

A HEGELIAN RESPONSE TO VIVEK CHIBBER'S CRITICISM OF POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

By

OGHENEKARO MOSES OGBINAKA, Ph.D

Email: oogbinaka@unilag.edu.ng | Phone: +2348023186396

ORCID Number: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2711-6458>

EMMANUEL OCHUKO ARODOVWE

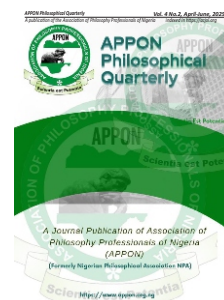
Email: emmaochuko@gmail.com | Phone: +2348103108064

JUMOKE IBIDAPO-OBE

Email: oibidapo-obe@unilag.edu.ng | Phone: +2348134430621



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)



ABSTRACT

Postcolonial studies are an important discipline for understanding and engaging with the Global South. Its main thrust is to push back the practice and effects of colonialism to enable affected societies to freely pursue their collective goals unimpeded from colonial influences. Existing works of postcolonial studies rely heavily on the theories of Marxism, deconstructionism, psychoanalysis, and post structuralism for their analysis of the colonial situation and reactions to it. This paper aims to defend the argument that contrary to Vivek Chibber's position, the subaltern studies historians are right in their cultural turn in pursuit of freedom and emancipation. However, their position is open to attack for lack of adequate historiographical framework to ground their analyses. Chibber tries to fill the vacuum by proposing Marxist socialism. The paper proves this to be grossly inadequate for the purpose, due to its economism, anti-nationalism and undue reductionism. This opens the door to Hegelian historicism, which provides a more comprehensive framework for radical anti-colonial and pro-national aspirations. This paper therefore rejects Vivek Chibber's main argument against postcolonial theory, and his choice of Marxist socialism as the panacea to the problems of the Global South. As an alternative, the Hegelian historicist narrative is recommended, due to the broadness of its perspectives and its exceptional accommodation for nationalist, cultural and linguistic aspirations in decolonization. Hegelian historiography proffers the insight into the divide of 'internal colonisation' and 'external colonisation'. We show that the matters with which the subaltern studies historians are primarily concerned finds accommodation in Hegel's theory. The paper is established within a theoretical framework of sociopolitical dialectics using a problem-centric approach. The paper therefore recommends Hegelian dialectics as ideal for a theoretical framework for subaltern studies since it foreshadows radical theories such as E.K. Ogundowole's self-reliance, decolonisation of minority nationalities and freedom from internal colonisation.

Keywords: Subaltern studies, Marxist socialism, economism, Hegelian historicism, nationalism

¹ Dr Oghenekaro Moses Ogbinaka specialises in Epistemology and Analytic Philosophy at the Department of Philosophy, University of Lagos, Nigeria. He is an advocate of problem-centric philosophy

² Emmanuel Ochuko Arodovwe lectures at the Department of Philosophy, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State. He is currently a doctoral researcher at the Department of Philosophy, University of Lagos, Nigeria

³ Jumoke Ibidapo-Obe lectures at the Department of Philosophy, University of Lagos, Nigeria. She is currently a doctoral researcher at the Department of Philosophy, University of Lagos, Nigeria

Introduction

Vivek Chibber is a Marxist scholar and a leading antagonist against postcolonial studies. Chibber directly attacks and outrightly dismisses subaltern studies historians. He derides them for abandoning the more primary task of economic emancipation for cultural, tribal, gender and linguistic concerns, which he considers secondary and peripheral to development. We agree in this paper that postcolonial theory lacks an adequate historicist framework of analysis for its studies. We disagree that the Marxist methodology proposed by Chibber is the ideal one for a fruitful understanding of the social, political, economic and cultural concerns of the Global South., We argue that the Hegelian historicist framework is superior to understanding colonialism and addressing the various concerns of the postcolonial world. Nevertheless, we are in agreement with Chibber that the difference between the East and West is unduly exaggerated, and universalizing historicist narratives are not necessarily imperialist or Eurocentric. However, Marxism, which Chibber appropriates, is liable to these charges. To refine this, the Hegelian historicist narrative is adopted to strengthen postcolonial studies, as well as liberate it from the scathing criticism of Vivek Chibber. The position is further advanced that colonialism is not intrinsically a Western phenomenon visited on others. Ethnic minority people are colonised in many post-colonial States.

On Postcolonial Studies

Since the last two decades of the 20th century, postcolonial studies have become an important discipline for understanding and engaging with the Global South. The main thrust of postcolonial studies is to push back the practice and effects of colonialism to enable affected societies to freely pursue their collective goals unimpeded by colonial

influences. Existing works of postcolonial studies have relied heavily on the theories of Marxism, deconstructionism, psychoanalysis, and post structuralism for their analysis of the colonial situation and reactions to it. However, none of these frameworks has proven adequate as effective interpretive tool of colonialism. Vivek Chibber in his book, *Postcolonialism and the Scepter of Capital*, elaborately argues that early works of postcolonial studies among Eastern Marxists scholars were on track in championing the resistance against capitalist exploitation towards socio-economic justice.⁴ Soon after however, they abandoned the Marxist theoretical framework, followed by a shift from economism towards cultural, ethnic and linguistic concerns.

The subaltern studies historians championed this change. They thought that the Eurocentric Marxist categories of social analysis were inadequate in addressing the challenges of the Indian society. According to them, the problem was deeper than mere economic exploitation. The abandonment of Marxism coincided with a cultural turn in postcolonial scholarship that relegated economic concerns to the margins. For Chibber, subaltern studies scholars - Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, and Gayatri Spivak – were most responsible for this 'unfortunate' cultural turn. Chibber held that the priority in any form of resistance against oppression is economic liberation. Such resistance, he argues, sacked the *ancien regime* of Louis XVI and instituted liberal democracy. Echoing Lenin and Kwame Nkrumah, Chibber avers that imperialism was brought about by bourgeois ambitions to universalise capital for the purpose of exploitation and oppression. Marxism earned its fame and popularity by its exceptional comprehension of the political economy of capitalism and its strong resistance; advancing a case for a more

⁴ Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonialism and the Scepter of Capital*. (London: Verso Books, 2013).

egalitarian and just socialist society.

Chibber argues therefore that just as the proletariat in Europe rallied against capitalist domination for an egalitarian and liberal society, so are the erstwhile colonies of Europe - groaning under underdevelopment and backwardness - organise an onslaught against capitalism in their quest for an egalitarian socialist society. He considers a cultural turn that places emphasis on matters of race, tribe, spirituality, gender, socio-linguistic identity, culture and nationalism as distractions from the main goal of economic liberation.

The subaltern studies historians were inspired by, but also critical of Mahatma Gandhi's nationalist resistance project against colonialism. They were impressed by Gandhi's accommodation of the concerns of the peasantry in Indian political discourse.⁵ Nevertheless, they were critical of Gandhi's fraternization with Indian capitalists and his condemnation of radical activism. They elevated the subalterns to the status of agency in their anti-colonial resistances in order to improve their conditions from being used as instruments in accomplishing communist struggles, which thereafter excluded their innate demands for racial, tribal, cultural and linguistic rights. The subaltern scholars projected an alternative historiography; one that was different from the Marxist orientation, as necessary to overcoming the euro-centrism and universality characteristic of the Marxist narrative. This alternative narrative would be more particular and relevant to the specific concerns of Indian subalterns.

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), the Italian, was the most influential figure in the development of subaltern studies. He influenced Ranajit Guha (1923-2023), the founder of the subaltern studies group. Gramsci was a Marxist philosopher whose

prison writings impacted Italian communism. Gramsci radicalized orthodox Marxism by creating allowance for nationalist and tribal causes. This position was incongruent with mainstream Marxism. Gramsci saw within the Italian nation, what Lenin had described as "internal colonialism", in which the industrial North preyed on and exploited the resources of the agricultural South. The Marxist framework of class analysis could not adequately account for this. Gramsci first used the word "subaltern" to refer to this oppressed and exploited group. This innovation found easy reception with thinkers of the Global South as an alternative to orthodox Marxism. It left little room for the marginalised groups that did not fit neatly into the class divisions of Marxist dialectics. The Indian subaltern scholars appropriated this Gramscian methodology to explain the situation in India; which the supposedly "nationalist" movement for emancipation ignored, i.e., the socio-political existential experience of marginalised population within the Indian society. Such marginalisation was based on gender, race, tribal and cultural factors, rather than the economism that was the focus of Marxist analysis.

Ranajit Guha characterized subalternity as "the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office, or in any other way".⁶ He also defined it later as "the demographic difference between the totality of Indian population and all those described as the 'elite'".⁷ The concept of subalternity has been expanded to mean marginalized or disempowered minority groups, particularly on the grounds of gender and ethnicity. An advantage of the concept of subalternity to liberation struggles is that it captured a wider social category of the oppressed and

⁵ Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001):353.

⁶ Ranajit Guha, *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983): vi; Quoted in Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001):354.

⁷ Ranajit Guha, *Subaltern Studies I*: (1983):8

marginalized than orthodox Marxism was theoretically disposed to; even to groups whose form of resistance and struggle had been ignored by nationalist and Marxist resistance movements alike.⁸ Guha was particularly interested in the simple and local history of anti-colonial resistance by unnoticed peasant groups whose efforts lacked the capacity to elevate them to the level of agency.⁹

Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* aver that there is need for a distinction to be made between the colonial state and the nation-state.¹⁰ Chatterjee argues that the colonial State was created by the colonisers, and was associated with modernity. Its focus was emphatically material - what Taylor describes as instrumental society.¹¹ It is in the context of this colonial State that Marxism thrived in its study and analysis of society. The other kind of society was the nation-State, a kind of cultural society which predated the colonial one, and whose emphatic focus was spiritual - incorporating cultural, religious, tribal, fraternal and linguistic concerns. Taylor describes this State as a republic - in the Rousseauan sense.

Chatterjee leans on Benedict Anderson's insight on the concept of "imagined communities" to argue that even though the nation-State is suppressed through the superimposition of the colonial State, its existence is sustained in the imagination of its citizens who preserve it in their consciousness. It is within the context of this cultural state that nationalist cravings of the subalterns can be explained. Chatterjee faults the political nationalism of African and Asian movements for lacking

rootedness in culture and deep spirituality because it is based on the artificial colonial State structure. Using his Bengali society as case study, he argues that the outer or material world of public and political life was an area dominated by the colonizing West and its lieutenants, whereas authentic nationality drew its strength from an inner domain, from where it got its cultural and spiritual embellishment.

In *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thoughts and Historical Difference*, Dipesh Chakrabarty, another prominent figure of the subaltern studies group, advanced the argument that Europe ought to be seen for what it really is.¹² Europe is a province of the world, and not the entirety of the world. The picture of Europe that is presented in books and meta-narratives by Eurocentric scholars foregrounds the assumption that the history of Europe is the history of all non-European societies, and of the world in its entirety. Chakrabarty notes that since the Enlightenment, Europe has come to be associated with modernity, or civilisation, so that one accepts either that one was European or one was pre-modern. In this sense, Europe becomes a standard of value for progress, rationality and humanity. Chakrabarty holds universalising historical meta-narratives (such as Marxism) guilty of imposition of European experiences on the particular histories of non-Western societies. He is particularly concerned about the character of capitalism in India, which he describes as essentially different from its character in Europe. He argues that while capitalism may have globalized, it has failed to universalise. In other words, capitalism failed to gain hegemony in the East as it did in the West. By lack of hegemony, he means

⁸ Robert Young, *Postcolonialism* (2001):354

⁹ Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince, and Other Writings*, transl. (Louis Marks. New York: International Publishers, 1957); Guha 1983; Young, (2001): 354.

¹⁰ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

¹¹ Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*. (MA: Harvard University Press, 1995)

¹² Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

it did not completely influence the entirety of the society in its social and political character. A traditional substratum proved resistant to assimilation into capitalist bourgeois character and values. This was unlike the West where capitalism achieved perfect hegemony over the society. According to Guha, "There was no class in South Asia comparable to the European bourgeoisie of Marxist meta-narratives, a "class" which was able to fabricate a hegemonic ideology that made its own interests look and feel like the interests of all."¹³

Therefore, Chakrabarty's project is a self-determining one that focuses on development and history from the bottom, the history of the ordinary peoples, told and written by themselves for their own emancipation, rather than imposed narratives and interpretive categories that seek to forcefully fit the peoples into their own conceptual straitjackets. However, Chakrabarty thinks that a creative adaptation of European values and concepts to the analysis of the subaltern society is possible. Indeed, he argues that it is the appropriate approach to subaltern emancipation.¹⁴

Why Hegel Matters in Postcolonial Scholarship

Postcolonial theorists have been limited in their theoretical options. The Marxist option has been the only historicist framework of analysis that has come handy to them. It is necessary to open up the discipline to other equally viable theoretical frameworks with strong claims to interpretive potentials for colonialism. Hegel's philosophy fulfils this condition. Therefore, it should be relevant in resolving knotty issues presently associated with the discipline. The relevant areas of interest in Hegel's work to postcolonial studies are his *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*.

The *Phenomenology* is an explication of the historical journey that the "knowing" process has undergone in its advancement from simple realist knowledge of "sense-certainty" through several stages of struggles, untenable positions and assumptions up to the point of perfect "absolute knowledge". Hegel systematises this long historical process into five stages - with each stage having three subdivisions according to the dialectical character of his general philosophy. These are: Consciousness, Self-consciousness, Reason, Spirit and Absolute knowledge.

The stage of consciousness essentially describes the epistemological orientation from Aristotle to Hume. Here, it is assumed that the object imposes itself on the subject. In which case, the object is 'master' and the subject 'slave'. This is where social concepts of colonialism such as 'master' and 'slave' begins to show up in Hegel's otherwise epistemological analysis. Hegel describes it in this manner: 'The truth of consciousness is something outside of itself'. The story begins to change in the last section named "understanding" - representing Kant's thought. At this point, there is a shift in epistemological orientation, in a way that both subject and object are conceived of as contributors to the knowing process. This was implicit in Kant's admission that 'intuition without concepts is empty, and concept without intuition is blind'. The drift towards the subject, begun in Kant, gets fully consolidated in the stage of "self-consciousness", well represented in the thoughts of Fichte as well as those of the early rationalists, René Descartes and Gottlieb Leibniz.

It is in self-consciousness that the reference to colonial engagements and subsequent disengagements is elaborately discussed in Hegel's phenomenology. In self-consciousness, according to Hegel, "the truth of consciousness is conceived as

¹³ Guha, quoted in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. (Princeton: Princeton University, 2000):15.

¹⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (2000):43.

something not outside itself". The "I" is projected outward as the object; the subject is then 'master', while the object is 'slave'. The object then gets dominated or consumed by the subject. Hegel refers to the disposition of the subject towards the object at this stage as "desire". It is also the basis of instrumental rationalism, for which the epistemology of René Descartes is considered most culpable. The relevance of this idea for social and political history is that it represents the temperament that leads to colonialism and imperialism. It is the temperament that sees the world, other human beings and cultures as mere appendages or epi-phenomena of the colonizing nations. They are to be dominated and oppressed.

Following this stage is what Hegel describes as the "master-slave struggle". It is the struggle of the object for equality, recognition and liberation. In the historical process, it represents anti-colonial struggles, independence movements, etc. This struggle, according to Hegel, ends in victory for the oppressed - in form of an admission of universal equality of national groups and cultures.

One of the highlights of Hegel's phenomenology is the argument that morality (whether in terms of institutions, political choices, economic principles, etc.) requires a right social context for it to be practically possible. This is achieved in the fourth stage where Reason passes into Spirit. The character of Spirit, from the Greek *thumos*, is zeal, courage, patriotic endeavours and heroic actions against wrong actions or inaction and injustice. For Hegel, it involves practical actions towards territorial restructuring; wherein world maps are altered. Hegel refers to the major actors in this activity as world historical figures. They include figures such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Napoleon Bonaparte, whose actions altered world maps in their times. The three

divisions in the stage of "Spirit" are Family, Civil Society and the State. The Family coincides with the state of nature of the Rousseauan brand, which is peaceful, and in which relations are cordial; in this State, subjectivism and universalism (i.e. the individual will and general will coincide). This situation develops into Civil Society, which Hegel defines as "bourgeois" because of its boundlessness and open-ended individualism. It is a Kantian cosmopolitan society that is indifferent to cultural affiliations and national peculiarities, and only regulated by civil laws, which Taylor describes as an atomist-individualist society.¹⁵ Hegel notes the inadequacy of this cosmopolitan uncharacterised grouping, preferring a cultural State. Marx on his part endorsed this cosmopolitan State except that he wished to alter its individualist production system and economism to reflect socialist rather than capitalist principles.

What was more primary was not the morality of the political or economic system, because according to Hegel, there could be no ethical attainment in the social context of the bourgeois civil society. Civil Society must therefore give way to the State; a cultural State overseen by an authority, which embodies the universality of the individual, wills of the citizens and which regulates production and social relations in a way that enhances freedom, equality and maximum happiness. Hegel writes of this:

When bourgeois society is in a state of 'unimpeded activity', 'the amassing of wealth... is intensified on the one hand, while the subdivision and restriction of particular jobs, and thus the dependence and distress of the class tied to work of that sort, increases on the other hand'. For the first time, the revolutionary character of the dialectic breaks through into the dimension of civil society: the

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, (1995) *Philosophical Arguments*. MA: Harvard University Press

image of this society, which was still essentially static in Kant begins to move. Where to ... ? It leads to the suppression of civil society by the 'state'.¹⁶

Consequently, Hegel can be said to be, not a promoter of capitalist or socialist systems of production, but what passes for a self-reliancist system.¹⁷ Hegelian philosophy, interpreted in this way, and applied to the colonial situation, proves to possess greater explanatory capacity and interpretive prowess than Marxism, in the struggle for all-embracing and comprehensive freedom and emancipation for postcolonial scholarship.

Applying Hegel's Insights to the Colonial Situation

The relevant area of Hegel's *Phenomenology* to colonialism begins in self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is associated with desire. The disposition of the self to its object at this stage is satisfaction, which soon degenerates to unbridled consumption. This is seen, for instance, in the scientific rationalism of René Descartes that leads to the abuse of nature. But this attitude of desire runs into a gridlock when it confronts other human selves, such as happens in colonial encounters between nations and peoples. The presence of the other, according to the Hegelian thesis, is essential in coming to self-consciousness, (just as one is not conscious of one's nakedness except in the presence of another). Developed self-consciousness can only arise when the self recognises self-hood in others and in itself. This means freedom has to be mutual for it to be actual.

However, the process of this attainment, according to Hegel, takes place only in

history and over time, through a process mediated by contradictions and inimical encounters. In this historical realm, the actors are national groupings. Again, the actions and counter-actions lead to colonization and anti-colonial movements. The point Hegel makes is that the colonizing nation (Europe in the case of the 19th century), in its quest to assert its self-consciousness and flaunt its newly attained civilization, nurtures the desire to consume or subdue other nations and peoples. To be successful in this, the colonizer denies the other their status of humanity and equality with itself. An order of master-slave relation is then established.

According to Hegel, this situation is unsustainable for long term. By reducing the colonized to the status of *thing-hood* and by stripping them of their humanity, it defeats the purpose of the coloniser for self-consciousness, because self-consciousness requires the recognition of the self-hood of the other. As Hegel explains it:

Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another ... Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come *out-of-itself*. This has a two-fold significance. First, it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an *other* being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self. It must supersede this otherness of itself. This is the supersession of the first ambiguity. First, it must proceed to supersede the *other* independent being in order to become certain of *itself* as the essential being; secondly, in so

¹⁶ Herbert Marcuse, (1973) *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, transl. by Joris Dr Bress, Boston: Beacon Press (Marcuse, 1973: 79)

¹⁷ E.K. Ogundowole, (2004), *Philosophy and Society*, Lagos: Correct Counsels Ltd

doing it proceeds to supersede its
own self, for this other is itself.¹⁸

This situation presents a contradiction. On the one hand, by not recognising the slave as a real person, the master deprives himself of the recognition of his own freedom and humanity, which he originally demanded as a prerequisite for his own self-consciousness. Therefore, the master, in trying to prove himself so, ends up debasing himself to a sub-human level. Furthermore, by simply carrying out the master's will, the slave objectifies himself through labour by which he 'masters' his environment and transforms material things to more sophisticated products. Thereby, discovering his innate potentials and discovering himself, even though his self-discovery is also inadequate because he achieves this, not by the understanding of his humanity and his freedom, but as a subaltern, and slave.

The master is therefore compelled to recognise the humanity and self-hood of the slave, thereby leading to the realisation of universal self-consciousness. In the historical realm of colonial relations, it marks the point of flag independence for erstwhile colonial societies. This happened in history in 1947 for the Indian State, and in the post-second World War decades for the African and several Asian societies. Hegel notes on this: "The true significance of self-consciousness's self-recognition in the external observable thing is its self-recognition in another self-consciousness, which, though a duplicate of itself, has the surface separateness from itself characteristic of a thing 'out-there'".¹⁹

Furthermore, according to Hegel, true liberation extends beyond flag independence for colonial States. He considers this as merely "abstract right", a possibility, which has been transformed to

"concrete right" through the creation of appropriate social institutions. This is the point in Hegel's phenomenology where "Reason" passes into "Spirit". Hegel notes:

Spirit is the *ethical life* of a nation in so far as it is the *immediate truth* - the individual that is a world. It must advance to the consciousness of what it is immediately, must leave behind it the beauty of ethical life, and by passing through a series of shapes attain to a knowledge of itself. These shapes, however are distinguished from the previous ones by the fact that they are real Spirits, actualities in the strict meaning of the word, and instead of being shapes of consciousness are shapes of a world.²⁰

The essence of this stage in Hegel's *Phenomenology* is the point that morality - whether in the political, economic or social realm, is not attainable unless in the context of the ethical State. Like Chakrabarty, Hegel makes a distinction between what he describes as the "Civil Society" - i.e. an uncharacterised collection of peoples in a geographical space - synonymous with the colonial State; and a cultural nation-State which Hegel calls the ethical State. In this way, Hegel differed from Kant and Marx in their Universalist moral theories that were indifferent to national boundaries, cultural as well as the boundaries of linguistic particularities, in their conceptions of moral and economic justice. Kant and Marx argued for cosmopolitan societies that created citizens of the world. In Marx, economic class divisions, either of the bourgeois or proletarian class, only differentiated these. Nevertheless, for Hegel, there cannot be talks of morality and justice in such

¹⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. By A.V. Miller, foreword by F.N. Findlay, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977): #178, 111.

¹⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, (1977): #47, 540

²⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, (1977): #441, 265.

cosmopolitan societies. Bourgeois or civil society must pass into the ethical State for talks of morality and justice to be sensibly made. This will involve delineating territorial national boundaries and accounting for citizenship in that context.

In this sense, the subaltern studies historians are operating in similar ideological temperament as Hegel. Schroeder explains it in this way:

A further difficulty arises however from the fact that human beings *think* and look for their freedom and the basis of ethics in the realm of thought. [However], exalted, however divine this right may be, it is nevertheless transformed into wrong if the only criterion of thought and the only way in which thought can know itself to be free is the extent to which it *diverges from what is universally acknowledged* and valid and manages to invent something *particular* for itself.²¹

Robert Pippin sheds light on Hegel's position in this way:

In exploring what could count as a reason in action or for a genuine subject, and why such an appeal would be necessary if any agent were to be a successfully self-determining subject, Hegel again criticizes an individualist notion of such agency, again introduces the explicit theme of sociality, or Geist, this time in a way that will lead to an extensive, detailed historical narrative, involving well-known accounts of Greek tragedy, Roman law, court culture, and the French

Revolution.²²

The three characterizations of social institutions by Hegel are the Family, Civil Society and the State. They coincide respectively with the unreflective ethical life of human communities and national groups. They follow customs and traditions as was done in pre-colonial communities. They perpetuate the form of culture in which individuals are estranged from their unreflective background and pass judgment on it; up to its synthesis and perfection in the ethical state in which the rational will is not something over and above the individuals in society but a common life binding them together as free persons. This third State is a form of community, a nation-State of free persons embodying the general will as a living unity (reminiscent of Rousseau's kind of society). This is the kind of States that Benedict Anderson says is imagined and lives in the consciousness of its citizens despite their geographical separation from one another. These kind of States are abundant in post-Cold War Europe with the balkanization of the Balkans and the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

A significant point in Chakrabarty's analysis, which also draws from the Hegelian insight, is that most States in the Global South are largely 'colonial' in their composition, rather than reflective of the cultural nation-State that Hegel and Rousseau theorized about. They are merely Civil Societies, bourgeois States, whose boundaries are artificially drawn by colonial powers for administrative convenience and economic exploitation and subjugation. At independence, these colonial States were inherited and administered by the natives who fail to alter to their arbitrary boundaries. Nationalist pursuits in the context of such States therefore turned out in essence as anti-

²¹ W.R. Schroeder, *Continental Philosophy: A Critical Approach*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005):44.

²² R.B. Pippin, "You Can't Get There From Here: Transition Problems in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit." In Frederick Beiser, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 52-85.

nationalist objectives because they preyed on the actual cultural aspirations of marginalized groups, which are now described with the concept of subalternity. Marxism's major failure derives from its indifference to the arbitrary nature of the composition of the colonial State, on which it seeks a moral economic system. This, as Hegel has shown, is practically impossible.

From this analysis therefore, the problem of the Global South is not so much a product of the economic system being practiced. It is in the heterogeneous nature of the colonial State. What must first be sought therefore, as Hegel theorized, is the transition of the colonial State into an ethical State that is culturally defined, as is now numerous in Europe. Once this is achieved, the economic system, whether capitalist, or socialist, or both, would naturally adjust itself to reflect equitable and just systems of production and distribution of the common wealth. This is exactly what the subaltern historians seem to have set as their priority without necessarily expressing themselves in this Hegelian way. When the subaltern scholars therefore talk of imagined nations, or spiritual ties, or cultural turns, or solidarity for marginalized and subaltern groups, they are in essence echoing Hegelian insights for the priority and necessity of the ethical State, rather than a Marxist economism that have failed everywhere it has been experimented. It is such Marxist socialist analysis that Vivek Chibber enthusiastically defends; and wishing to impose a postcolonial theory.

The Inadequacies of Vivek Chibber's Objections to Postcolonial Theory

Chibber identified five basic beliefs that shape and guide subaltern studies. First, he says, subaltern theorists believe that the nature and character of capital in the West differ from that of the East. The bourgeoisie of the East achieved dominance without hegemony. In the West, capitalism gained hegemony. It commands widespread consent, including shaping social, cultural and political orientations in line with its

character. It did not do so in the East. Consequently, capitalism "globalised" by its spread worldwide, but it did not "universalise." It failed to command adjustments to fit its character in other areas of society. Second, power relations in the colonial world do not neatly fit into the economic class differentiation that is found in Europe. For example, lord/serf, bourgeoisie/proletariat, etc. In place of economic-class, power relations, what is more commonly the practice are relations based on ethnic, communal and religious interests. Third, social theory with Western origins and categories (such as Marxism) is Eurocentric and lack the right conceptual tools for analysing the situation in the colonial world correctly. Fourth, Enlightenment theories are guilty of historicism in which progress follows a uniform trajectory that fails to acknowledge the unique particularities of the colonial world. Fifth, nationalist goals in the Global South, by its approach of ignoring peculiar distinction of power relations and adopting Universalist economic class structures of the West, ended up merely as a repudiation of foreign rule without attaining true nation-building objectives based on notions of community, religion and subaltern agency.

Chibber faults these beliefs and presuppositions on the grounds that they arise, first, out of a basic misunderstanding of the workings of capital in the West, and second, from an essentialist disposition that holds unbridgeable distinctions between the East and West. He holds that even in Europe, capitalism did not gain hegemony in the sense in which the subaltern scholars use the term. Furthermore, he argues that the Marxist approach does not deny that societies have interests around spiritual, racial and linguistic concerns, but holds that what is primary, even in the face of other concerns, is material welfare of the citizens - which Marxist socialism practises.

In challenging Chibber's position, it is appropriate to make a conceptual clarification, which we suppose, is at the

base of the misunderstandings. It concerns the relationship between the liberalism as social consciousness that the Enlightenment epoch gave rise to, and capitalism as an economic theory. Chibber appears to hold that capitalism was the cause of liberalism rather than an effect of it. To argue that European societies first practised capitalism and then struggled to hegemonies it by gradually working the society to think in liberalistic orientations is a categorical error of historical judgement. Capitalism did not precede liberalism; rather, it was one, among many implications of enlightenment rationalism and liberalism that was begun in the epistemology of René Descartes, and thereafter in the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The implication of this social consciousness in the realm of politics was liberal democracy; capitalism was its consequence in the economic realm, while atomist-individualism, as Taylor describes it, was the implication in social relations.²³ Capitalism therefore was not a cause in itself, but simply one of the effects of a social consciousness that arose out of the Enlightenment. This is the point the subaltern historians wish to make with their distinction of 'universalism' and 'globalism' of capital. Non-European societies to which capital was exported did not have such ideologically prepared-ground for the reception of capitalist practice, which then accounted for capitalism's failure to universalise, as it did in Europe.

Peter Ekeh, an African social theorist, has also made similar remarks about imported European ideologies to the colonial world. He refers to them as 'migrated social structures'. In his words:

The second type of social formation in colonialism consist of what I have chosen to call migrated social structures and construct which were almost

literally packaged from metropolitan centres of the imperial West to Asia and Africa and engrafted onto the new colonial situation. ... It is important to note that the European organizational pieces that came to us were virtually disembodied of their moral contents, of their substratum of implicating ethics. Yet, the imported models were never engrafted onto any existing indigenous morality.²⁴

It is significant to note that capitalism is one such ideology that Ekeh refers to with the concept of 'migrated social structures'. What is significant for the discourse is that Ekeh appears to be raising similar concerns as the subaltern scholars about imported ideologies, such as democracy and capitalism. For Ekeh implies that democracy, rule of law, capital, etc. may have globalised, but did not universalise. They emerged as one package from a liberal epoch, which had gained hegemony in Europe, out of which these political and economic practices emerged. Chibber fails to appreciate this point in Marxist critique of subaltern studies, thereby accusing them of exhibiting essentialism. What the peoples of the Global South hold is not so much that there are unbridgeable distinctions between the East and West. But that there are prevailing circumstances and orientation (such as liberalism) that allowed certain practices to thrive in the West; but which are absent in the East; and therefore, those practices, when they were imported did not, and could not, produce similar results as they did in the West.

Another major point to note with Marxism, which appears to shape Chibber's ideological outlook is its discomfort and

²³ Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*. (MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

²⁴ Peter Ekeh, *Colonialism and Social Structure*, Inaugural Lecture Series (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1983):13

impatience with nationalist identities and sentiments. Marx always held a view of the State as a creation of the bourgeois class, or at least as a hijacked institution by the capitalists to consolidate their exploitation of the working class. To this extent, he argued that it must of necessity be overcome. Marx's theory developed out of a critique of Hegel's. Rather than a progression, from the family through civil society to the state, as Hegel reasoned, Marx argued that society had progressed through contentions between distinct economic classes in history. Therefore, the State is the result of class conflict, and provides the means of capitalist class reproduction, exploitation and dominance. Whereas Hegel viewed the State as an end to be desired, representing the collective will, Marx viewed it as representing the ideology and repressive arm of the ruling class that needed to be abolished. Lenin drew upon Marx's historical materialism and antagonisms between the relations and forces of production. The State, for Lenin, is determined by the mode of production. He builds upon Marx's conception of the State as the repressive arm of the bourgeois class. For him, the State is an instrument of capitalist rule and domination. It is the armed repressive apparatus of the capitalist class. As such, it must be destroyed to achieve a revolutionary change in the mode of production.

Ethno-Linguistic Space, Statehood and Nationalism

The simplistic view of both nationalism and of the nation-State can be deconstructed by reference to the views of Benedict Anderson. Benedict Anderson used his theory of "imagined communities" to analyse the phenomenon of nationalism. He depicts a nation as a social construct that is imagined by a people who perceive themselves as part of a group. What is

particularly striking in his thesis is the role he gives to writing in vernacular languages in the emergence of modern nationalism. He refers to it as "print capitalism". Capitalist entrepreneurs printed books in the vernacular (instead of exclusive script languages such as Latin). This cultural and linguistic revolution in writing began with John Wycliffe in 1382, in his translation of the Latin Bible to English; and Martin Luther in 1517, in his translation of the New Testament to German, thereby presenting his views on the Bible in the German language.

Hence, for Anderson, print-press-capitalism (the convergence of capitalism and print technology) and the standardization of national calendars and clocks, as well as publication of daily national newspapers in vernacular languages aided the rise of nationalism in the modern era. In other words, the nationalists leveraged on the new opportunities provided by machine equipment and mass production of literary works to foster the spirit of nationalism. According to Anderson, a nation is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet image of their communion lives in their minds. Members hold a mental image of their affinity in their minds. Furthermore, he says, a nation is imagined because "Regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately, this fraternity makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings."²⁵

This point explains one of the fundamental weaknesses in Marx thesis of dialectical and historical materialism. Marx undermined the influence of national

²⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso Books, 2006): 7.

consciousness on humans, and thought. He believes that exploitation, economic and social inequality were the priority in society. However, Anderson and Berlin explain that the quest for recognition of one's national group in terms of independent existence often supersede that of economic equality. Isaiah Berlin interprets nationalism to mean the product of the yearning for group recognition. Such group recognition, he says, is intricately linked to the question of identity. Drawing from Aristotle's view of man as a social being, he says men are inevitably affected by the actions and activities of others. It is in the multiplicity of these actions that individual identities are defined. He says, "I am a social being in a deeper sense than that of interaction with others. For am I not what I am, to some degree, in virtue of what others think and feel me to be?"²⁶ According to Berlin, people seek freedom, not because they strictly desire individual liberty but for freedom and recognition for their social and national group.²⁷ Hence, Berlin sees nationalism as the quest for group freedom for a national group.²⁸ He says:

Men who have fought for freedom have commonly fought for the right to be governed by themselves or their representatives – sternly governed, if need be, like the Spartans, with little individual liberty, but in a manner which allowed them to participate, or at any rate to believe they were participating, in the legislation and administration of their collective lives.²⁹

This nationalist flavour also occurs in

Samuel Huntington's interpretation of post-Cold War global politics. He agrees with Berlin that the quest for national self-determination will define conflicts in the post-Cold War international system. "The fundamental source of conflict in this New World will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among human kind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural ... The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future."³⁰

For Huntington, differences between civilizations are not only real but also basic, and are characterized by history, language, culture, tradition and religion. He argues, contrary to the views of Marx and Fukuyama. He holds that economic characteristics cannot be the determining motif of interaction between States because cultural and historical considerations are often more fundamental and deep-rooted:

In the former Soviet Union, Communists can become Democrats, the rich can become poor and the poor rich, but Russians cannot become Estonians an Azeris cannot become Armenians. In class and ideological conflicts, the key question was "which side are you on"? [In addition], people could and do choose sides and change sides. In conflicts between civilizations, the question is "what are you"? That is a given name that cannot be changed. And as we know, from Bosnia to the Caucasus to the Sudan, the wrong answer to that

²⁶ Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*. (London: Oxford University Press. (Berlin, 1969):155.

²⁷ Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*. (1969):156.

²⁸ Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*. (1969):156.

²⁹ Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*. (1969):156

³⁰ Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*. (1969):161

question can mean a bullet in the head...³¹

Group freedom or the positive sense of liberty is distinct from freedom as absence of external constraints. The prevalent quest for freedom in contemporary society, at least since the wave of strong nationalism in the early 20th century, is the desire for one's linguistic group to be equally recognized and respected as others. Such quest is primary. It precedes the quest for individual freedom. Therefore, the advocates of liberalism and socialism miss the point when they "calculate" democratic dividends only in terms of economic well-being, better health care, free speech and so on; ignoring the more fundamental point of the longing for recognition of linguistic peculiarities. Beyond, the quest for survival and material comfort, men desire to be recognized for who they are: as Englishmen, as Russians, as Ukrainians, as Germans, as Bengali, as Yoruba, as Isoko, as Urhobo, as Kikuyu, as Akan, as Ewe to mention a few. Any political system that glosses over such primary human aspiration and which hopes to quell it by substituting it with material and welfare schemes would only be generating more problems unrealized.

This perspective of Hegelian historiography has implications on our understanding of colonisation. The history of colonisation has always revealed a situation in which external powers impose their power and will upon less powerful nations. The aim of the coloniser is economic exploitation, political subjugation and outright looting the the natural and human resources of the colonies. The colonised is often dehumanised as one without civilisation and history. This form of colonisation can be called "external colonisation". It is overt and easily resisted by the oppressed. Hegelian historiography rests on the constructs of "nation-State" and "authentic nationality". Consequently, it

has thrown upon us the reality of a new form of post-colonial non-European "internal colonisation." The non-reversal of the conclusions of the 1885 Berlin Conference and the partitioning of Africa along artificial boundaries have created a situation in which majority ethnic groups in Africa dominate and control the resources of the minority tribes and nations, Minority nationalities are often sociopolitically and economically excluded and alienated from both their resources and governance. Internal colonisation is often difficult to unveil. The frequency of violence, resistance and political struggles as being witnessed in Nigeria, the Congo and most so-called multi-States in Africa and elsewhere are not likely going to be settled if the question of internal colonisation in post-Independent Africa is left unattended to.

In Nigeria for example, three majority ethnic groups are contexting over the power of being the colonisers over other ethnic nationalities. Only the resources, such as crude oil (petroleum and natural gas), domiciled in the the minority Niger Delta region is legally "defined and treated" as natural resources that belongs to the State. Other resources such as gold, coal, iron ore, tin, lime stone, marble, etc. are largely part of the State's budgets. In the appointment of people into political offices it is a winner takes all affair depending on who is at the helms of governance. Historically, the Benin Kingdom was the most prosperous and well-organised prior to colonisation. In post-colonial Nigeria the fate of the subjects of this Kingdom is one of internal colonisation.

Conclusion

There exist theoretical limitations in postcolonial studies. This limitation arises from the assumption that the only radical historiography for resistance and liberation is Marxism. Given this limited theoretical orientation, critics such as Chibber are then hard-pressed to impose Marxism and its

³¹ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilization?" in *Foreign Affairs*, summer 1993; vol. 72, no.3: (1993):22. ABI/INFORMGlobal. available at www.hks.harvard.edu/... Huntington_clash... accessed

socialist implications on societies in attempts to help them out of colonialism and its effects. They do so even when the societies express the inadequacy of the theory to adequately address their most deep-rooted concerns. Chibber's mission is to impose Marxist socialism on the Global South regardless, and in spite of themselves, on the presupposition that it is the only radical historiography for liberation. Indeed, we have shown that Chibber's position is wrong and untenable; and that an alternative radical ideological framework exists in Hegelianism, which is more comprehensive and accommodates cultural, national, economic and self-determining concerns such as the subaltern historians seek.

Chibber accuses postcolonial theorists of rarefying particular features of their societies while lacking a universalising theory that explains what is general among different societies. In this sense therefore, they are unable to distinguish between Universalist features and particular distinctions in societies. Chibber is right on this point, but he is wrong to think that only Marxism is such universalizing theory that accounts for society in general. Indeed, what the post-Cold War economic crisis revealed is that Marxist socialism is a poor interpretive model for the study of societal evolution. Yet, by virtue of the limitation within which critics of postcolonial studies operate, they are unable to find alternative frameworks to account for society, so they are condemned to impose forcefully the Marxist interpretation on the Global South, and indeed, the Global North. They hence attempt the impossible by seeking to revive a theory that has proven itself inadequate as an interpretive model for the historical evolution of society. The essence of the argument therefore is to show that Hegelianism, out of which Marxist economism developed, is a more profound and comprehensive model for accounting for the development and historical evolution of societies.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso Books, 2006
- Berlin Isaiah, *Four Essays on Liberty*, London: Oxford University Press, 1969.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Chatterjee, Partha, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Chibber Vivek, *Postcolonialism and the Scepter of Capital*. London: Verso Books, 2013.
- Ekeh, Peter, *Colonialism and Social Structure*, (Inaugural Lecture Series) Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1983.
- Gramsci, Antonio, *The Modern Prince, and Other Writings*, transl. Louis Marks. New York: International Publishers, 1957.
- Guha, Ranajit, *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Hegel, G.W.F., *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. By J. Sibree, Introduction, C.J. Friedrich, New York: Dover Publications, 1956.
- Hegel, G.W.F., *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. By A.V. Miller, foreword by F.N. Findlay, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.
- Huntington, Samuel P., "The Clash of Civilization?" in *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993; vol. 72, no.3: 22. ABI/INFORMGlobal. available at www.hks.harvard.edu/.../Huntington_clash... accessed 19/12/15
- Marcuse, Herbert, *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, transl. by Joris Dr Bress, Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.
- Ogbinaka, Oghenekaro M., *A Course Text on Government Ifor Schools, Colleges and Universities*, Lagos: Obaroh & Ogbinaka Publishers Ltd, 2002

- Ogbinaka, Karo, *A Window into Philosophy*, Lagos: Joja Educational Research & Publishers Ltd, 2010
- Ogundowole, E. K., *Philosophy and Society*, Lagos: Correct Counsels Ltd, 2004.
- Pippin, R.B., "You Can't Get There From Here: Transition Problems in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit", in Frederick Beiser (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993: 52-85
- Said, Edward, *Orientalism: Western Representations of the Orient* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978.
- Schoroeder, W.R., *Continental Philosophy: A Critical Approach*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
- Taylor, Charles, *Philosophical Arguments*. MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Young, Robert, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001.