

# Class Politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Myths and Realities

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## Abstract

Mainstream and dominant global north-influenced social science scholarship in contemporary Nigeria dismisses the class factor in both socio-political engineering and scholarship as non-existent. While the chief priests of this brand of social science scholarship denies its liberal origins, undercurrents and ferments and claim to be neutral in its investigations, the dialectical-historical materialist method of social investigation prioritizes the class question. This study, an interrogation of the place of class in the politics of the Fourth Republic in Nigeria, examines the social forces which shape and direct current politics in the country, and why the country's socio-economic, cultural and political development continue to fall into bouts of epilepsies and create a number of millions of citizens at the bottom level of society. But the study restates the fact that it may seemingly be unscientific for ultra-left thinking to centralize Nigerian politics mainly on class forces.

**Key words:** Class, Politics, Nigeria, Ethnicity and Fourth Republic.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

It is still being debated in several social science circles and in the humanities that class formation, and indeed, crystallization, have not, and may not occur in Africa. A moderate viewpoint is also canvassed by some scholars that class relations in Africa are not so strong and clearly developed as in the global north, and in many cases, they are secondary and even tertiary to tribal, caste, or racial communities. Thus, some school of thoughts in Africa contend that traditional African societies were strongly egalitarian in character and had an absence, or a low level, of stratification. The concepts of "African humanism", "traditional collectivism", Sekou Toure's "communaucratique" and Nyerere's "Ujamaa" all proclaim the absence of social classes in Africa (Oriakhi, 1989:39). However, several other scholars have since rebuffed these assertions and profiled them as merely efforts at finding state ideology for the emerging postcolonial states in Africa. Cohen (1971), (Ake, 1978), (Nkrumah, 1971) have canvassed this position.

According to Cohen (1971:I):

*Far from reflecting a contemporary and empirical reality, such attempts at looking backward towards an over-generated and over-romanticised past, reflect more saliently the search for an acceptable and*

*respectable state ideology, usually organized around notions of "African Socialism".*

Ake, (1978) in his work, *Revolutionary Pressures in Africa*, posited emphatically, that "objective class relations exist in Africa". According to him, there are those who effectively control the means of production, and those who effectively possess no means of production. However, each of these classes is complex and considerably heterogeneous.

Indeed, identifying and categorizing the compartment of classes in contemporary African political space remains a very demanding task. This, perhaps, make some scholars and analyst to deny the existence of classes in Africa. The classes are fluid, complex and indeed heterogeneous as Ake noted above. But the truth, beside para-science, is that politics, in a state, is a class phenomenon. No matter how hard anyone tries to separate politics from class, objective science would not let that be. Ekeke (1986) makes the point that "the state expresses the unity of various institutions in society which crystallizes the total class relations in that society". The "relations", according to him, are "ones of domination and subordination, and the state plays a role that, in the long run, the interest of the class that is dominant in the economy" (Ekeke, 1986:I).

Nigeria, since the colonial era has witnessed class politics in which the state has enabled the social class that is dominant and control the economy to acquire state power, and use such to deepen its hold on the economy and thereby, control the destiny of the entire polity, and also, turn state power to the agency for primitive accumulation of state resources for personal empowerment. Through such capital formation process, the emergent propertied class has dominated the political space, reproduced itself through sham and rigged elections, and outright military takeover of power to sustain its class rule, and subsequent control of the political process in the country. This has come to be classified as bourgeois rule in Nigeria. Again, this is contentious. It is debatable whether there are bourgeoisie in Nigeria, in the scientific sense of the word. Yet, what is going on in Nigeria since colonialism to the present day neocolonial political process, even in the so-called Fourth Republic has been classified as liberal capitalist politicking (i.e. bourgeois politics) in which the right wing political gladiators have managed in what has been, purely intra-class rivalries over the years, to enthrone bourgeois rule through often sham bourgeois elections over the years. But, some efforts even during colonialism have been made by the political left to contest bourgeois elections, in a class struggle to wrestle power from the right wing bourgeois politicians, the outcome, since the colonial times, have been largely poor, and infinitesimal. The British colonial power brokers have ensured that the liberal capitalist order was enthroned in Nigeria.

The Fourth Republic which commenced on May 29, 1999 has sustained the liberal capitalist tradition. The military and all other Nigerian state institutions like the bureaucracy, the electoral body, i.e. the independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and others have ensured that the political process is dominated and controlled by class forces of the bourgeoisie, the property owners. Working people and other under class social forces in the country are consciously, creatively schemed out of the political process, nay, and so-called democratic process. The expected outcome for the capitalist forces in power is that the truly majority in the country- the working people which include workers, peasants, market-traders, women, artisans, unemployed, youths and students are schemed out, or placed at the bottom level in the power configuration of the Nigerian polity.

This discourse, while not oblivious of the complexity of the class structure in contemporary Nigeria, is an attempt to interrogate the class forces which shape the politics of the Fourth Republic, 1999 to date. Which social class has influenced and directed politics since 1999? Which social class has grabbed political power, and what has the social class done with the state power which it grabbed since 1999? What is the state of affairs in Nigeria today, in terms of the

transformation of social life? Why has it been difficult, if not near impossible for another social class to displace the current dominant social class from political power? The study also questions the assumption of some left intellectuals and political activists that all politics must and should be approached from class perspective in contemporary Nigeria. These socialist thinkers and activists relegate the all-powerful variables of ethnicity and religion and insist these variables are the creations of bourgeois politicians as a scheme to capture power. Yet, in the face of an emerging class formation that is not crystal clear in organization, demands and consciousness, it is becoming difficult for objective political analysis of Nigeria's Fourth Republic politics to dismiss ethnicity and religion as critical variables in the Fourth Republic. Perhaps, the manipulation of these emotive forces of ethnicity and religion which coloured the eyes of both the politicians and the voters in periodic elections deserve some critical interrogation even by left activists and researchers. We think this is germane to understanding the chaos and anarchy that define Nigerian Politics today.

This study is in five major sections. The first section introduces the discourse by way of some general reflection on the class question in Nigerian Politics. The second section considers the debate on class, its manifestations and its relevance in understanding contemporary politicking in Nigeria. It also functions in lieu of theory when understood from the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of politics as a class activity. Section three considers the trajectory of socialists' involvement in Nigerian Politics. It interrogates the forces that have worked for and against the crystallization of organized and programmed socialist efforts at capturing political power in Nigeria. The section dwells on the seemingly failing efforts of left socialist activists and politicians to grab power and use same to enthrone socialist transformation of the Nigerian State. What are the issues? Section four foregrounds the debate on the question of what is primary in contemporary Nigerian politics – ethnic contradictions or class contradictions. Can Nigeria truly overcome the ethno-religion contradictions and primer the class contradictions in the face of a yet to be developed class-for-itself and class-in-itself? Section five concludes the discourse and forecasts some possible trajectories in the future for Nigerian Political development.

## **2.0 Class manifestations and relevance in contemporary Nigerian politics**

### **2.1 A Critique of the Class Theory**

The political process in Nigeria is complex. It is more difficult to discern when attempt is made at unveiling its class character. It is not that the dimension of class contestation for power in the country is hidden beyond measure or buried in the labyrinth of politics

itself. As a matter of fact, what predominates in the body polity is class politics. Class politics of domination, oppression and exploitation of the working people, i.e. the working class by the so-called property class- the emerging compradoral, bureaucratic and national bourgeoisie and their intellectuals (ideologues) and the clerics subsists in Nigerian politics since the country got flag independence from colonialist Britain in 1960. Of course, the British, through its imperialist activities in Nigeria as it did in all its colonies across the World may have perfected class oppression in the polity. Interestingly, British scholars and ideologues from the global north have “successfully” sold the message of “no class” mantra in Western Liberal Social Sciences, which is today the dominant thinking in African social science scholarship. Mainstream social sciences have articulated social theories like elite theories, functionalist theories, structuralism, stages of growth theories and several others to explain socio-political situations. Some sociological theorists like Arnold Tonybee, a British historian and sociologist contended in his elite theory that in all periods and among all nations, history is made by creative individuals or creative minorities. He asserted that present-day society consists of three groups, viz: a creative minority (an elite ruling class of the bourgeoisie), an uncreative mass (working people) and primitive communities to which he attributed former colonies and dependent countries. For Tonybee, society lives normally when the minority creates and rules, and the non-creative majority- the primitive people submit to it (cited in Zotov, 1985:220). There is also the functionalist approach to socio-political analysis. Functionalism is the theory that human social aggregates involve differentiated units which are interdependent. These units may be individuals, families, and kingship structures, villages, or such analytical structures as age, sex categories or broader groups. The society and culture are the most encompassing social aggregates or social systems of which other concrete or analytical units thus become parts. But, how is the interdependence of units affected? And what contributions do the parts make to the whole? Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917), the French born sociologist, credited with founding functionalism used fictitiously homogenous society as an expository device for examining the sources of differentiation and the problem of maintaining cohesion of increasingly differentiated societies. Durkheim constructed a theory of society, or at least of social phenomena, reflecting the evolutionary principle of progression from simple to complex structures. His arguments also assumed a principle of social integration that would become a basic tenet of functionalism that analytically distinguishable parts of any society or culture must be appropriate for the rest of the system (Moore, 1979: 324).

Durkheim called the combination of differentiation and integration, “organic solidarity”. Thus, the two most fundamental assumptions are “differentiation” and “integration”. Two other assumptions were essentially derived from the above one. One of such derived assumption is that any observed cultural form or pattern of behaviour must fit the system that is, must have a function. Thus, survivals without current utility are discredited (Moore, 1979: 325).

The functionalist theory is seemingly guilty of not paying attention to tensions and to inequities within systems of social inequality; but, it is the case that conflicts necessarily exist in complex societies. Though, such conflicts tend not to be reported and they go unnoticed because of the functionalism theorists acceptance of an “integrated system” model or are discounted as mere examples of relatively unimportant deviance (Oriakhi, 1989; 37).

It is pertinent to foreground the point that while the elite theory, functionalist theory, neo-functional theory, economic growth theory and even the near-chaotic post-modernist theories, perhaps tend to suppress the conflict inherent in human society and development, the Marxist-Leninist class theory, which emerged from the materialist understanding of history directs attention to class conflict, as the moving force of social change and human progress.

Nonetheless, the concept of class has attracted varied interpretations in social studies and socio-political, cultural and economic praxis, liberal scholars theorized that class is a group of people marked off from other groups by definable boundaries such as prestige, wealth, power and rank ordered by the forces of demand and supply. Thus, for the liberals, class refers to issues like social status and the hierarchical distinction that exist between individuals or groups within a society. In this general sense, class is an alternative general term to social stratification. The term, social class, is also widely used as general synonym for “class”. (Jary and Jary, 2000:7). This liberal perspective is well articulated in the works of leading social scientists: Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Talcot Parsons, David Easton, Pareto, Mosca and several others.

However, it is in the Marxist political economy or Marxist social sciences that one finds the scientific and critical meanings of the concept of class. According to the Marxist perspective, which remains popular and widely accepted in contemporary social sciences, class can only be defined from the framework of production. In keeping with the theory of materialist interpretation of history (historical materialism) V.I. Lenin, a foremost Marxist theoretician and revolutionary leader of the defunct Union of Soviet

Socialist Republic (USSR) gave a scientific definition of class:

*Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour and consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people, one of which can appropriate the labour of another, owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy (Lenin, 1977: 21).*

The Marxian perspective which is the operational theoretical framework of this discourse is certain on its findings that people involved in the production process who relate with one another are always divided into two diametrically opposed groups called classes - those who own, and those who do not own the means used in the production process. Ake (1981), Madunagu (2007), Nzimiro (1977), Onimode (1983) and several other scholars have alluded to the class character of Nigerian politics. In contemporary Nigerian political economy, we can identify the dominant bourgeois class and the working class (the proletariat). Nonetheless, scholars have markedly pointed out subsets of these classes in the body-polity. Ekekwe (2009: 75) noted that “class boundaries are not always as clear as one would like but then reality does not always come in neat packages”. He identified the sub-sets of the petty bourgeoisie, which is made up of bureaucrats and other white-collar workers, workers in service industries, teachers and other salaried workers who built and rent one or two houses. Ekekwe (2009) described this sub-set of the bourgeoisie class as “the very epitome of vacillation, disappointment, unreliability and contradictory political alliances”. Fanon (1967: 152) classified the national bourgeoisie as the dominant class, i.e. the ruling class which consists of a group of people who because of the fact that they are the owners of the means of production and distribution in society also dictates the terms under which the country is governed. This dominant class, the national bourgeoisie is called the ruling class. Fanon maintained that the national bourgeoisie in Africa lacks something that is essential to bourgeoisie – capital (money). African bourgeoisie are incapable of generating bourgeois society because they are incapable of promoting productivity. Hence, the major strength for the African bourgeoisie remains state power which guarantees their economic activity. The other constituent of the dominant class in Africa, and indeed, Nigeria, is the comprador bourgeoisie (capitalists). As Jary and Jary (2000:76) observed, the comprador bourgeoisies are entrepreneurs in colonial or Third World countries who accumulate capital through acting as intermediary between indigenous producers and

foreign/merchants: “comprador” is a Spanish word, meaning “buyer”. Andre Gunder Frank is reputed to have raised the concept of the “comprador bourgeoisie” in his analysis of Third World underdevelopment crisis. A.G. Frank categorized the comprador bourgeoisie as a class that promote Third World dependency, since their economic interests were in the very economic transactions which he saw as existing at the heart of the dependency relationship (Frank 1969:53).

The most powerful class in the world capitalist political economy is the bourgeoisie or the capitalist class in terms of its composition. The middle and big bourgeoisie are distinguished by the size of their capital, while the big bourgeoisie consists of the non-monopoly and monopoly bourgeoisie, it is the monopoly bourgeoisie that holds the principal levers of political power (Zotov, 1983:120). The capitalist class is a class of persons possessed of wealth in money form and owning means of production which are set to work by hiring wage workers. There can therefore, be no capitalist production unless in addition to the capitalist class there is also a class of wage-workers (Oriakhi, 2014:57).

It should be noted that capitalist class in the global political economy has metamorphosed over the centuries since its earliest appearance as merchant capitalists, to monopoly capitalists arriving at a defining moment in the transformation of capital. This moment which Lenin (1970:48) described as “imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism” witnessed the merging of bank capital with industrial capital – which is the eventual creation of “finance capital” also witnessed the export of capital abroad as distinguished from the export of commodities. Capitalists, otherwise, known as international bourgeoisie are the authentic bourgeoisie, who the national bourgeoisie and the comprador bourgeoisie in Africa and Nigeria to be specific, are in conspiratorial relationship with since the colonial experience to perpetuate the exploitation of the surpluses of the people (Oriakhi, 2014:57-58).

Today, the class of bourgeoisie has continued to exploit the surpluses of the African People through the global financial architecture and socio-economic arrangements and institutions like the multinational companies (MNCs), foreign aid, foreign direct investments, debt financing, etc, with the very conscious, active collaboration of the national bourgeoisie and the comprador bourgeoisie in Africa. The other subset of bourgeoisie in Africa is the bureaucratic bourgeoisie which is the bureaucratic elite. This bourgeoisie along with nationalist and comprador bourgeoisie collaborate with imperialism.

The working class otherwise known as the proletariat refers to those who do not own any means of production. The concept of proletariat is employed in



all branches of modern production – industry, construction, transport, services and agriculture. While it has no means of production of its own and is compelled to live by selling its labour power to the capitalists, the working class feeds and clothes the whole of society by its labour power to the capitalists. When the proletariat works, society lives and develops. When it ceases to work, proclaims a national strike, all economic life in the affected country comes to a standstill (Zotov, 1985:121).

Following from its disadvantageous position, the proletarian class is exploited, immiserized and pauperized by the bourgeois class. The point should be made that the proletariat class in Africa, in particular Nigeria, does not necessarily subsists or manifests only as industrial workers as in the industrialized countries of the Triad: the USA, Western Europe and Japan. Rather, in Nigeria and the rest of the unindustrialized agrarian Third World countries, the class of proletariat consists of the following components – the peasantry, the flower and middle urban strata, petty-bourgeoisie, intellectuals and white-collar workers. While these subsets of the working class in Nigeria cannot be described as united and constituting a formidable one-dimension class structure; and the subsets can and do fluctuate depending in their individual interest in the politics of economic survival – the fact remains that these subsets are members of the working class, who cannot live except they selling their labour power to the bourgeoisie or the bourgeois state for wages (Oriakhi, 2014:59).

## 2.2 Social Classes in Contemporary Nigerian Politics: Manifestations and Relevance

It has been argued by Marxist scholars and political activists that the postcolonial Nigerian and indeed, the postcolonial African Political economy and Political arrangements (social formations) lend themselves to social class analysis. Scholars and political activists like Eskor Toyo, Bade Onimode, Claude Ake, Ola Oni, Bala Usman, Biodun Jeyifo, Festus Iyayi, Omotoye Olorode, Edwin Madunagu, Bene Madunagu, Okwudiba Nnoli, Molara Ogundipe-Lesile and several others have captured this perspective in their scholarships and political campaigns at respective times and eras.

Some of them have traced the emergence and presence of class divisions or formations in contemporary Nigeria to the capitalist orientation of colonialism in Nigeria and the rest of the colonized world. As Olaopa reflected:

*In scholarship, colonialism is taken to have engendered a dependency situation within which the political economy of the capitalist and colonial nations, especially Britain, led to an economic dependency is simple; the wealthy state of Europe colonized the poor states of Africa in order to facilitate the economic*

*development of the European states, and the impoverishment of the African states. Africa supplies the raw materials while Europe produces the industrial goods. Thus, dependency speaks to the indirectly proportional development of the two – the development of the European states is simultaneous with the underdevelopment of the periphery states of Africa. (Olaopa, 2020:12).*

While this thesis is long on the mill and seemingly over-stated by the dependency theorists otherwise called Third World scholars like Samin Amin, A. G. Frank, Walter Rodney, Immanuel Wallerstein, Claude Ake and countless others, it should be re-emphasized that the thesis has not lost its relevance in understanding the Nigerian situation within the matrix of the global political economy. For Ekekwe (1986:60) the class structure in Nigeria was largely created by colonialism-thanks to the activities of the colonial state and the trading firms.

However, Bade Onimode using the Marxian framework that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle”, and Lenin’s definition of social classes in respect to ownership of the means of production alluded to the fact that in pre-colonial Nigeria, classes and class struggle were associated with the two antagonistic social relations of the slave and feudal modes of production. (Onimode, 1983:26). According to him:

*Under the slave formation, the social classes were freemen (slave-owners) and slaves, some of whom were assimilated into the former class, through loyal service to their masters. The immediate objectives of class struggle under the slave mode was freedom from bondage. This involved the fight to secure the rights of freemen or “citizenship” in order to participate freely in economic and political processes such as mobility of labour, membership of kings’ councils and even succession to kingship. Slave revolts were the usual expressions of this class struggle.*

*The social classes under the feudal mode consisted of the landlords and the tenants of whom both were in social and political bondage to the nobility. The class struggle here involved a desire for freedom from this personal bondage and its numerous obligations and restrictions. While this freedom was required also in order for the tenants to participate as freemen in the affairs of their communities, the overriding motive was the termination of personal restrictions and exploitative obligations. An expression of this struggle was the frequent declarations by distant vassals in Oyo and other really kingdoms of their independence from the king (Onimode, 1983:26-27)*

Onimode added that these feudal struggles do sometimes happened between two different communities resulting in wars like the frequent inter-

ethnic wars which were recorded in the early Nigerian kingdoms. Some of these inter-ethnic and inter group wars were so severe that they made the British free-trade imperialist aggression in some of the kingdoms and territories that made up the present day Nigeria to gain traction and facilitated full blown British colonialism in the country.

As Olaopa (2020) stated earlier that the capitalist basis of colonialism facilitated class divisions in colonial Nigeria, Ekeke (1986) had echoed this view joint earlier when he averred that the “class structure in Nigeria was largely created by colonialism, thanks to the activities of the colonial state and the trading firms”. Onimode (1983) articulated the class basis of colonialism in Nigeria and stated inter alia:

*One of the dominant and more permanent social consequences of colonialism in Nigeria was the intensification of antagonistic class contradictions. Both the colonial state and the colonial economy by their autocracy and exploitation personified these social antagonisms. One process involved in this development was the acceleration of the decadence of the pre-colonial mixed feudal-slave communal mode of production and the reinforcement of traditional class differentiation. The other was the introduction and development of new class divisions linked to the development of the capitalist mode and its ruthless exploitation (Onimode, 1983: 125).*

The Marxist theoretical formulation that the evolution of societies is foregrounded on the fact that the state appears where class antagonisms exist, as the state is only the instrument by which one class dominate another illuminates the class divisions that the colonial state brought to Nigeria after the territories that make up present day Nigeria were forcefully and violently coupled together to create the colonial Nigerian state. Of course, the colonial class formulation came to strengthen and expand the class divisions in pre-colonial Nigeria. Again, Onimode illustrated this process thus:

*In Nigeria, the colonial state underlined this fact by imposing the colonialist representatives of the British national bourgeoisie as the imperialist ruling class in colonial Nigeria. These colonial governors, residents, district officers, military and police officers, merchants, financiers, shipping magnates and other British imperialists constituted the bulk of the imperialist-bourgeoisie in Nigeria. Their class domination was aided and abetted by other imperialists such as French, German, American, Levantine and other foreign exploiters, all of whom constituted the “imported aristocracy”. Their predominantly British ruling class in Nigeria monopolized the colonial state apparatus, controlled political power and dominated economic and social structures with their imperialist accomplices. These were the dominant expropriators of the economic*

*surplus produced in the colony (Onimode, 1983:126-127)*

Several scholars including Onimode (1983, 1981), Ake (1978), Cohen (1971), Amir (1977), Odion-Akhaine (2018), Oriakhi (1989), Olaopa (2020) have articulated the social class divisions in Nigeria’s colonial and postcolonial politics. Indeed, the postcolonial reality is neo-colonial capitalist political arrangement, flowing side by side with international finance – dominated global political economy with Nigeria as a junior partner in the global capitalist order. Onimode identified the following sub-set of classes in colonial Nigeria, beside the imperialist-bourgeoisie: indigenous petty-bourgeoisie, which consists of feudal chiefs, or natural rulers called emirs, obas, obongs, onis, etc; indigenous “coastal aristocrats” of Lagos, Brass, Calabar, Bonny, etc, who were also colonial intermediaries. They consisted of merchants, squeezing in between the big imperialist forms and the peasant producers: bankers, real estate speculators, transport magnates, western-aculturated repatriates, like the Brazilian Yorubas, etc, who shuttled between the imperialists and the “native of the interior”. Onimode added that the ranks of this subset were expanded after 1945, by the emergence of other indigenous capitalist farmers and merchants trading in Kola-nut, smoked and dried fish, livestock, import-export commodities etc. though at times they competed with imperialist as in banking. This collective intermediary group was essentially one of commission agents, the first “native collectors of the imperialist loot” in Nigeria. This subset was branded as comprador bourgeoisie by Frantz Fanon (see Fanon, 1967). The other groups in this subsets i.e, indigenous colonial petty-bourgeoisie are the professional group of lawyers, doctors, teachers, engineers, journalists, etc. This group according to Onimode, were an aspirant group who quickly joined the *nationalist movement* and used colonial politics as a base for primitive accumulation of wealth, often through kleptocracy, especially when Nigerians ran regional governments after 1952. The salariat, which included minor colonial functionaries, sometimes called “national functionaries” – clerks in public and private sectors, indigenous soldiers and policemen, operators of the technical adjuncts of the colonial state such as railways, power plants, hospitals, harbours etc formed the fourth stratum of the indigenous colonial professionals (petty-bourgeoisie). The last three strata (coastal aristocrats, professionals and minor functionaries), according to Onimode (1983) have been jointly labeled the “middle class” or the French “*inter locuteurs valables*” and were largely the creation of colonialism proper and the mercantilist imperialism that preceded it. Characterizing this stratum of the colonial petty bourgeoisie Onimode citing Amin and Cohen (1977) stated inter alia:

*Their exploitative relationship with the masses has been advanced to suggest that exploitation is possible even without ownership of means of production, provided there is ownership of the means of distribution and control of such state agencies as Marketing Boards which serve exploitative purposes and control, rather than ownership, of the 'means of production, distribution and exchange'.*

The fourth sub-set and lowest social class in the colonial setting identified by Onimode were the masses of peasants, students and workers, Fanons "Wretched of the earth".

*These peasants were the small, individual producers who often hired out their labour. Power as seasonal or migrant workers in mines, plantations, construction sites etc. The workers consisted of the core of the working-class, Marx's "wage-slaves" who had lost any independent means of livelihood and preferably torn themselves off from their rural origins. Their numbers increased with urbanization, industrialization and the imposition of colonial oppressive taxation, which was often aimed at the proletarianization of the peasantry. They consisted of operators, drivers, miners, factory workers, etc in Lagos, Kano, Enugu and other business centres. Their ranks also included the "false proletariat" of semi-permanent unemployed in towns, the "déclassé groups" or Marx's "refuse, offal and wreck of all classes", the French la Bohème". These hapless victims of colonial repression bore the brunt of imperialist and indigenous exploitation (Onimode, 1983:125).*

As stated earlier, Ekekwe (1986) also averred that the class structure in Nigeria was largely created by colonialism. With the advent of colonialism, Nigeria became fully incorporated into the global capitalist agenda, of course, as a junior partner, exploited partner. Aaron Gana articulated the colonial enterprise thus:

*More than anything else, the commodification of everything, including labour power and the values associated with it – such as greed, private property, political democracy, inequality – accounts for the insertion of the Nigerian formation in the interstices of global capitalism (Gana, 1987:9)*

Thus, the structure of capitalism and capitalist mode of production relations were imposed in Nigeria just like any other colonized Third World countries. With the imposition of metropolitan economic and political institutions on the colonized Nigerian peoples, the reproduction of capitalist structures and values became logical outcomes and imperatives which have propelled the neo-colonial political economy since the country achieved "nominal" or "flag" independence in 1960. With Nigeria sinking deeper into the World capitalist economy with political power dominated by the British colonialists between 1860 and 1960 in collaboration with their local feudal and reactionary

indirect rule agents, who were later joined by the petty-bourgeoisie – Herbert Maculay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello and a host of others, three social classes which later fused into two emerged. These classes consisted of the imperialist bourgeoisie, the Nigerian petty-bourgeoisie and the masses of the working people (Onimode, 1983:37). The appropriation of surplus under the colonial system was monopolized by the British serving ultimately the fundamental reason behind free-trade imperialism in Nigeria; the central point of the colonial relationship is the transfer of surplus to strengthen the capitalist class and the capitalist mode of production in the imperialist country (Oriakhi, 2014:12-14).

While the struggle against colonialism witnessed some form of alliance among the various social classes for the sole objective of gaining independence from Britain, the petty-bourgeoisie which led the struggle soon outmaneuvered the working class after the country gained "flag" independence to hijack state power for the purpose of defending and reinforcing its class interest of primitive accumulation to enable the class constitute the ruling class and dominate the political space, relegating the working class to irrelevance in the power equation in Nigeria. Till date the petty-bourgeois class in collaboration with international bourgeoisie and the emerging domestic bourgeoisie runs the affairs of Nigeria.

Ekekwe captures the situation vividly:

*The struggle to negate the colonial state and against the metropolitan bourgeoisie was waged by an alliance of all social classes under petty-bourgeoisie leadership. Throughout the struggle the petty-bourgeoisie was already painting itself in the image of a ruling class and heirs of the metropolitan bourgeoisie. It was of course, the class best placed to lead the struggle in part because of the modern skills that it had acquired through education. (Ekekwe, 1986:76).*

The political leadership of Nigeria since "flag" independence in 1960 is on the hands of the petty-bourgeois class working in close collaboration with international finance capital and its local agents (the so-called emerging bourgeoisie in Nigeria). They have foisted liberal capitalist rule on the country and relegate virtually all strata of the working class to irrelevance in the power equation in the country. The ruling petty-bourgeoisie politicians and their intellectuals (ideologues) parrot the false idea that there are no social classes in Nigerian politics. And that democracy allows all citizens to vote and be voted for. This polemic of "classless" Nigerian society cannot hold water. While social classes may be inchoate and sometimes difficult to categorise because of several factors including the fact that Nigeria is yet to develop as a full blown, production-based capitalist state, the reality is that social classes exist and are becoming very manifest in



contemporary Nigerian politics. The social classes that emerged during colonialism which have been identified in this study have developed and manifested visibly in the politics of the Fourth Republic, 1999 to date. According to Bade Onimode:

*After nominal or “flag” independence in 1960, Nigeria was transformed from a classical colony into a neo-colonial capitalist system. The process involved two critical changes: state power was now formally vested in the leaders of the nationalist struggle and the institutional as well as economic links that tied Nigeria to Britain bilaterally were increasingly becoming multilateral so that Nigeria was more effectively integrated into the international capitalist system. These changes meant that in structural terms the neo-colonial economy was essentially the same as the colonial economy (Onimode, 1981:171).*

To drive home the contention that there are social classes in Nigerian politics today in the politics of the Fourth Republic with the petty-bourgeoisie ruling the country with the dictates of imperialism, Tunji Olaopa, a public intellectual and retired federal permanent secretary in an article published in The Nation Newspaper, Lagos, in October, 2020 stated inter alia:

*Whatever analytical framework we might deploy in understanding Nigeria’s postcolonial dynamics, from ethnicity to religion, Nigeria is a class society. It is made up of the extremely rich and the extremely impoverished, with a few stragglers in between. In this power play, the interest of the business, political and the bureaucratic classes are interviewed in ways that undermine whatever interest the masses of Nigerians may have. This inevitably leads to the use of state power and positions for prebendal purposes. The real democratic objective of the state- the transformation of the quality of life of the people is subordinate to the selfish whims of the few political elites who are more than willing to substitute their interest for the development of the society (Olaopa, 2020:12)*

This is the reality of the Nigerian situation today. Since the First Republic, between 1960 to 1966, to the Fourth Republic 1999 to date, nothing has changed. The collaborations between the so-called national bourgeoisie (petty-bourgeoisie) and international bourgeoisie as represented by international finance capital have led Nigerian governments to implement all sorts of neo-liberal economic policies and blueprints of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other imperialists international financial institutions (IFIs). These policies which are collectively branded as the Washington – Consensus introduced the structural Adjustment Policy (SAP) in the 1980s and now the so-called policies of poverty reduction which successive administrations – military and civilians have implemented since the 1980s. the Washington-

Consensus school of thought who believe they owe the key to Africa’s, nay, Nigeria’s development with their “policy trinity” of the elimination of the public sphere, total liberation for corporations and skeletal social spending (Klein, 2007) has continued to give policy directions to the petty-bourgeoisie class who govern Nigeria today. The President Muhammadu Buhari administration’s Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) is the latest version of the neoliberal policy thrust of the Washington Consensus school.

But what are the consequences of the petty-bourgeoisie rule in contemporary Nigeria? Again, Tunji Olaopa, who is in position to know as a former top state bureaucrat and professor at the government owned think tank, the National Institute for Public Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, Jos reflected:

*And in many senses, the Nigerian postcolonial socioeconomic situation is more than ripe for the ignition of a social uprising. One indication is sufficient-the alarming youth unemployment statistics. One of the frightening lessons of the Arab spring is that modern technologies and a rising youth unemployment are a terrible combination. By the second quarter of 2020, the unemployment rate among young Nigerian has risen from 29.7% to 34.9%. This means that 13.9 million Nigerian Youths have no significant work to do. This translates into an army of frustrated persons whose energies thereby become a security risk, rather than a highly productive factor. And yet the possibility of a revolution dangles in everyone’s mind. Will there be a delay while the political elite gets its acts together? Or will the delay fuse finally? (Olaopa, 2020).*

As articulated above, the bourgeoisie in Nigeria and its class rule has brought misfortune, penury and underdevelopment to the country. They have frustrated the working people from forming political parties to take a shot at power. The bourgeois ruling class has captured all state institutions to feather their nests at the expense of working people. Politics and the political process are under the control of the ruling bourgeois class which Eskor Toyo described as “insatiable money mongers who mount on money for economic power, lean on guns for political power and exploit political power for more economic power. They lord it over the working millions as the ruling class” (Toyo, 2004:2). The point should be made that neoliberal capitalist rule globally has disempowered the mass of the people – the poor working and non-working people, the vulnerable and underclass in society. Neoliberalism is causing anger, frustration and despair among the exploited, under privileged people in society to the point that the most desperate ones live their own laws as demonstrated by the criminal activities of kidnappers, bandits, armed robbers, terrorists and criminal elements in Nigeria today. Anarchy and barbarism are gradually setting in (Oriakhi, 2017:34).



### 3.0 Socialist interventions in nigerian politics: a critique of the fourth republic experience.

This discourse does not pretend to do a deep review of the intervention of Nigerian socialists in the political development of the country. But for the purpose of driving home the thesis of this discourse, which is ‘class politics in the politics of the Fourth Republic’, it is apt that a brief review of socialist intervention in Nigerian politics is considered. The Nigerian socialist movement, the radical left is credited with several interventions in the politics and struggle for independence. As stated earlier, there was a class alliance of all social classes under petty-bourgeois leadership in the struggle against colonialism (Ekekwe, 1986). Thus, several radical socialists and trade unionists like Pa. Michael Imoudo, Mokuwugu Okoye, Kola Balogun, Abiodun Aloba, Hajiya Gambo Sawaba, Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti and several others formed and organized radical socialist parties and movement. A good number of them constituted the Zikist movement in the nationalist party, National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) which later became known as National Convention of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) after parts of Southern Cameroon opted to bond with Northern Cameroon. Most of the radical elements in the 1940s were leaders of Trade Unions who bonded with petty-bourgeoisie politicians to fight the colonialism.

Aside the Zikist movements there were also socialist workers’ and farmers’ party of Nigeria (SWAFP), Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU)-Peoples Redemption Party (PRP). Earlier, the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) (established in 1933), the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) founded in 1923 by Herbert Macaulay had appeared on the Nigerian political scene to fight British imperialism. The class alliance against colonialism between the 1920s and 1950s paid off with the attainment of “flag” independence on October 1, 1960. Although, several trade unions, unionist, radical socialist politicians, the students movement, the women movement, peasants and other strata of the oppressed Nigerian working people teamed up with the petty bourgeois (so-called nationalist politicians to secure “flag” independence for Nigeria, the opportunistic Petty- bourgeois class hijacked political power and pushed the working people to the background. Since 1960 till today, the class division in Nigeria has become sharper with the petty-bourgeois in power using the state to enrich them and enforce class rule.

A researcher on Nigerian left politics articulates Nigerian leftists’ intervention succinctly: *Since the 1940s, these movements, separate but interconnected, have fought a very formidable hydra: pre-modern-style male chauvinism, classical British imperialism and later on, the Nigerian polity itself (dominated by a semi-criminal comprador class). They fought against exploitation by foreign corporations.*

*Continuously, at one time or another, all these movements were illegal; militantly Marxist movements technically still are, in 2016. (Mayer, 2016: 36-37)*

In the second Republic, 1979-1983, left political forces and socialists couldn’t do much as the petty-bourgeois class continues to dominate the political firmament. The petty-bourgeois which forms the political class continuously dismiss labour and all left forces as ignorant and incapable of sustained political activity and governance. They also ensured that left forces and socialists in the country were frustrated from forming political parties or registering left political parties. Although, the All Nigeria socialists conference, held in Zaria in 1978 had given the nod for socialists to form parties, and efforts were made in that direction, it was only the socialist-oriented People’s Redemption Party (PRP) led by Aminu-Kano and Balarabe Musa that saw the light of the day. Although, Tunji Braithwaite’s party also gained recognition it could not go far. There are several factors which explain the relegation of left political parties to the background in Nigeria. The obvious and more critical factor is the class character of Nigerian Politics.

Eskor Toyo, a renowned leftist academic and socialist political activist, who spent all his adulthood fighting for socialism in Nigeria contended:

*However, since 1960, i.e, since the ideological question of independence versus colonialism was removed from Nigerian Politics, the politics of Nigeria has grossly degenerated. There is now no politics of ideas. We have the politics of individual bourgeois interests. Then the bourgeoisie in their selfish and greedy competition exploit ethnicity. The country is consumed by bourgeoisie greed, egotism, corruption and irresponsibility. Then from time to time, for lack of anything else to exploit to be a “leader”, some resort to stroking up religions or regional differences. All this irresponsibility provokes Military coups which leave problems unsolved. The country is a cauldron of opportunism, ethnicity and conflict. It is thanks to military autocracy and the love of ordinary Nigerians for the country that this country has not broken up. (Toyo, 2014: 121)*

The socialist thinker of blessed memory added:

*I concluded way back in 1962 that the only way of dragging this country out of the perpetual politics of grabbing, personality cult, ethnicity, opportunism and bareness of ideas and the constant danger of disintegration is to create a working peoples’ Party. Such party, if so substantial that it cannot be ignored, will counterpoise the interest of working people to the greedy interest of all the grabbing bourgeois egoists. The wage workers belong to all the ethnic groups. So do artisans as a class. So do the peasantry as a class. It is the vital interest of these classes that the bourgeoisie as a class toss aside. To cover up their perfidy they*

*exploit ethnicity and sometimes ignite religious differences into a conflagration. (Toyo, 2004: 121).*

It is on record that Eskor Toyo himself working with many of his comrades in the labour movement, the intelligentsia and other members of the working class laboured throughout his lifetime to establish a vibrant workers' party but for the vacillating character of the trade union movement and the divisive tendency of the socialist movement in Nigeria, the emergence of a truly workers' party remains a mirage. According to Esko Toyo:

*It (Eskor's meeting with workers at different times in different places in Nigeria) also demonstrated that it was not their (workers') unreceptiveness or inability to understand things that kept workers in Nigeria from power. It was lack of ability to educate and the inability to mobilise because of selfishness, factionalism, and opportunism and cowardice on the part of so-called leaders. My experience from 1960 till today has again and again confirmed this. The workers understand the language of power and can be mobilized with great enthusiasm for it. The trade unionists settle, of course, only for crumbs from the master's table begging the masters, and bowing before them – which is the professional role assigned to trade unionism. The trade unionists also incline to opportunism, manipulation, double talk and aping the behaviour and life style of the masters. (Tayo, 2004: 11)*

The politics of the Fourth Republic, since 1999 till date foreground the crescendo of the class character of Nigerian politics since the colonial era. The ruling bourgeois class has perfected its strategies and tactics of holding on to the power to the exclusion of the working people and other deprived social classes, including women and youths in the country. At the beginning in 1998 three political parties, with probably ethnic colourations were registered by the military-controlled Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to contest the series of elections in 1999. The parties, - all bourgeois parties were the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All Peoples Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD). The PDP was in power between 1999 and 2015. Subsequently, following alliances and adjustments of positions by members of the bourgeois ruling class, several parties emerged, and the ruling All Progressive Congress emerged from the coming together of Buhari led Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Tinubu-led Action Congress (AC), and the All Peoples Party (APP) and a faction of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA). The political space was also opened for more parties to emerge with well over fifty parties operating in the country today. In all this, what is interesting is how the bourgeois ruling class has manipulated the democratic process, and completely schemed out progressive left political parties which emerged in the Fourth Republic to contest for power. The long-standing PRP, National

Conscience Party (NCP) the Democratic Alternative (DA), the Labour Party (LP) emerged as left-leaning Parties. It took a long court battle for the NCP to be recognized and registered by INEC. The same court process is being used by INEC to deregister parties and frustrate left parties like the Socialist Party of Nigeria (SPN).

As Eskor Toyo (2004) correctly observed, the Politics of the Fourth Republic like the previous republics are soaked in ethnicity and religious division, with a constant divide between the geopolitical North and South of the country. The bourgeois politicians formed ethnic and religious blocs and power associations to canvas for political power. These ethnic organs all claim to be defending the interest of their ethnic groups. Yet, the leadership of the ethno-religious groups are factions and fractions of the ruling bourgeois class. They masquerade as the saviours of their peoples but in reality they are busy fighting to grab state power with which they will further their primitive accumulation. These factions and fractions of the ruling class based in the six geopolitical zones of the country are currently not in control of power. So, they make demands about "true federalism", "devolution of power", "creation of states", and sundry demands. The point has been well canvassed elsewhere that what drives these Nigerian ethnic leaders and champions, some even among the clergy is the struggle to grab power and have access to the petro-dollars of the Nigerian state. The avenue to that access is power.

*It can be argued that the game political actors play is about the distribution of power in a given society-power to control the production relations. The succession crises in Nigeria such as the annulment of June 12, 1993 Presidential elections won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola and the one under focus (the Yar'Adua succession crisis of 2010) are fundamentally about the distribution of oil rents which prioritises hegemonic control of the superstructure. Crude oil, a dominant economic asset of contemporary Nigeria, represents the most important expression of the country's connection to the international global economy and has largely shaped the complexion of the country's superstructure, thereby underlining Marx's (1859) famous words that the totality of the "relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. (Odion, 2018: 197.).*

Nevertheless, while the bourgeois political class of the various ethnic nationalities are gaming for power to control state resources and power itself, it is important not to ignore the country's skewed federal structure, which itself is a product of the politics of resource distribution, "the ultimate prize in politics", and is the heart of the persistent struggle for control of the centre (Odion, 2015).

In the fierce intra-class war in the petty-bourgeois camp today in Nigeria, the working people are treated as underdogs and irrelevant in the distribution of resources. And so, the living standard in Nigeria today continue to plummet to the abyss with unemployment figure of over 13 million young people, the road to anarchy is being perfected. Yet, the ruling bourgeois class is soaked in the web of self-serving primitive accumulation.

#### 4.0 Ethno-religious contradictions or class contradictions: unmasking the Nigerian crisis

It is fashionable for some Nigerian Marxists and radical intellectuals to obviate the ethnic and religious dimensions of the Nigerian crisis. As we demonstrated in the successive sections of the discourse, there is no doubt, the Nigerian Petty-bourgeois ruling class has manipulated ethnicity and religion as critical variables to grab political power, especially in their various constituents and regions, and have thus, created a wide gulf between the citizens of the North and of the South. The ruling class found these variables as “soft” targets to win the support of their kits and kins from their ethnic groups. The unfortunate result is that the Nigerian peoples themselves have bought the lies of their oppressors over the years, and do vote along ethnic and religious lines. Since, 1960, the pattern of voting, along ethnic lines for dominant sectional political parties is not abating. Variables like low-level political education, poor political mobilization, money politics, “son of the soil” sentiments, and even false consciousness, of the people may be responsible for this aberrant political behaviour of the exploited working people. But the socialist political activists must seek some creative way to solve this problem. It is not enough for progressive forces to dismiss ethno-religious forces in the struggle for political change, and wish that only objective forces will make the people to embrace political change.

Ethnicity and religion are twin factors which shape Nigerian politics negatively today. The ruling Petty-bourgeois class will continue to manipulate these twin forces, but radical left forces should begin to address these variables frontally as they manifest rather than dismissing them as insignificant. It is merely academic to do so.

#### 5.0 By way of conclusion

As we have noted elsewhere, political power is the all-be-it route to empire-building and fiedom for the mainstream Nigerian politicians-the Petty-bourgeois social class which appropriates and expropriate the national patriomony to build its capital base for continued domination of social, economic, cultural and political life in the country. The Fourth Republic like all the successive ones and the period of military interregnum is anchored on class-base politics. The ruling Petty-bourgeois class is perfecting its hegemonic

hold on the Polity while pushing other social classes, the working peoples, the true producers of national wealth to the brink. The dominant parties are bourgeois parties, even when majority of them are mere “portfolio” parties. Yet, they go into alliance with the ruling party and other bigger parties to grab state power. The politics of the Fourth Republic has brought pains, misery, untold poverty and continued exploitation to the Nigerian peoples. The ruling class will continue to hold all sorts of imbizo in the guise of working for the people. The overall result as we are currently witnessing is the continued build up of the capital formation process of the petty-bourgeois ruling class while the working people are left to wallow in penury, disease and death. The question is; what is to be done? Perhaps, Olaopa (2020) reflections is germane: “and yet the possibility of a revolution dangles in everyone’s mind? This calls for critical reflections by all critical, progressive minds who truly want social change in Nigeria.

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