three basic things; interconnection, contradiction and change.

By *interconnection* Hegel means everything in the world is interconnected to other things. Therefore, to understand one thing needs an understanding of its connection to several other things. An individual is interconnected to his family, clan, other families and other clans, his village, several other villages, community, several other communities, and the whole society. This means that all parts are interconnected and interrelated; therefore, understanding their relation/interconnection is necessary. You cannot understand any part of the society without a prior analysis of how this part is connected to other parts and how this connection affects and is affected by the whole society.

Marx had no problem with this conception. His main concern was to explain the proper *source* of this interconnection. To Hegel, it is the larger historical wholes which determine the interconnections of individuals. In other worlds, Hegel implies that “history produces man” (Morrison, 2006). We are how we are because history dictated our direction. This history and its development is characterized by *contradiction*, the principal of social

change and development. Contradiction means the existence of *conflicting* elements in reality.

How does contradiction lead to social change/development? According to Hegel, for social change to occur, three stages must be observed. *Affirmation* or *thesis* is the first stage of change; it denotes the existence of something actively (i.e. the first state of something). Then comes *Antithesis* or negation. This is a thing which acts negatively to the first one. It opposes the one which existed before; and it limits the ability of the first thing to develop. It is a force which resists an existing force. The coalition of *thesis* and *antithesis* produces the third stage called *synthesis*. Jordan (1967) called this the *negation of the negation*. It is the stage at which the coalition between thesis and antithesis are transformed to form a new thing (change). In this regard, Hegel emphasized that the transformation from thesis to antithesis is determined by categories of *ideas*. Contradiction becomes real when ideas act in history. Without this historical contradiction of *ideas* societies cannot change.

Marx did not agree with Hegel in this conception. While for Hegel development was caused by changes/contradictions of ideas, for Marx, development is caused by *material conditions* of existence (Morrison, 2006). While Hegel thought that ideas produce the history of individuals, Marx believed that individuals are producers of their own ideas and history (Lenin, 1984:20).

According to Marx, Hegel's principle of social change is vague; it is too abstract and myopic. In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx (1859) argues that, Hegel's method is idealistic as it comes from nothing, through nothing, to nothing. For Marx then, the thesis, antithesis and synthesis process is not an ideal process. It is real in the sense that it takes place in the *material activity* of men. These contradictions express class struggle in real life. It is this force (class struggle) which determines the quantitative and qualitative nature of social development.

When Marx was writing on Dialectical Materialism the concept of *materialism* had already been put into use. It was Feuerbach who introduced the concept in the German literature. But according to Lenin (1984), this was the old materialism, or perceptual materialism in the words of Hamilton (1974). It was inconsistent, incomplete and one-sided. Feuerbach's materialism established that *it is not thinking that determines being but it is being that determines thinking* (Hamilton, 1974). But Feuerbach was unable to find the *essence* of this philosophy. He regarded human essence as the

basis of thinking. For him, art, religion, politics and science are determined by human essence. For Feuerbach, essence is in the *community*; in man's unity with man i.e. the *universal love* as in Hegel "*civil society*". Therefore, in this respect Feuerbach remained an *idealist*.

It was Marx who discovered the essence of materialism, the socio-economic nature of the society (Plekhanov, 1969:40). For him materialism refers to the argument that "Social Consciousness is an outcome of social being" (Lenin 1984). It is the human nature where men must produce their economic needs. This production is done in the social relation indispensable and independent of their will. These relations are the foundation of a legal and superstructure; in other words, the superstructure (e.g. conscious, religion, theory etc.) is determined by the social relations of production, the real life of men. In *the Preface of the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx shows this essence as follows.

"In the social production of their life men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces.... The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the *economic structure of society*, the real foundation on which rises a legal and political superstructure (art, philosophy, religion etc. as for Feuerbach) and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions/determines the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness...." (Marx & Engels, 1977:503).

Going through these premises I can say that Feuerbach had a real problem (Human Problem), wrong premises (can be understood and solved by the *universal love*) and valid but unsound conclusion (*consciousness is the product of being*). It was Marx then who made it clear, consistent and complete, that human problems can only be understood by examining the mode of production of material life conditions which are the basis of consciousness. Therefore, it can be said that while Hegel was a *Dialectical Idealist*, Feuerbach was a *Materialist Idealist* (Perceptual Idealist) and only Marx was a *Dialectical Materialist*.

Dialectical Materialism vs. Conflict theory

Up to now, we have seen the main premises of the Conflict theory, and also the original premises from Marx; and how his theorisation can be applied in the society. Thus, with regard to these sections we are now in a good

position to answer the questions that were raised: is Marxism synonymous with Conflict theory? What is the position of conflict in the entire Marxian theorization? What is conflict in the Conflict theory?

From the stated observations, it is deducible that, *Dialectical Materialism* does not deal with ‘conflicts’ in the form of violence, war, bloodshed, or fight as explained by Wallace and Wolf (1991), Abraham (1993), Taylor, et al., (2002) and Laluddin, (2016). Even the thesis, anti-thesis-synthesis model of Hegel (presented above) does not deal with such ‘conflicts’. In short, by following the augments of historical materialism above you will find some terminologies like contradiction, antagonistic forces/classes, opposing forces etc. These are not “conflicts”; and when you find the term ‘conflict’, in the first place it does not mean ‘violence’ or ‘fight’ between people but contradictory/opposing forces which, in principle, produce new forces. Marx does not start with “conflict” as *a main theoretical concept*. In a broad picture Marxism deals with contradictions of social elements as here Marx explains the contradiction between productive forces and relations of production.

“At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or-what is but a legal expression for the same thing-with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed” (Marx & Engels, 1977:503).

This quotation suggests that the term conflict here denotes an inter-relationship between productive forces and relations of production. This relationship is contradictory rather than violent. For Marx then, social elements stand in contradiction/opposition (not in violence or fight) to one another; for instance, a serf against a hoe, his fellow serfs, a farm, a house, climate, market price, and natural resources.

There are two kinds of relationships here; *first*, the relationship between a serf and inanimate objects. These objects, such as farm, hoe, and climate are inanimate things but they act. When man acts (e.g. cultivates) he acts against them, in turn they act against him. They act against him as *conditions of production* (not as enemies). They act as “negation forces” which limit his existence or ability for instance by cultivating a small farm, depending on rain, little harvests, and so forth. As this becomes a social

process overtime, man thinks of other alternatives as dictated by his natural and social environment. The issue of technology is very important here. Technology comes not as the *determinant* factor as it may be argued by determinists, but as a social force. Then, man invents a plough, irrigation systems and related items, as the nature of social *contradiction* allows. This is how Marx conceptualized contradiction/conflict. So where is 'violence/fight' in this analysis? Is it a fight or violence between a hoe and serfs?

This is one side of the coin; *second*, a serf is in a relationship with other human beings. He is in opposition/in contradiction to his fellow serfs as members of the same class and also against their lords (as a class). Here too their lords stand in contradiction (knowingly or unknowingly) to themselves and as a class against serfs. These relations, namely serf-serf, serf-lord, serf-lords and lord-lord, and lords-serfs are contradictory not *violent* as theorised in the conflict theory. It is rooted in the material conditions rather than conflict/war/fight. Whereas serfs want to take the produce for their existence and for their lords, their lords too want to take as much as they can so as to have more produce for their uses. In the process, when the conditions of production become too exploitative to the serfs, this contradiction may take a *violent* form such as strike, riot, and fight, among others, depending on the nature of these *conditions* and the level of exploitation. This then is followed by changes in the sphere of production.

Therefore, this second relationship between serfs and lords may result in a *violent* conflict. A conflict/fight between serfs and lords, however, should not be taken as evidence of *Marx's conflict theory*. That is why I said earlier that, when you find the world *conflict* in Marx's theorisation, it does not refer to conflict/violence as a main theoretical concept. As far as Marxism is concerned, conflict in the form of violence/fight may or may not occur. The nature of contradictions and its dynamics are subjected to the nature of material conditions; the language of the real life. In this way we can explain, for instance, why Britain proletariats of the 1840s were more violent than those of today; or even why American proletariats are more violent than those of Sweden. Yes, because of the nature of the material conditions prevailing in a particular nation, and at a particular period. In other words, it depends on the conditions of getting means of existence of each period/nation. How do they get food, health services, wages, shelter, clothing and other wants? Thus, it is more likely to find *violence* between workers and capitalists in America than in Sweden, although both are capitalist nations. However, this does not mean that there is no contradiction between proletariats and capitalists in Sweden or in the contemporary

Britain. Contradictions are inherent features of any society while violence is just a temporal incident.

The driving force of these contradictions is what Marx calls class struggle. Each class strives to improve the means of existence. This process is characterized by contradictions of which conflicts may come out as an *epiphenomena*. Conflicts in terms of violence/fights therefore, take a minor position in Marxian theory. It is my argument therefore that Marx did not produce a theory of conflict but of social contradictions or well, a theory of social conditions. If you want to analyse conflicts by using Marxism then, you must not start with conflict rather its material conditions. If you want to use the concepts “conflict” and “contradiction” synonymously then you must attach the concepts to the material conditions of society. The hanging contradictions/conflicts are fuzzy and can’t be regarded as Marxian. When explaining the transition from slavery to feudalism in Europe Marx and Engels elaborated this notion as follows:

“Nothing is more common than the notion that history up till now it has only be a question of conquest. The barbarians take the Roman Empire, and this fact of taking is made to explain the transition from old world to the feudal system... taking is thus determined by the object taken... the conditions of production and intercourse of the country taken” (Marx & Engels, 1977:72).

Therefore, in Marxism, conflict/violence is neither a theory nor an explanatory variable; it is just an element of society which is determined by the conditions of society. By reading the premises of the so called *Conflict theory* as presented by Wallace & Wolf (1991) and Abraham (1993) above, it comes out clear that they are not synonymous to Marxism. Marx has contributed nothing in this [conflict] theory. If they refer these words; *constraints, change, conflicts and every element in a society contributes to its change*, as Marx’s words, then, it is doubtful because these words were there even before Marxism. As I have said above, Hegelian dialect also offered such kind of analysis. The theoretical problem which faced Hegel was to locate the source of such constraints, conflicts or change. Even Hegel knew that *every element in a society contributes to its change*. He also knew the *conflicting nature* of the society. Similarly, he was also aware of the fact that the society is not static. There is no problem if this perspective is labelled *Conflict Theory* but kept away from Marxism. All the same, scholars should not regard macro sociological theories as divided between *consensus* and *conflict* because by doing so they leave out Marxism. It is better, therefore, to assert that, there are two branches of sociology, namely

Marxism and Academic sociology, the latter of which is formed by consensus and conflict theory.

Marxism as a Structural Theory

In this part I am addressing the question of Marxism is or is not a structural theory. Many sociologists believe that sociology is divided into two groups; Structural and Action sociology (Cuff, et al., 1995) or Macro- and Micro-sociology (Wallace and Wolf, 1995). Structural or macro-sociology believes that human behaviour and actions are conditioned by the structures of society. In this way, individuals seem to be constrained by forces/structures of their society. Therefore, individuals are passive since they cannot influence or change the structures in any way. Cuff et al., (1995) define structural theories as those theories which believe that human actions are to a large extent structured by their social environment. The kind of values and attitudes they hold, the kind activities and relationships they produce are a result of, or greatly influenced by the organization and structure of the society in which they live. Structural theories thus, include Functionalism and Marxism (which is synonymous to Conflict theory).

Action or Micro sociology, in contrast, assumes that individuals are active, powerful and rational in their actions and behaviour. The main assumption is that in real life situations, societies do not act but individuals do. What is being done, by who and with what purposes, are all matters which 'social actors' make sense of in producing their own actions, and in responding to the actions of others (Cuff, et al., 1995). Therefore, an understanding of social actions should start from individuals'/actors' point of view rather than structures. Structures are constructed by actors in their day-to-day activities.

This distinction suggests that the two branches of sociology deal with different issues. Structural/Macro sociology deals with issues that Micro sociology cannot explain, and vice versa. This implies that Marxism as one of the structural theories, ignores actors' abilities, powers and rationality towards social actions and social change in general. The validity of this argument must be established by assessing the original premises of Marxism. I start my argument by presenting the Marxian theorisation on the relationship between structure and agency/actors, then followed by a reflection of this theorisation along structural lines.

Marxian Sociology starts with an assumption on human nature. According to Marx and Engels, what differentiates human beings from other animals is their ability to produce their basic necessities of life. They do this actively by interacting with the natural world and their fellow human beings. By this

then, they transform the nature of the natural world and their own. Thus, history is made from this process. Here Engels clarifies:

“In the history of society... the actors are all endowed with consciousness, are men acting with deliberation or passion, working towards definite goals; nothing happens without a conscious purpose, without un-intended aim...” (Engels in Selsam et al., 1975:63-64)

This quotation shows how agency is theorised in Marxism. Men are conscious actors; they plan their actions before actualising in the real world. Imagination, planning and acting are essential characteristics of men; they comprise the human *nature*. Marx elaborates this more in his analysis on labour:

“...Labour is in the first place, a process in which both man and nature participate, and which man of his own accord starts, regulates and controls the material relations between himself and nature. He opposes himself to nature. As one of his own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate nature’s production in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway...” (Marx, 1976: 283).

It is this ‘unique potential’ which differentiates human beings and other animals. Here again Marx says:

“...A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour process we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labour at the commencement...” (Marx, 1976: 283)

These paragraphs reveal how agency is theorised in Marxism. Now, it is evident that Marxism recognizes the capacities of man to think, imagine and act. Here actors are active and rational, and their action can transform themselves and their environment.

When this is observed then it is not scientific to just assert that man changes the world; so men are agents/driving forces of change. It is the role of science then to investigate what is behind these changes. What are the

driving forces of these driving forces? It is true that every action of men must go through their minds (as human nature) they must imagine, contemplate, regulate, control before they act; but what is important here is to investigate where does the mind get this stuff/ideas and how will these ideas be imagined, contemplated or regulated? To answer these questions Marx (1852) in *the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* asserts that:

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a night mare on the brain of the living” (Marx, 1852:15-19).

In this quotation, Marx tries to establish a theory of human action that, yet men have a capacity to plan and act but they are conditioned by *circumstances*. The term circumstance here must be correctly understood. It is my impression that this term misleads most of sociologists. Others interpret circumstances as *structures* that determine human action. They mean *Structures* in a Functionalist sense i.e. law, income, education, status, religion and the like, just as Durkheim’s integration and regulations on the influence of suicide. In Marxian Sociology, the term ‘circumstance’ means material conditions, or let us say, *social relations* [of production] as they have been evolved historically.

Social relations are not just *structures* but they produce structures. Social relations are constructed by men (agency), but yet produce conditions for their actions. So, circumstances deal with the production and reproduction of social relations which include the ownership patterns of the means of production (*who owns what*), the class relations (*who produces what and how*) and the distribution patterns of the fruits of labour (who gets what). Then, law, income, education, ideas, and status are expressions of these relations of production. They do not condition peoples’ actions as independent variables but as the products of social relations which are also created and transformed by men through the process of production. Those who consider Marxian Sociology as *Structural* fail to capture this dialectical relationship between actors and social relations of production. As such, it is scientific to assert that Marxian sociology is a *relational theory* or a theory of social relations, or an agency-structure theory rather than a structural theory alone.

Human action therefore, may conform to or diverge from the structures, but whatever the case, his action occurs around a given circumstance. When actors conform to a given condition, it does not mean that, they are always powerless or passive. Similarly, when they diverge from given circumstances, it does not mean that they are always powerful. These actions (to conform or diverge from the conditions) are guided by the extent to which the circumstances impinge actors' mode of producing basic needs, their class positions, their ownership and distribution patterns, and the existing class ideologies. In other words, individual actions and the conditions of their actions are dialectically related (asymmetrical dialectical relationship) rather than one-sided.

In this juncture therefore, it is evident that, both agency and structure are adequately analysed in Marxism. It is my argument that, Marxian sociology is neither structural/macro no action/micro theory; both structure and agency are analysed dialectically. In the social process, structure and agency are dialectically influencing each other. There is no dominant force which *always* shapes the other. It is not simply men responding to structures or just rationally making their own realities independently. Such analysis is alien to Marxian sociology. It is from this context where neo-Marxists such as Lukacs (1971) argues for the need to understand issues in their totality, to isolate agency from structures is to produce a distorted version of Marxism.

Marxism as Economic Determinism

Most of recent scholars, as explained above, tend to regard Marxism as an economic determinism theory (Abraham, 1993: Ritzer, 2004). Marxism, they say, is interested in how the economy determines the rest of social aspects. In this case then, one of the weaknesses of Marxism, is to emphasise one factor; *the economy*. In simple language some of them say, *if you have money you have the rest*. Abraham (1993) for instance claims, Marx emphasized economic base of political economy, and ignored other important features like bureaucracy.

Along the same line, other scholars like Weber (in his causality) came out with multiple- factor causation. As noted in Morison (2006:277) Weber rejected the idea that all social life could be explained with recourse to underlying *economic* laws. He asserts that, the economy alone could not explain the development of modern societies; thus other *non-economic factors* had to be taken into account. These non-economic factors are political, legal and religious spheres.

However, as sociologists, we must examine these claims in relation to the original premises of Marxism. Marx's theorisation is well synthesised in Historical Materialism. Historical/Dialectical Materialism as a philosophy and a method of understanding society, does not deal with "economic factors." It is not simply a 'one to one' causation that *economy* determines the rest (politics, art, and philosophy etc.). If this is true then, Hegel can be considered as a genius than Marx as his *old* dialectic method is deeper than the so-called economic determinism.

Dialectical materialism as explained above, analyses the society as a whole (*holism*). In the process, it focuses on interrelationship, contradiction and dynamism of all social elements/factors. Factors like economy, law, education, culture, class, and technology interrelate with one another and their relationship is contradictory and changing. Thus, no single factor is taken independently as dominant, or *determinant* of others. Plekhanov (1969) puts it clear that Marxian sociology does not worry much about the quantity and the hierarchical arrangement of factors, but the historical and dialectical connection between them. It is interested in analysing the objective and subjective connection, the essence of their existence. Then, what follows is not to look into the influence of one factor over the other, but latent forces - forces that appear as relations and process of historical development.

In the theory of class struggle for instance, Marx shows how different social classes have been competing for ownership and distribution of resources; slaves against slave masters, serfs against feudal lords, and capitalists against workers. From this struggle then rise forms of consciousness such as politics, law, and religion, among others. While the ownership and distribution of resources can be viewed as "pure economics", they are determined by the level of productive forces of that particular society and in its turn, the contradictions between the two. Here we have productive forces and relations of production; let us say industries, capitalists and workers; to add the superstructure, politics, law and philosophy. These elements must not be understood in isolation. The *economy* which Marx says is based on the understanding of all elements and how each element influences and is influenced by others; and the qualitative and quantitative changes that have been associated with that material contradiction.

It is from this background that Selsam et al. (1975) insist that "historical materialism" is not economic determinism. A simple causation of *one-to-one*, say between economy and other factors, is alien to Marxian Historical Materialism. Those who see it as economic determinism interpreted the term

material or *economy* (driving force of history) as *material things* such as industries, shops, and money, among others. Basically, economy in the Marxist sense, means *relations* between people, classes and other social elements. These relations are always bound to things and appear as things. Some modern scholars then, fail to understand this philosophy and thus provide a misleading version of Marxian sociology. A good example of some of contemporary scholars who have interpreted Marxism adequately include Ruben (1977), Harvey (2005), and Amin (2009). These scholars do not approach Marxism as Conflict theory, Economic determinism or Structural theory; they have managed to understand the original premises of Marx and tries to advance the science accordingly.

The social context of distorting Marxism

A complete understanding of these common misconceptions in the Marxian sociology is achieved by interrogating the social context which brought the notions. To abide by the materialist theory, any idea/theory does not emerge randomly, rather, it comes from the material conditions. This is what Gouldner (1973) calls the infrastructure of a theory. The immediate question here is, why Marxism was distorted? The answer to this question is based on four interconnected issues; the collapse of capitalist economy in the world and the associated social and political impacts in America since 1910s, the cold war (in which ideas became the main weapon) and the Americanisation project which aimed at protecting American liberal values by defeating the communist ones.

The situation was associated with violent labor movements and industrial unrest since 1914. The Ludlow massacre is cited as an example in this context. The American capitalists then came together to discuss the means of solving these problems. Capitalist companies, philanthropic institutions and foundations such as the Rockefeller foundation (which includes Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial and Spelman Fund), Carnegie Institution, Russel Sage Foundation, Ford Motor Company, Julius Rosenwald Fund and many others, released millions of dollars to finance the project of Americanisation (Bulmer, 1982; Solovey & Cravens, 2012; Seim, 2016). Fisher (1983) describe this as a deliberate movement of the powerful class in the world to influence, control and dominate others thorough ideology.

The main objectives of this project were, how to scientifically justify the dominance of capitalism (Fisher, 1983, 1984), to redefine and reform social science theories so as to fit the desires and values of Liberal American (Seim, 2016), to use knowledge as a weapon against the triumph of communism in the world (Solovey & Cravens, 2012), to enforce capitalist

values to the Americans and the rest of the world without using force (Mueller, 2013). To create a rational desired social order by discouraging industrial workers and the unemployed mass from collective bargaining and class struggle so as to be more productive (Solovey & Cravens, 2012; Mueller, 2013), to produce counter theories towards the so-called “socialist lies” concerning the then trembling capitalist economy (Fisher, 1983).

Consequently, millions of dollars were pumped to many academic institutions and research centers which were to accomplish these objectives (Fisher, 1984). Scholars were commissioned specific tasks such as critiquing theories or developing new concepts that conform to the above objectives. Some of the funded institutions include University of Chicago, Columbia University, Harvard University, University of Berlin, London School of Economics, University of Fribourg, University of North Carolina, University of Wisconsin, Social Science Research Council Fellowships, Brookings Institution, London School of Economics, University of Minnesota, Vanderbilt University, Iowa State University, Yale University, University of North Carolina, University of California, Stanford University, University of Texas, Economic Foundation for National Bureau of Research, Fisk University, Cornell University, University of Pennsylvania, University of Cambridge, China University of Virginia, North-western University, Russian Research Centre, International Institute of Social History and many others. Some of the scholars who involved in this project include Talcott Parsons, Harold Garfinkel, Ernest Burgess, Robert Park, Luis Wirth, C. Wright Mills, Robert Merton, Peter Blau, Herbert Marcuse, Lewis Coser, Ralf Dahrendorf, Randall Collins, Elton Mayo, Leo Strauss and many others (Burawoy, 1982; Fisher, 1983; Solovey, & Cravens, 2012; Mueller, 2013; Allan, 2014; Turner, 2014).

These scholars were tasked to find new theories and concepts which can better explain the then conflicts (capital vs labor and capitalism vs communism) in fervor of liberal values. Thus, says Burawoy (2013), some of these scholars did not have a Marxist background, but they quickly turned towards it. Others posed critiques on Marxism without even reading Marx’s original works. The aim was to produce a distorted version of Marxism-Leninism so as it can be used strategically in the cold war (Robin, 2001; Mueller, 2013). This version of Marxism was mainly produced for export so as to discourage the world from a communist route (Solovey & Cravens 2012). The Theory of Totalitarianism for instance was produced to portray communism as dictatorial, destructive and utopia (Mueller, 2013). The Conflict theory as well, was used to undermine the influence of Marx and Marxism in the social theory as the question of development was reduced to

“Consensus” and later on Modernisation, desired, progressive and democratic while Marxism was branded as conflictual, violent, deterministic/dictatorial and generally destructive. Some scholars like Coser (1957) and Dahrendorf (1959) argued for the positive/beneficial impacts of conflicts. By *positive* impacts they implied conflicts that results to “social reforms” rather than “social change”- let us say from capitalism to socialism.

In this context, the terms Conflict theory, Structural theory, and Economic determinism, did not emerge as noble projects for advancing Marxism but as psychological weapons to defeat the theory. That is why, as explained above, a number of issues were deliberately distorted to conform to the objectives of this huge project. The concept of “economy” was turned into “economic sector” rather than relations of production. The concept of “class” was turned into “group”, “social change” turned into “social dynamics”, “contradictions” turned into “conflicts”, “social relations of production” turned into “power relations” (isolated from social structure and class struggle) among group members; the relationship between contradiction and social change (i.e. thesis, antithesis, synthesis) was reduced to relationship between violent conflicts and social change. Under this project, *analytical* concepts like Social formation, Materialism, History and Dialect were silenced.

Conclusion

This paper interrogates the claims of contemporary sociologist who tried to interpret the work of Marx. In the process it was discovered that, the scholars have produced a misleading version of Marxism. The paper also highlights the source of such misconceptions. The cold war, and the resulting effects on world capitalist economy influenced the American capitalists to forge a project of distorting social sciences for their advantages. The main argument here is that; Marxism is neither a conflict nor a structural theory. Similarly, as I have argued above, Marxism is not *deterministic* as the proponents of economic determinism argues. Such claims are not genuine; were informed by the fictitious ambition of the Americanisation project. Thus, it is recommended to read and understand the original premises of Marx rather than relying on the misconceived versions.

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