

Kidnapping For Ransom In Nigeria As A Revolutionary Effect Of Capitalism In Africa

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Abstract

The problem of the contemporary spate of kidnapping in Nigeria is presently horrendous and worrisome. This dastardly act is perpetrated with the aim of amassing wealth in the context of mass unemployment among the nation's youth. This is certainly a capitalist oriented problem. Kidnapping for ransom had no place in the traditional communalist African society, hence there was no such thing during the era of communalism when Africans were their brothers' keepers and economic production was carried out on the basis of the extended family system. In this paper which is basically a literature review, the writer undertook a critical analysis of the nature of the problem of kidnapping in our Nigeria today. He further attempted to project the cumulative anti-social effect of the ugly vice of kidnapping on the development of the Nigerian nation. There is no gainsaying the fact that high rate of unemployment among the youths in Nigeria is one of the causes of the present situation. Greed and inordinate ambition to become wealthy even among the employed is another cause. The adverse effect of this ugly development on the socio-economic growth of the country is far reaching as many companies and individuals who would have established industries in the country are now unwilling to do so. The problem therefore demands urgent attention from the Nigerian government and citizenry.

Introduction

When Karl Marx predicted that "capitalism will sow the seeds of its own destruction", he meant that capitalist societies will create the necessary conditions that will give rise to revolutions. Such conditions include exploitation, mass unemployment, under-employment and dehumanization of the working class by the owners of the capital, thereby giving rise to frustration and depression. That is why at the moment capitalism stands on the path of further social development. The period when the system increased the well being of significant numbers of people as a bi-product of seeking out profit for a few has gone. Today, the quest for profits by a few comes into sharp conflict with people's demands that their social and material needs should be fulfilled (Rodney: 1972: 11).

The introduction of capitalism in place of the traditional African communalism in Nigeria was initially believed to be a welcome change which freed many youths from the shackles and strains of traditional agriculture and offered them better paying jobs and socially exciting lifestyle in the new urban centres. However, available industries have been unable to provide jobs for all those who deserted the rural areas in search of industrial and office jobs in urban cities.

This imbalance created the problems associated with urban living, including crime and delinquency, etc., which are mostly a result of unemployment. No wonder it is said that social problems are often associated with changes induced by the adoption of innovations in society (Igbo & Anugwom: 2002: 77). It is incontrovertible that kidnapping has become one of the greatest social problems plaguing Nigeria in her 50 years of existence as a sovereign nation. The present researcher views the problem as being associated with capitalism. Capitalism is the system of economic production whose origin marked the beginning of the modern age which originated from the western world.

In approaching the problem of development in Africa the capitalists almost generally believe that the acquisition of modern values and norms (obviously from the West) is the panacea. This view is known as the modernization theory of development and it posits that societies develop better by acquiring the values of developed societies. This ideology has constituted a clog in the wheel of genuine development in Africa as the African youth does not understand the real principle of modernism but simply believes that the end justifies the means in the effort towards modernization.

Modernization, in actuality, is an increasing ability to master the socio-physical environment and the growth of social complexity in the context of scientific and technological development. It posits primarily a general progress through increase in specialization or adaptation by expansion of factors deemed positive to the material growth of the society. Thus, modernization paradigm talks about progress through time in which case past epochs can be seen as qualitatively less developed than the present. This system mediates social change through cultural modifications which in turn causes social problems in the society in which it is introduced.

According to Ikechukwu Okenyi (Christian Trumpet: November 2009: 20) the ugly development of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria took its root from the activities of the militant youths in the Niger Delta region within the present decade arising from the controversial issue of resource control. The activities of the restive youths is to abduct employees of oil companies, especially the foreigners and then establish contacts with their employers to demand for mouth warming ransom before the release of their helpless victim. Like a whirl wind, this dastardly act had gradually spread to other parts of the country. Since then the atmosphere had been turbulent and horrendous.

This is a very big social problem which has thrown the entire Nigerian populace to a situation of psychological sickness as people are now jittery and gripped with fear not knowing who will be next victim. Apart from the South South region of the country, the South East has witnessed the highest rate of kidnapping in the country.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CAPITALISM

Capitalism is a system where an individual can own and control a lot of wealth and use it to create more wealth for himself, hence it is characterized by high sense of individualism and exploitative attitude in economic production. Immanuel Wallerstein (1987: n.p) highlights the nature of capitalism by distinguishing three historical epochs in the world system. According to him the three epochs were not historically demarcated and thus co-existed between 8000 BC and 1500 AD at the end of which the capitalist system became dominant.

The first of the epochs is the 'mini-system' which was short-lived and did not control expansive geographical territory. This type of system is akin to Durkheim's idea of a society characterized by mechanical solidarity. In the mini-system there was homogeneity in cultural

and social systems and they were governed by reciprocity in exchanges. This system was later replaced by the world empires. The world empires had strong political centres and were made up of many cultures. Their economic system was essentially dependent on extracting tributes from lesser but relatively autonomous political units for the maintenance of the centre. The third epoch is the epoch of the present which is the modern capitalist economic system. It involves multiple nation-states participating in a world system economy based on the extraction of surplus through market mechanism. In other words this system is a capitalist mode based on exploitation.

Karl Marx writing in the 19th century (Rodney: 1972: 6) distinguished within European History several stages of development. The first major stage following after simple bands of hunters was communalism where property was collectively owned, work was done in common and goods were shared out equally. The second was Slavery, caused by the extension of the domineering elements within the family and by some groups being physically overwhelmed by others. The next was Feudalism where agriculture remained the principal means of making a livelihood, but the land which was necessary for that purpose was in the hands of the few, and they took the lion's share of the wealth. The last was Capitalism, under which the greatest wealth in the society was produced not through agriculture but by machines – in factories and mines.

Like the preceding phase of feudalism, capitalism was characterized by the concentration in a few hands ownership of the means of producing wealth and by unequal distribution of the products of human labour. The few who dominated the system were the bourgeoisie who had originated in the merchants and craftsmen of the feudal epoch, and who rose to be industrialists and financiers. Meanwhile, the serfs were declared legally free to leave the land and to go in search of employment in capitalist enterprises. Their labour thereby became a commodity – something to be bought and sold.

Capitalism as a socio-economic system transforms the social life of a people by first changing their cultural orientation. In other words, Capitalism first brings about cultural change which in turn mediates social change. Whereas social change refers to a transformation of the actual behaviour of a people, cultural change refers to the alteration of the culturally meaningful symbols produced by the people in their attempt to survive within their environment. Ryan (1969: 8) defines cultural change as “modifications of the body of knowledge of a people or their tools, or their idealized patterns in contrast to the actuality of their behaviour”. On the other hand, social change refers to modifications in the mode of interaction of members of a society. Thus, Capitalism mediates social transformation by first transforming the culture of the people thereby sowing the seed of discordant relationships and social revolutions.

In Africa, for instance, the introduction of the Capitalist system led to the elimination of communal system of production and sharing. This cultural change transformed social relationships within the traditional extended family system. Before the advent of Capitalism, the extended family was the unit of production in Africa and it provided social and economic security against the harsh realities of living for its less fortunate members. In other words, Africans were their brothers' keepers before the advent of the Capitalist system of production. But with the Capitalist system and its associated individualism and private ownership of property, the extended family system lost much of its original meaning as individuals struggle to fend for themselves and their immediate families (Igbo and

Anugwom: 2002: 16-17). The result is increased spate of individualism and uncontrollable craving for and pursuit of wealth.

The distinguishing characteristic of capitalism is the integration of the world into an almost seamless economic order unlike previous systems which were marked by a single political centre in each empire and were economically differentiated. This characteristic is especially significant in the context of the present movement towards globalization. The capitalist system entails the creation of a global economy that unites the entire world into one economic system. However, the system has different political systems within it. It is marked by domination in the areas of wage labour and capital and international division of labour between states.

From the words of Igbo and Anugwom (2002: 28) it is gathered that capitalism is characteristically exploitative.

The system creates core countries especially in Europe and America which harvest most of the gains of the system and the peripheral countries which are exploited by the core countries. This relationship can also be considered in three forms in which the core countries exploit the semi-peripheral countries which in turn exploit the peripheral countries which have little power in the world economic system.

To this effect, capitalism breeds revolutions in modern societies. There was a period when the capitalist system increased the well-being of significant members of the society as a by-product of seeking out profit for a few. In the words of Rodney (1972: 11), “the capitalist or bourgeois class is no longer capable of guiding the uninhibited development of science and technology because these objectives now clash with the profit motive”. Capitalism has proved incapable of transcending fundamental weaknesses such as underutilization of productive capacity, the persistence of a permanent sector of unemployed, and periodic economic crises related to the concept of ‘market’ which is concerned with people’s ability to pay rather than their need for commodities.

Kidnapping For Ransom As A Capitalist-Oriented Problem

Capitalism has created its own irrationalities such as vicious white racism, the tremendous waste associated with advertising, and the irrationality of incredible poverty in the midst of wealth and wastage even inside the biggest capitalist economies, such as that of the U.S.A. Above all, capitalism has intensified its own political contradictions in trying to subjugate nations and continents outside of Europe, so that workers and peasants in every part of the globe have become self-conscious and are determined to take their destiny into their own hands (Rodney: 1972: 11).

This is very typical of the Nigerian society with the introduction of the capitalist system. The situation has often given rise to revolutions and other similar anti-social activities in the society. The contemporary spate of kidnapping in the country could be said to be traceable to the revolutionary reactions of the indigenes of the Niger Delta over the foreign control of the resources that are produced in their own land. Kidnapping for ransom in Nigerian is therefore a kind of social revolution by youths, especially the unemployed ones, who are not satisfied with their socio-economic lot and have decided to take laws into their hands to fight for their own socio-economic development by all means. Denisoff and

Wahrman (1975: n.p) intone that most social scientists agree that revolutions are products of an imbalance between the individual needs/wants and social opportunities. A society that does not provide for the political and economic needs and desires of most of the members is potentially a fertile ground for revolutions.

In many parts of the country, kidnapping activities have been fully commercialized and targeted at the rich in the society and their immediate family members. Those involved in these activities are mostly youths who have found kidnapping as a lucrative source of economic enrichment. It is worrisome and disheartening that in spite of the stupendous advance of information technology the business of kidnapping has continued to have a meteoric rise. The kidnappers abduct people at their whims and caprices with impunity, without resistance. The most painful aspect of it is that most often, these social miscreants beat security agents with ease, while people are kidnapped on daily basis.

There is no gainsaying the fact that high rate of unemployment among the youths is one of the causes of this dastardly vice. Greed and inordinate ambition to amass wealth (capital) even among the employed is another cause. The implication of this ugly development on the socio-economic growth of Nigeria is very adverse as many companies and individuals who would have set up industries in the country are now unwilling to do so. This obviously portends great danger for our country's developmental prospect as the country is no longer conducive for foreign industrial investment. Foreign investors who would have loved to set up their industries in Nigeria cannot do so as nobody will be willing to take the risk of establishing his business in a society where security cannot be guaranteed. Even those who have already established will be forced to withdraw and relocate to other countries where security is ensured.

Why Capitalism Cannot Bring Development In Africa

Scientific and technological skills and tools are the greatest means to social development without which capitalism turns out as a social revolution-oriented factor. Many Africans lack meaningful skills and tools to really help themselves with the natural resources which they are so richly blessed with. Thus, lack of knowledge, skills, and in most cases, the means to develop the economy, makes many contemporary African nations poorer than and more dependent on the developed nations, and a people with an uncontrollable sense of dependence like the Africans cannot operate genuine capitalism. Pierre Jailee (1960:64) concludes in his analysis of the Two-Third world economic crisis, "thus, the Third world is growing more and more dependent on the developed capitalist countries which depend less and less on the Third world". The above situation is very typical of the situation of most African countries in relation to their European and American counterparts.

Population growth is another big problem to the development of genuine capitalist system of economic production in Africa. In many developed countries, population growth has been tremendously reduced with the result that birth rate and death rate have almost balanced; the population growth of such countries is not so significant. But in many African countries, the population growth is quite worrisome. It would not have been a problem as such if the countries were able to provide for their teaming populations. It becomes a big problem when a greater percentage of the populations are without the economic means to take care of themselves. Population growth impacts negatively on national development in this sense. In some African countries, population growth is as high as 4.5% e.g. Cote d'Ivoire. Nigeria has a population growth rate of about 3.4% (Chukwuezi:2000:8). This is far

from being favourable to the development of the country, especially as other grave developmental problems are also facing the country.

Such problems include lack of adequate Medicare. In many developed countries, the ratio of Physicians to the population is one doctor to about one thousand people, in other words, there are enough doctors for the population. Unfortunately, in some African countries, there is about one doctor to about thirty thousand people, e.g. Chad. Nigeria's situation is fairly better with about one doctor to about ten thousand people (Chukwuezi:2000:8). To complicate the matter, medical facilities are so scarce in African countries as opposed to the developed countries of the world.

Lack of stable democracy, free press and political associations also plague the rate of development in Africa. Countries with totalitarian regimes or dictatorial military governments usually lag behind in matters of development. The western countries have people-oriented democratic systems of government and rule of law where freedom of association, expression, etc. is maintained and human rights are observed and citizens are politically responsive. Conversely, many African countries are experiencing one form of dictatorial regime or the other and even the democracies enthroned in most of the countries are quite fragile and are not people oriented. There are various machinations to subvert the will of the people. Accountability is not the watchword of the rulers, many of whom rule their countries as private estates.

The clearest index of African's underdevelopment is that most, if not, all African countries have very low per capita income. Many developed countries have high per capita income, up to \$39,000 and above while in most African countries per capita income is so low, as low as \$1,500 for some countries such as Ethiopia, Chad, etc. Nigeria has per capita income of \$2,748 (World Bank: 2010). This affects the quality or standard of life in African countries bothering especially on the area of Education and Medicare. In developed countries, enrolment for primary and secondary schools is well over 90% while in many African countries, the enrolment is as low as 30% for primary schools and 10% for secondary schools (Chukwuezi:2000:9).

The level of transportation and communication, though recently enhanced in urban areas, lack of employment and the issue of minimum wage for workers, the quality of food intake in terms of the required dietary standard; the issue of housing and recreational facilities; lack of portable water supply for the populace; environmental pollution and degeneration, etc., all pose grave challenges for development in Africa. All these are directly or indirectly related to the inability of many African countries to meaningfully attract the positive effects of capitalism. Thus, countries like Nigeria cannot harness the fruits of capitalism but are rather challenged with nearly all the ills of capitalism.

Recommendations

As a way out of the socio-economic problem associated with kidnapping in Nigeria, it is recommended that the government should as a matter of urgency build industries for the employment of our teeming unemployed youths. Capitalism can only bring positive results to a country in the context of industrialization. In Nigeria, unemployment is a social problem associated with lack of industries, but in industrialized countries, it is seen not as a social problem but as a personal problem over which the unemployed is liable to blame since there are enough industries.

In developed countries, there are enough industries for about 90% of the school leavers to get jobs in as soon as they leave school, hence unemployment cannot be said to be a social problem. For the 10% of the school leavers who failed to get job in such countries, it can be surmised that it is their own fault. But if 90% are unable to get jobs after leaving school as is the case in Nigeria, then unemployment is not a personal problem but a social problem requiring government intervention.

It is true that the industrialized countries of the world are not totally free from the ills of capitalism but their situation is not as worse as that of Nigeria and her sister African Countries where there are relatively no industries, and as a result, the majority of the populace, especially the youths, employ themselves in perpetration of various forms of socio-economic crimes. Such criminal activities do not have common place in industrialized and developed countries because the youths are so busy with their official jobs where they are fully and constructively using their minds and hands in contributing positively to the development of their countries. Conversely, in African countries, the majority of the youths are idle, and “for idle hands”, they say, “The devil always finds mischief to do”. It is therefore strongly recommended that the governments of African countries should get the minds and hands of their youths positively committed towards national productivity by providing sufficient employment opportunity for them instead of sparing them the whole time of their lives for adopting various forms of socio-economic vices as a means of livelihood.

This does not however justify kidnapping. Kidnapping under any guise should not be treated with kid gloves. The police should be well equipped to fight the rising spate of this social vice known as kidnapping. A situation where kidnapers would be operating with AK 47, rocket launcher and other modern sophisticated weapons while the police would be given rifles is quite unhealthy. This reduces the efforts of the police to combat the activities of kidnapers to a cripple’s effort, thereby making the target unrealizable.

It is on this note that the police and other security agents in Nigeria should be commended. The Nigerian Police and other security agents had proved their prowess in the task of combating the activities of kidnapping in many cases, sometimes by foiling the attempts of kidnapers and at other times by net-catching them after their operations. According to Ikechukwu Okenyi (Christian Trumpet: 2009: 11), when Chief Paul Okonkwo was kidnapped at Awka negotiation was still on when the police stormed their hideout at Nibo, Anambra state and he and others under captivity were forcefully released by men of the State Security Services (SSS). Also security agents recently performed a feat as a 23 year old 300 level law student of Imo State University Owerri, Stephen Ajarogu and his gang were caught for allegedly kidnapping a four year old Sopuruchukwu Orji at Awada Obosi near Onitsha. Also at Onitsha, Igwe Alfred Nnaemeka Achebe, the Chairman of Anambra State Council of traditional rulers and Obi of Onitsha escaped being kidnapped on 1st October, 2009 due to the intervention of the police. The kidnapers numbering over ten were over-powered by men of the special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS). Two of the abductors were killed instantly during the gun battle that ensued.

It was reported in the Christian Trumpet Newspaper (November: 2009: 8) that between January and May, 2009, the police in Abia state arrested 31 kidnapers and killed 18 in various operations. In the case of Muhammed Sani, a soldier who was kidnapped with the pregnant wife of an Army officer, the Police in conjunction with some soldiers swooped on their hideout. Two of the kidnapers were killed and Sani was freed in the process.

However, the fate of the pregnant woman was not known immediately. In Enugu, the Police also succeeded in catching the gang that abducted Dr. Edemobii, the brother to the Minister of Information, Dora Akunyili. Other cases where the police also fought gallantly include those of the wife of the Enugu South Local Government Chairman who was rescued from the hands of the kidnappers two of whom were killed; the wife of Igwe James Mama of the Ifesinachi Industry in which case the police worked like Trojan and got ten of the kidnappers nabbed; and so many other cases.

It is therefore recommended that hard working men of the police and other security agents should be given a part on the back as to encourage others to rise up to the challenges of combating kidnapping and other such social vices. In addition, the Inspector General of Police should put up more stern measures to fight crimes, and government should supply the security agents with more sophisticated weapons than what they are presently using. If the security agents and the government intensify their efforts in this regard the dare devils can no longer continue to have their field day in perpetrating crime in the society.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, today, the spate of kidnapping is on the increase; the government, the society and even the police seem helpless. Relatives of victims pay through their nose to secure the freedom of their loved ones caught in the net of the hoodlums. The victims no doubt grieve and suffer psychological trauma and the families are put into agonies of indescribable sorts. Generally, people are now jittery and afraid of mixing up for the fact that social gatherings, schools and even churches, among others, are vulnerable places for kidnapping wealthy individuals.

This ugly situation is a product of the social change that occurred in Africa with the inception of European slave trade and subsequent colonialism which introduced misconceived capitalist system into the country. One of direct effects of this anti-social development is that Nigeria is no longer conducive for foreign industrial investments. For fear of being kidnapped foreign investors who would have loved to set up their industries in Nigeria will not do so as nobody likes to establish his business in a society where lives and property are not secured and even those who have already established will be forced to relocate to other countries where their security and that of their investment will be ensured. The direct negative effects of this development on Nigeria's prospect of development cannot be overemphasized.

Not only does the situation have a direct anti-development effect, it also has indirect negative effects on development. The victim's family members and his close relatives and friends may suffer mental disorders as a result of the psychological trauma they have been subjected to, not to talk of the victim himself. At night, when one is meant to enjoy rest after a hectic day's activity, the victim and those deeply concerned about his fate will not find it easy to sleep and this will definitely affect their overall health and economic productivity the next day. Imagine how great the economic loss could be to those concerned if the period of the victim's abduction is prolonged. The cumulative effect of this situation on the nation's economy will no doubt be very colossal.

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