

Modernization Theories and the Study of Development Today: A Critical Analysis

Mazi Mbah, C.C.¹ and Dr. Ojukwu, U.G.²

¹Department of Political Science, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University,
Igbariam Campus – Nigeria
Tel: 0803-870-2687
E-mail: mbahclem2@gmail.com

²Department of Political Science, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University
Igbariam Campus – Nigeria
Tel: 0703-333-1344
E-mail: ojukwuuche04@gmail.com

Abstract: *The topic modernization theories and the study of development today: A critical analysis is an interrogation of the relevance of these theories of development to current realities in different societies. The study adopted historical/descriptive method and modernization theory as its theoretical framework of analysis. It found that the theories of modernization are still relevant as of today in the study of development. But its Western Anglo-American values bias is a burden on its continued relevance to the study of development in different societies. The study came to the conclusion that the criticisms against modernization theories led to the emergence of dependency theory in studying development. Therefore, the study recommends that the theories of modernization must play down Western Anglo-American value bias for their proponents to be at breast with current state of affairs in Non-Western Societies.*

Keywords: Development, Modernization, Functionalism, Dependency and Third World Societies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Modernization is the view of historical progression as a series of stages, reflecting intellectual, technological, economic and political development. It views progress in terms of particular path of transition.

The theory of modernization is said to be the current term and the old process, the process of social change where less developed society's acquired characteristic common to more developed society.

For some persons, modernization is a process of structural differentiation, functional specialization and adaptive upgrading. In the evolutionary perspective modernization refers to transition from primitive to traditional form of industrialized society to super industrialized form religious to secular ideology, from particularism to ascription, diffuseness, self-orientation to universalism etc. A modern society has been identified as a society characterized by the application of technology and by extensive social interdependence.

Modernization implies the breakdown of traditional society, it refers to the development of a new social order based on advanced technology and the spirit of science, a rational view of life, a rational approach to social relations, achieving for justice in public affairs and above all else on the acceptance in the political realm of the belief that the

prime unit of public policy should be the nation state (Ojukwu, et al., 2016, p.84).

Modernization theory like industrial revolution is said to have started in Western Europe and has spread to other parts of the world. Thus, industrialization, Urbanization, education and media participation are the various aspects of modernization. It therefore, refers to change in political culture and political institutions as a result of the process of modernization.

The association of modernization with a particular Western Model of development has led to the charge of euro centrism and a denial of a neat dichotomy between the traditional and the modern understanding, political and socio-economic progress (Mclean and MacMillan, 2009, p.349).

2. BACKGROUND TO POLITICAL MODERNIZATION AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

These two terms are used interchangeably. However, there are some attempts to distinguish them. Following the original work of Lucian W. Pye, C.H. Dodd in (Satyabrata, 2017, pp.304 - 305), writes that political modernization denotes political transformation found first in Europe and then following in many other parts of the world since the Renaissance. Its major characteristics are (a) equality of political opportunity (b) capacity for making and implementing policy (c) specialization of political functions and (d) secularization of the political process, meaning separating politics from religion.

Accordingly, on the way to political modernization, every political system, encounters certain problems, though not necessarily in the same order of intensity. These are often called “developmental problems”. Pye (1965) has identified six such major problems: (a) legitimacy crisis (b) identity crisis (c) penetration crisis (d) participation crisis (e) integration crisis and (f) distribution crisis.

According to Gabriel Almond, political development was “a growth industry” from the mid 1940s till the 1960s. What led to this was that the end of the Second World War brought in Africa and Asia who combined with Latin American States that came to be known as about the process of decolonization, facilitating the emergence of a number of “new states of the Third World”. Following the weakness of European powers, the USA emerged as a super power and expanded its influence to the Third world. However, the former Soviet Union emerged as a counter force in the international system leading the socialist bloc. This initiated the cold war. The major target of expansion in the scenario was the Third world. And influencing the Third world countries needed first and foremost, a close understanding of them.

Against this background, Western predominantly American Political Scientists came up with the concept of modernization and political development, and engaged themselves in studying different Third World Countries.

The defining features of the “modern” and the “developed” that the scholars generally highlighted were essentially drawn from the western experiences. Equally, the modernization studies during the period were liberally sponsored by different agencies in the USA.

3. MODERNIZATION THEORIES AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF DEVELOPMENT AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

In the development literature, the central theory that has been used today to explain the process of change and growth is the modernization theory. A wide range of intellectuals subsist under modernization prism to suggest various development models.

This ranges from Economist, Sociologists, Psychologists and Political Scientists, while the economists were interested in explaining the great change in the economy and industrial revolution in the developed countries, the sociologists, psychologists and Political Scientists were concerned about the change in the non-economic institutions of the society (Nnamani, 2009, p.95).

With respect to understanding Development and Underdevelopment Walt Whitman Rostow (1956), an American economist identified five stages of social transformation in his popular book “stages of economic growth: a non-communist manifesto”, which countries must pass from Underdevelopment to development. According to Rostow (1965) they represent classic blue print from steady growth, social mobility, education and economic freedom. The stages are

1. The traditional society,

2. Pre-condition for take-off
3. The take of stage
4. Self-sustaining growth
5. Stage of high mass consumption.

For the modernization theorists, the problem of the Third world countries is the problem of how to move these countries from their traditional level of development to the modern stage. The reason for this is that according to the modernization theorists, every society undergoes stages of development.

They also argue that the other problem of the Third world countries is that most of them lack: resources, skilled manpower, slow growth; and suffer from high level of corruption, high level of illiteracy, they are usually very poor, there is high level of nepotism, usually diseased and above all lack adequate institutional framework. That because of all these problems, the concern of the modernization theorists is on how to move them out from this their decadent state of existence to a modernized or developed state.

From the fore-goings the modernization theorists made the following recommendations:

- a. That in order to bring about development in the Third world countries, greater interaction between developing nations and developed nations should be encouraged, that there should be a high level of technical assistance as a major means of development.
- b. That Third world countries should throw their economy open and should allow greater participation by the developed states.
- c. They also recommended that the Third world countries should be helped to develop their political institutions.

This theory underpins the technical assistance to the Third world countries in the mid 1950s and early 1960s; these programmes were aimed at moving the Third world countries from the transitional stage to the modern stage of development.

Modernization theorists believed that by the process of continuous interaction some aspects of the modernized world will be imbibed by the underdeveloped nations. This will also help them in technological transfers which the underdeveloped states require for their development.

4. MODERNIZATION THEORIES AND THE STUDY OF DEVELOPMENT TODAY

The most durable aspect of modernization theory is its interdisciplinary method of analysis. From their studies of different societies we can learn that economic and political changes are related to various ways to fundamental changes in social values and social structures. Secularization also has important political consequences both for the role of the individual in the political system and for recruitment into political office. The emergence of rational-legal authority has profound implications for the nature of the state not least

in the opportunity which it opens up for bureaucratization. Clusters of pattern variables provide models of social organization in which the political significance of universalism achieved status, neutrality and specificity are known (Smith, 2003, p.5 8).

The above are clearly demonstrated in the works of (Rostow, 1956) and David Apter who connects democracy and good governance to positive political and economic development. David McClelland in "The Achieving Society" (1967), approached modernization from the psychological perspective with his motivation theory, where he argues that modernization cannot take place until a given society values innovation, success and free enterprise.

Alex Inkeles and Smith David, in "Becoming Modern" (1974), created a model of modern personality, responsively, independent active and interested in public policies and cultural matters, open for new experiences, rational and being able to create long term plans for the future (Igwe, 2012, p.46)

Also Smith, (2003), notes that much of what is expressed by functionalism has become almost common place and integrated in political analysis. Its enormous appeal is quite understandable. It made a great impact on political studies.

Equally, much of the research on which contemporary development policy is based confirm some of modernization theories basic assumptions, that there is a mutually supporting relationship between legitimate political authority and the generation and distribution of wealth and that effective government needs to be responsive and accountable (Barkan, 1994, pp.87-89).

Structural-functionalism drew attention to the importance of seeing societies as consisting of interdependent parts so that one could adopt a dynamic rather than static approach to the analysis of systems of government.

Political development theory and modernization generally have inspired the production of a large number of monographs, journals as well as books, which have formed an important process of acquiring a clearer understanding of political change and development generally in the Third world countries.

However, modernization theories have been criticized on different fronts. The first major criticism against modernization theorists is the charge of their being pro Western bias in their analysis. Almost entirely condemning everything that are found in the Third world countries and extolling all Western Values as being developed. The western societies are presented as the ideal to which all societies should aspire to develop along their lines. They modernization theorists therefore created the catch up mentality in the psyche of the Third world countries. The theory out rightly ignored the obvious fact that the forces that breeds development in the North resulted to the underdevelopment in the South (Obi et al., 2016). So the theory has been highly criticized for regarding development

as an autonomous process; disregarding other issues associated with development.

In the analysis of the concept of "tradition" as deployed by modernization theorists some problems were discernable. First, there is the emphasis on obstacles to development by characterizing as "traditional" anything in developing societies which appeared to be such an obstacle. This made most of their policy recommendations in the Third world countries to fail.

Second, their separation of secularization and religion became questionable following the resurgence of religion as a foundation of political mobilization in parts of Third world countries. Meaning that modernization does not necessarily bring about secularization e.g. the growth of "political religions" in the Middle East, Africa and the Caribbean, Asia and Latin America not only undermines the secularist assumptions of modernization theory. This is a reaction to failure of governments to secure economic prosperity and social well being and equally a reaction to the failure of secular ideologies to deliver socio-economic development; as well as a response to the undesirable consequences of modernity, including political repression, economic and political corruption, loss off cultural identity and community dislocation.

The second major problem associated with modernization theories in studying development today is its reference to the nation - state as the only unit of analysis. For assuming that all societies can potentially follow a single path of evolutionary development from tradition to modernity and simultaneously for ignoring the world's historical development of transitional structures that constrain and prompt national development along diverse as well as parallel paths the modernizers committed intellectual parochialism.

The third argument against modernization theory is hinged on its contention that in modernized societies there is secularization of functions instead of religion as determinism of functions. But some scholars like (Smith, 2003, p.61; Kamrava, 1993, pp.148-149), argue that religion has surfaced as a foundation for political mobilization in parts of the Third World like: Middle East, Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and Latin America. According to these scholars, the new trend undermines the secularist assumptions of modernization theorists. They stressed further that religious politics has been partly a response to the failure of governments to secure economic prosperity and social wellbeing that is equitably distributed. That it is also a reaction to the failure of secular ideologies to deliver social and economic development as well as a response to the undesirable consequences of modernity, including political repression, economic and political corruption, loss of cultural identity and community dislocation. Those contemporary forms of political religion are formed by the impact of political and economic modernization. Meaning that religion in the aforementioned societies is used to pursue

secular goals contrary to the initial assumptions of – modernization theorists.

Along this line, liberation theology in Latin America has challenged the authority patterns of the Catholic Church as well as political regimes in its clerical populism, its ideology of democratization and equality, its stimulation of collective organization and its recognition of the poor as a valid source of religious values and action. That religion is not merely being used as a convenient instrument of political mobilization and solidarity. It represents a new spirituality as well as a new awareness of class conflict, exploitation, the spirituality of the exploited poor (Levine, 1986) in (Smith, 2003, p.62).

The fourth point against modernization theorists is based on their concept of integration. The left out conflicting interests and the differential power of groups in conflict with others, their idea that different parts of the political system are supportive of everything else producing a functional thirty, seems a distorted way of describing any society. Their interests were mainly on factors that maintain consensus and stability. Modernization theorists see the structures of the political system in a neutral light and as mere arena for the resolution of conflict that is impartial as regards the contestants; Their conception of society as a functional unity in a mystification of social reality (Smith, 2003, p.65).

They were therefore, more concerned with the integration of interests into a single normative pattern than with instability and conflict as a source of social change. Their view that conflict over the allocation of scarce resources is seen as resolved within a framework of common values is wrong. The main reason for this kind of thinking is modernization theorist's orientation toward the maintenance of the status quo. That is the conservation of what already is in place, leading to suspicion and hostility to change. Authoritarianism is even seen as a legitimate way for elites to manage crisis and order is made the highest political good; opponents of regimes are described as system “wreckers”. So the theories of modernization put forward as “value – free social science end up being an ideological dogma of sort.

A final criticism about modernization theories was their analogy with biological organisms. Their analogy could not demonstrate a correct explanation of political and social phenomena. This is because societies can change their structures, but organisms do not. This therefore leads social explanations to the end of the matter. Meaning that, they do not provide the room for theoretical explanations that assumed parallel between natural and social sciences (Smith, 2003, p.71).

5. CONCLUSION

It cannot be denied that modernization theories are still relevant in the study of development today despite the criticism heaped on them. With respect to the Third World countries, modernization theories raised the questions and identified the issues which remain core to an understanding of Third World Politics and development generally many of

which are still plaguing these societies, e.g. what effects does the lack of effective political institutions have on political development? What are the relationships between political norms, structures and political behaviour? etc. Further, their recommendation that there should be greater interaction between developing nations and developed nations in order to bring about the much needed development of the Third World cannot be wished away. This is because as the saying goes, a pace setter is always in a position to coach a beginner.

However, modernization theories have suffered immensely from rigorous mode of analysis, which led to the proliferation of the concept of development by different western scholars; this fragmentation of interest neglects the western, Anglo-American values bias of the initial modernization theorists. For instance, the theory of political development appear ethnocentric while claiming to be scientific, because a look at the theory properly shows that developed political system looks very much like Anglo-American pluralist democracy. This made Third World Social Scientists to get disillusioned about the theories, of modernization in studying societies of the developing countries. This eventually led to the emergence of dependency theory in studying development today with the central message that the underdevelopment of Third World Nations is the consequences of their incorporation into the world capitalist system, which in turn gave rise to the present day Centre-Periphery Relationships between the developed nations of northern hemisphere and the underdeveloped nations of southern hemisphere. Dependency theorists in contrast to modernization theorists recommended that the present day asymmetrical relationships between the North and the South must be halted if any meaningful development can be achieved in the south.

Be that as it may, the short comings of modernization theorists notwithstanding, their contributions to the study of development is still very relevant but its Anglo-American Values bias against the Third World is a serious concern and has to be expunged or at least played down in future deployment of the theories in the study of development to day and the current conditions of the Third World must be appreciated by new modernizers.

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