UNDERSTANDING STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN A NEW WORLD ORDER: THE COVID-19 EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) a novel disease was first noticeable in 2019 at the Wuhan region in Peoples Republic of China as an epidemic. Later it grows into a global pandemic causing disorganisation to global system of development. Countries (industrial and less industrial) were at cross road to challenges posed by this dreadful cankerworm in areas like government spending, health, economy (trade and investment), education, agriculture and the like. Restriction of movement of people and goods across national boundaries either initiate a new world order or exacerbate existing order. This paper used secondary data including functionalism and mirrored structural changes in developmental processes of society especially how society regenerate itself amidst serious challenges on it cohesiveness, stability, equilibrium, maintenance and productivity. It argued that since all units of the social system are independent but interconnected, a dysfunction in any of these component parts would result to imbalance in the entire structure of social system as epitomised in the covid-19 crisis. Even though critics accused functionalists of lack of being explicit on how social change occurs within the social structure. The paper concluded that how functionalism express the social system as product of interdependence of functional parts is significant to understanding the network of relationship as well as adaptive mechanism particularly in the era of novel coronavirus (Covid-19).

Keywords: Structural change, Covid-19, Functionalism, New World Order

1. Introduction

Functionalism is a significant perspective in sociology that mirror society in terms of the functions performed by its constituent parts. Other perspectives within sociological discourse include conflict, symbolic interactionism and so on. Functionalists view social problems in society as a product of inadequate adaptability to constant change by various institutions within the social system. Functionalist view point was first noticed in the writings of August Comte especially in the "*Course of Positive Philosophy*" published between 1830 and 1842 and later in Herbert Spencer's "*The Principles of Sociology*" fully published in 1896, (Turner, Beeghley and Power, 2007). But it was later polished by Emile Durkheim and of recent by Talcott Parsons to explain how society maintains statuses or adapt to roles. Durkheim takes more credit in the development of functionalism in modern times (Robert, 1973). In his analysis of social solidary, he pictures the social system as characterised by interdependence of roles coupled with lack

of self-sufficiency of diverse units. This is more visible in societies with organic form of solidarity (Whitney, 1983; Turner, Beeghley and Power, 2007). Parsons advocated that individuals should freely take roles that best suited them than being assigned one. As people become more specialised in their roles there is possibility that new demands or roles may emanate from the initial ones leading to individualism (Bottomore, 1975).

Development as a concept entails the enhancement of the quality of life and livelihood. In its strictest sense, it implies life-sustenance, self-esteem and freedom from servitude. (Todaro and Smith, 2012). It implies interaction of individuals in institutional arrangement and the interdependence of constituent parts of the social system to ensure human development. The nature and manner of their interaction is also significant to development. As earlier noted, the World order has recently been challenged by a dreadful cankerworm that allegedly originated from China (WHO, 2020). This implies that societies must generate internal and external mechanism (status' and roles) to either cope with or fit into new exigencies created by the covid-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, the History of respiratory illnesses including coronavirus is not new to the world (John, 2001; Hays, 2005; Christian, 2016; Steve, 2020; Brands and Francis, 2020). But the history of the cause of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (Covid-19) that bedevilled the world recently was a coronavirus term SARS-CoV-2 which formally came to the notice of the World Health Organisation on 31/12/2019 (WHO, 2020). It started as an epidemic in Wuhan China with 59 reported cases as at 5 January 2020. By 15 January, about 282 confirmed cases was recorded by WHO with four cases each in South Korea, Japan and Thailand. In May 12, 2020 about 82,591 new cases were reported globally with daily infection rate of over 4200 persons (WHO, 2020).

Covid-19 spreading like wildfire globally illuminates a system of mutual dependence in economy, security and geopolitics. The then World Bank Vice President (Hafez Ghanem) in one of his messages said "*Covid-19 is testing the limits of societies and economies across the world and African countries are likely to be hit particularly hard*". As a result, many economic and social analysts predicted a change in interactional patterns and interrelationship across world borders (Anagun and Oni, 2020). Activities may naturally readjust in the face of lockdown and other forms of restrictions; people, businesses and governance could adapt to new patterns of institutional arrangements for survival. For instance, families purchased more food than usual because people spend much time at home and schools have to switch to online learning to educate those that would produce enough food for the family. Similarly, competition among world powers particularly US and China shifted to accommodate alliances that will facilitate vested interest (Steve, 2020) which manifested in promotion of 5G network. In functionalist view, even where current arrangements were altered by whatever societal factor society has developed internal mechanism to naturally deal with such alteration. To understand how this works, it is necessary to leap into the contributions of some forerunners of functionalism toward stability and maintenance of system function.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Retrospective view of Covid-19 Era within Structural Framework

An important personality in the development of Sociology August Comte (1798-1857) ideas on positivism and functionalism were clearly demonstrated in some of his works notably "*Course of Positive Philosophy*" published between 1830 and 1842, and the "*System of Positive Polity*" published between 1851 and 1854, (Turner, Beeghley and Power, 2007). His demonstration of the laws that govern operation of human society is significant to reconstruction of workings of societies during covid-19 pandemic. Comte use of the concept of social statics and social dynamics that represent functions perform for survival of society and change or development society experience overtime explains his argument on the "law of human progress."

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) read Comtes works and concluded that sociology should focus on the condition under which social differentiation and de-differentiation occur. In "*The Principles of Sociology*" he explained the basic laws of human organization. His use of the concept "*survival of the fittest*" (a reflection of natural selection) demonstrates diplomatic and explicit manipulation of covid-19 pandemic by countries for vested interest. Elimination existed in form of economic dependency and recession that reshaped the world order. Even where these conditions are altered, society showed its natural tendency to return to normal by balancing out the resulting changes to the social structure which reflects in new roles in health, education, agriculture and foreign policies.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) like Comte believed that the law of human organisation must be discovered. His focus was to understand the force that integrates society especially as it undergoes rapid change and differentiation. To him, integration will always involve a 'morality' or set of values, beliefs and norms that guide the cognitive orientations and behaviours of individuals. That is, people are bound together by a common morality. In DurkheimstheDivision of Labour *in Society* particularly in organic society roles are highly differentiated. Complexities due to the pandemic reflect in international arena in form of power or economic dominance leading to interdependence amongst institutions and governments. It also resonate cold war among powerful nations that seek to exert influence in political and economic affairs of weaker nations.

From Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) system theory (see Sjoberg, 1960; Turner, Beeghley and Power, 2007), actors actions are guided by desire for optimum gratification and their relationship in terms of the situation and with each other is regulated by cultural and shared symbols. Importantly, the relations between status and roles in a social system that is where actors occupy certain positions and perform certain functions (roles) to ensure order in the system. Further incidences in society's development like the case of the novel covid-19 may generate new roles/status which allowed individuals explore their unique abilities or personalities within the social system. Similarly, Merton introduced the concepts of 'manifest' and 'latent' functions further supported Parson' system analysis especially with character of actors toward development of vaccines. In as much as every part of society works hard to ensure stability, they may have dysfunctions; functions that create less adaptation of the system. While 'manifest' are well recognise consequences, 'latent' consequences are neither intended nor recognised by participants in a social

system, (Ganon, 1972). Despite collective efforts to combat the virus individualism surfaced where actors like US, China and the like each seek to exert dominance toward vaccine production reshaped the world order.

Generally, the functionalists focus on the interconnectedness of constituent parts of society and how each part functions for the maintenance of the whole. All things being equal, these parts function to create equilibrium, order as well as performance. But where there is problem (dysfunction), these parts must work hard to reproduce new system of order/balance, equilibrium plus performance (see Robert, 1973; Bottomore, 1975; Turner, Beeghley and Power, 2007). For instance, the prevalence of coronavirus (covid-19) in the world compels readjustment of other parts of the system to create new form of order. Dysfunction in health institution caused by the spread of covid-19 virus necessitated readjustment in government spending, politics, trade relations, education, agriculture, family lifestyle and the like. This way, a new social order (equilibrium and performance) is naturally created for the continuity of the entire social system.

2.2 Justification of New World Order in Era of Covid-19 Pandemic

Social order derives ultimately from the functional prerequisites of social system which represent it presence as a necessary condition of their existence. Social actions assume systematic and regular nature from the fact that it is governed by values and norms which guides behaviour. For instance, the health institution serves to promote well-being of individuals in the social system, but where certain pandemic in this case covid-19 threatens lives, a social dysfunction or disorganisation which affect primary function of health institution is introduced into the social system. Where one part of the system is dysfunctional, its effect trickles down to other parts hence, create disunity, disharmony, disequilibrium or lack of stability. Globalised competitiveness in trade, technology and security pronate direction of mutual dependence of nations and economies. National strategic plans take reshape as influence by dark pulse of covid-19 pandemic. Great economic actors notably US and China mapped out plans of action toward more integration, sustenance or maintenance of world order. Such artificial course became manifest in drive toward isolationism, one-worldism or two-worldism in global socio-economic and political system especially in the US (see Joseph, 1990; Brands and Francis, 2020).

3. Methodology

Isolationism was a dominantly US model used toward the closed of the first world war to 1941 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. The basic aim is for the US to try and avoid being entangled in other nations' problems but always work hard to limit it jurisdiction for independent action. Again, it can only drag itself in conflicts that serve its vested interest (see Brands and Francis, 2020).

One-Worldism is an economic model that rejects Isolationism. It was the post war initiative of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This model presumed there was shared interest sufficiently enough among US, UK, China and the Soviet Union to establish mutual beneficial global structures that would help regulate commerce as well as political relations. Institutions promulgated in early 1940s for this arrangement should include the

United Nations (UN), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and a proposed international trade organization, (Brands and Francis, 2020).

Two-Worldism was put forward by President Harry S. Truman as a corrective of One-worldism. The central belief here is that fundamental variations exist in vested interests (including ideology) between US and USSR which indicates that it will be unavoidable for Europe to be divided along economic and political line. This model rested on two offshoots of the Marshall Plan; the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) couple with General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (progenitor of WTO) and European Coal and Steel Community (that begot the EU), (Brands and Francis, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic raised decentralised forces in global economic system, forces which have been growing in strength over recent years. This new trend of crisis compel governments to place restrictions on movement of both people and goods; a new change with adverse effect on global patterns even after the pandemic. It is no news that most countries `have restricted about 70% of their entry points (land, sea and air) against foreigners. Stakeholders in United States particularly politicians (irrespective of party affiliation) advocated for changed in approach toward healthcare spending. In the US, both democrats and republican politicians asked for a new "Buy American" rules for government health spending. Also, France seek complete freedom in supply of critical medical facilities toward December, 2020, (Brands and Francis, 2020; Matthew and Michael, 2020).

About 90 nations seem to block export of medical goods into their territory. Over Twenty-nine countries imposed similar restrictions on food stuff. Japan favours paying foreign companies especially those that brought back their factories home; Trump administration considered a similar policy option. The European Union (EU) tends to impose new restrictions on foreign investment as well as takeovers. Even Pascal Lamy (the then DG of WTO) and notable agitator of free-trade emphasized the need to change the focus of international supply-chain management away from "efficiency" but toward "resilience" in other to minimize the effects of covid-19 disruption (Jacob, 2020; Brands and Francis, 2020). It was also visible that national governments' policies gear toward security in diverse areas of trade and commerce.

However, it was not every country that plans retreat from all aspects of globalization. For instance, New Zealand and Singapore led a coalition to expand trade particularly in medical products through reduction in tariff. This stems from the view that effects of covid-19 pandemic necessitated the need for more alliance or cooperation than recourse to autarky (policy of economic independence). Similarly, many research and other forms of studies in the knowledge-based industry (educational institution) were carried out using online communication technology. Most people cut travel cost and avoided distant or stressful journeys and this new trend (norm) arguably continued in the education industry even after covid-19 era, (see Jacobs, 2020).

If the challenges posed by the First World War, the 1918 Spanish flu be reflected upon, the challenges posed by covid-19 pandemic may not be short-lived. After the Second World War, it took a quarter-century before de-globalization was finally stopped and the world spent about half a century just to return to pre-World War I stage. With the above

in mind, the world may overcome covid-19 crisis but the current world order may unlikely revive without support. This may require governments' actions (particularly towards China) so as to rebuild or replace the world order. This agenda would foster what is known as "splinternet" (Brands and Francis, 2020), as rightly asserted by Eric Schmidt (former Google CEO) that "*it is far less desirable than finding a way to coexist peacefully and profitably with China under one set of standards and a genuinely global market for technology and communications for instance, the production of fifth generation (5G) and possibly sixth generation (6G) wireless networks*" (Brands and Francis, 2020).

Over the years, Africa and other less industrial countries are direct recipients of European economic and political gimmicks. The consequences of both WWI and WWII engulfed Africa even though it was not an actor in either of the world wars. As suggested by functionalist scholars, societies are independent yet interconnected so that alteration in one aspect of society influences the general structure of the whole. Stability of Africa particularly sub-Saharan Africa is shaken by disorganisation in political, economic, social and more recently the novel coronavirus (covid-19). Prior covid-19, most of the sub-Saharan African countries already faced daunting challenges in areas of terrorism, banditry, political instability, climate change and so on (AU Report, 2020). The situation particularly in Nigeria signal dysfunction in the social system. Societies were left to adapt to the new order, but in February 2020 the covid-19 pandemic showed it ugly face in the country. Within few months, the effects of covid-19 permeate all aspects of Nigeria's social system beginning with health, economy, politics to other aspects of social life, (see Chike, 2020; Chukwuka and Amara, 2020; Anagun and Oni, 2020).

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Imperatives of Covid-19 Pandemic and Nigeria Social Structure

Many nations of the world were concerned about the possibility of economic recession. Economic and social change analyst predicted a negative change in global economic structure due to the impact of the covid-19 pandemic. World Bank Group in April, 2020 said that the economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa may decline from 2.4% in 2019 at a decreasing rate of -2.1% to -5.1% in 2020, which may cause the first region's recession in about 25 years, and the consequences may rest on three giant economies of Nigeria, South Africa and Angola, (Anagun and Oni, 2020). Most economies in less industrial countries including Nigeria experience a shift in their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in recent past due to covid-19 pandemic and this create challenges on the economic strength of such countries. Government economic policies are required to create balance in the system. Like in the view of Amara (2020), microeconomic policies may reduce pressure on the economy; citizens' lifestyle as well as governance.

It goes without the say that "health is wealth." At the same time, David and David (2006) affirmed that "the Gross Domestic Product per capital as a result of the pandemic (covid-19) largely caused changes in other areas of human endeavours like education, productivity, export/import, exchange rates and price of oil per barrel, fertility rate, consumption and savings rate. They also stressed that countries can adapt traditional mechanism such as reducing trade tariff to promote trading, restructuring well placed state-owned enterprise, export promotion, increase infrastructure, investment in education

and health care services among several others. This means that the pandemic had threaten economic prosperity of Nigeria in no distant time. Like in other nations the coronavirus (covid-19) pandemic affected diverse sectors of Nigeria economy such as the price of crude oil, education, health, agriculture, tourism, and so on, and as well, affects citizens lifestyle, (Eneji, Odey and Bullus, 2016; Anagun and Oni, 2020; Amara, 2020). In a bit to uncover how alteration in one aspect of society affects the entire system we will briefly analyse some of the institutions that constituted the Nigeria social structure and this may include Health, economy, agriculture and education.

4.2 Covid-19 and Health Institution

Corona Virus (covid-19) has largely affected all institutions in Nigeria; in fact, one of the worst hit sectors by this pandemic is the health sector. The health sector can be regarded as been aggregate output of human health and social services. With limited number of health practitioners and facilities, the health sector was overburdened thus the need for government to increase its spending on health sector. A further effect on health is that access to care for simple illness became harder than usual due to the fear of the virus spreading. Many health care centres placed restrictions on how patients get treatment or admitted to prevent overcrowding in hospitals. Also, the needs to provide equipment and medicines for health services led to a reduction in the production of vaccines for other diseases especially vaccines for immunization for new born babies, therefore leading to increase in infant death rate. As such, the African Union Report (2020) reveals that persistent increase in the pandemic (COVID-19) could create difficulties for most African countries including Nigeria to treat their patients.

4.3 Covid-19 and Economic Institution: Price of Crude Oil

The covid-19 had significantly cause reduction in crude oil prices globally. Oil producing countries; those whose revenue predominantly depends on oil particularly in less industrial countries were worst hit. Just three months into the pandemic crisis global oil price fail by 44.07% and within the same period the price of oil per barrel reduced to US $30 as opposed to $65 per barrel in November, 2019. Nigeria might have lost up to US $19 billion within the same period (CBN, 2020). This means that the economic output of the country will be negatively affected by shortfall in crude oil price because oil constitutes 90% of the country's foreign exchange. Similarly, in the 2020 national budget alone oil revenue accounted for about 31% of the total budget (CBN, 2020). Even the prices of non-oil commodities shrank drastically: aluminium (0.49%), lead (1.64%), metal (4%), copper (0.47%), natural gas (30%) and cocoa (21%), (Brookings Institution, 2020; African Union, 2020; Amara, 2020).

4.4 Covid-19 and the Agricultural Institution

Agriculture is said to form the major part of the Nigerian economy, which is also the aggregate output of crop production, livestock, forestry and fishing. Asides oil, agriculture is one of the largest income generating sectors from the non-oil sector to the Nigerian economy. According to the National Bureau of Statistics Report (NBS, 2019), agriculture has contributed 28.25 percent to the overall GDP during the third quarter of 2019. However, this contribution reduced with the outbreak of the deadly disease during the lockdown period, also border closure leading to disruption in transportation and

internal supply food chain. Remarkably, according to World Economic Forum Report (2020), domestic restrictions and import delays are hindrance to farmers, while farmers were warned against predictive failure in production if government does not act. Also, Nigeria fertilizer stock during this report was 20 percent below its normal levels; there were only enough seeds to plant. The result of this is low production of food for consumption, which gradually moves the country towards malnutrition in post covid-19 era. In addition to this, COVID-19 profoundly affected the livelihood of poor rural farmers who depended on agriculture, (CBN, 2020; Anagun and Oni, 2020). It generated a shift in GDP of Agriculture from 21.2 percent in 2018 to an estimated 26.21 percent in 2020, which resulted from high rate consumption of food in the country due the lockdown caused by Covid-19 pandemic (Amara, 2020).

4.5 Covid-19 and Educational Institution

Education is seen as the first and important yardstick for any nation that sets to experience development. In Nigeria, the output of education is aggregated to be primary, secondary, and tertiary education. All these levels of education were partially or fully closed due to the impact of covid-19 pandemic. The decision to close down schools affected more than a hundred countries worldwide and impacted on the majority (about 90%) of student's population globally (UNESCO, 2020).

In taking this decision, Nigeria is not excluded from this impact. According to Nigeria Education in Emergencies Working Group (2020) accounts that close to about 46 million students throughout the country will be affected, not only that but about 40,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) children to be given some form of learning in camps and host communities will be affected by stoppage of learning in schools. This shows that educational sector is also greatly affected by the deadly coronavirus, and the society will have to adapt to the new change. Presently, in the mode of teaching; many schools in Nigeria and around the globe, have adopted the online teaching method while for the younger ones, their parents have become their teachers or merely get teachers to teach their kids at home.

While many European countries have successfully implemented their school setting using online digital tools like zoom or google meet, the question remains; can Nigerian education survive the online teaching methods, coupled with the unavailable network and high rate of purchasing data? In essence, the virus; COVID-19 would be seen in education as a result of the changes in modes of teaching and how students relate in schools, the ability to adapt to this remains a question to be answered. However, this pulse a fear in the minds of parents and guardian as regards the students ability to recall and regain all what they've been taught, (Anagun and Oni, 2020).

In fact, the virus did not affect much of the student population may be, due to policy that ensure closure of schools to enforce social distance which help to cut the rate of infections and also reduced overstretch of health facilities in the country (Anagun and Oni, 2020; Amara, 2020). Not just on health services, other sectors of the society would suffer if the pandemic persist as observed in the analysis above. Even when the functionalist perspective is not explicit on how social change might occur in society, it

still gives insight into the internal workings of institutions performing roles to ensure the continuity of the whole.

4.6 The Shortfall of Functionalism in New World Order

Functionalist perspective helps to explain the functions of societal structures or institutions and how each contributes to the success of the entire system. It however fails to provide us with clear picture of life within this social system, (Hughes and Kroehler, 2008). Dahrendoff (1929) viewed structural functionalism as utopian in the sense that it shows a world with little development histories, full of consensus showing high degree of integration and always tenting toward maintenance of the status quo. For example, the conflict between the US and China over security and economic dominance today has put the entire world at cross-road. The Covid-19 may not be the factor that initiated such conflict but serve to fuel this crisis. America did not trust China particularly over what she felt as conscious spread of the covid-19 and consequent mass export of suspected Personal Protection Equipment (PPEs) and she (US) is determine to react, (Brands and Francis, 2020). Further implications were seen in the fuelled war in Ukraine and the attack in Iran among other Asian Nations.

Furthermore functionalism always talk about stability, order, consensus, order without recognizing the fact that conflict is inevitable in a society in as much as human beings interact with one another. This means that consensus, cohesion, stability, order and equilibrium are mere theoretical marsh especially in situations where social actors are motivated by vested interest. Recent increase in political and economic conflict between USA and China on one part and political conflict between USA and Russia is a perfect example, (Brands and Francis, 2020). The US also suspects Russia on perceived plan to undermine it one-worldism economic model during the 2016 presidential elections in the United States. Recently suspicion resulted to crisis as seen in the fuelled war in Ukraine and Iran

China on its own part has no plan to supplant one world order or model rather, try to take advantage of such institutional arrangement. It schemed to exploit than embrace the so-called developed world's ideals of open market economy. This is seen in China's plan to inject over $1.4 trillion over five years just to strengthen domestic firms who are interested in carrying out projects in areas like mobile communications and data centres, artificial intelligence and other technological fields. Again countries like Germany, Australia, Norway and Sweden that oppose Chinese strategic policy were heavily sanction particularly with bans on importation (Brands and Francis, 2020; Liza, 2020).

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

How the world succeeds through covid-19 crisis shaped international opinion toward the global order. This envisages the way and manner China, USA, Russia, UK and the entire European Union acts first in the race to manufacture vaccine for patronage by other nations and second to establish both economic and political dominance in other nations especially through nuclear programmes. It was clear from the covid-19 experiences that the world is a nip system only separated by functional roles which ordinarily

shouldpromote unity and coexistence. It is imperative for government across the globe to initiate economic, health and other forms of policies that would slowly allow societies adapt to the new world order ushered in as result of the covid-19 pandemic.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings the following recommendations were made:

1. Enhance Global Health Governance: Strengthen international cooperation and governance frameworks to ensure that global health crises are managed effectively. This involves reforming organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) to improve coordination, transparency, and resource allocation during pandemics, as well as fostering partnerships between governments, NGOs, and the private sector.

2. Promote Digital Transformation and Connectivity: Recognize the critical role of technology during the pandemic and invest in digital infrastructure to enhance connectivity. Governments and institutions should prioritize initiatives that promote digital literacy and access to technology, ensuring that all communities can participate in a more digitally driven economy and society.

3. Reassess Economic Models and Supply Chains: Evaluate existing economic structures to build resilience against future shocks. This includes diversifying supply chains, promoting local production, and adopting sustainable practices. Policymakers should encourage businesses to embrace flexibility and innovation, ensuring they are better equipped to adapt to disruptions.

4. Strengthen Social Safety Nets and Health Systems: Advocate for robust social safety nets and improved health systems to protect vulnerable populations. This involves investing in mental health, universal healthcare access, and social support programs that can safeguard citizens during crises, thus ensuring a healthier recovery for societies.

5. Encourage Global Cooperation on Climate Change: Integrate lessons from the pandemic into climate change strategies by fostering a collaborative approach to addressing environmental challenges. Building a more sustainable future requires international frameworks that promote green technologies, reduce carbon footprints, and prioritize resilience against climate-related disruptions, ensuring that public health and environment

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