Merton's Criticism of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown's Postulation as a Comparative Analyst to the Nigeria Social System

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Abstract

Structural Functionalism is a broad perspective in sociology and anthropology. It sees society as a structure with interrelated parts. Structural Functionalism assumes the society as a system of interconnected parts (which comprises of constituent elements such as customs, norms, traditions, institutions, etc.) that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of society by focusing on how each part influences and is influenced by other parts. Fundamental assumptions of the Structural Functionalism can be traced to the Organicism of Comte of early 19th century (and subsequently in the work of Spencer and Durkheim). Timeless analysis by Durkheim and emphasis on social taxonomies (ideal types) by Weber also shape Contemporary Structural Functionalism. The analysis and emphasis influenced the Functional Anthropologists Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955). This paper takes a look at Merton's criticism of some of the aspects of Structural Functionalism. The criticism has been seen as conceptual insights that helped give Structural Functionalism a continuing usefulness. Merton's criticism of Structural Functionalism, particularly that of Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown postulates have been used in this paper to proffer explanation to what is obtainable in the Nigeria social structures and institutions.

Keywords: Structural Functionalism, criticism, structure, institution

Introduction

On a broader note, structural functionalists described the various parts of a society and their relationship through the organismic analogy (Parsons, 2017). The analogy compares the different parts of a society to the organs of a living organism. Just like a biological organism, a society is said to maintain its essential processes through the way different parts interact

together. Institutions such as religion, family, and the economy are the organs and individuals are the cells in this social organism. Structural Functionalists examine the importance of social phenomena; they assess the functions and how they help society to maintain the entire whole (Jarvie, 1973). SF as a school of thought, began in the early twentieth century, and it was a response to the surfeit of both the evolutionary and diffusionist theories of the nineteenth century and the philosophy of the early twentieth respectively (Goldschmidt, 1996). This implied that the fundamental assumption of structural functionalist theory can be applicable to the context of the Nigeria social system. Since, Nigeria as society is a system that has various components parts (such as the political; education; economic; religion; family and cultural systems) that work harmoniously together for the effective functioning of the entire whole.

The contribution of Malinowski (1939) and Radcliffe-Brown (1952) from Great Britain was of great importance to the development of Structural Functionalism (SF). The work of Malinowski proffered explanation to the fact that individuals have needs (such as the physiological; social; educational etc.) and the role of the social institutions are to meet those needs. Radcliffe-Brown although emphasized on the social structure rather than biological needs. He also opined that institutions are organized sets of relationships (system) that function for the purpose of maintaining the entire whole. This is also in line with the fundamental assumption of the structural functionalism. The analogy I made earlier about the Nigeria society as a system that comprises various component parts, and each part functions for the maintenance of the entire whole, is therefore in conformist with the fundamental assumptions of the Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown.

Merton major contributions to the structural functionalist theory were the dissimilarities he made between manifest and latent functions (Holmwood, 2010). He described manifest functions, on the one hand, as the objective consequences for some person or subgroup which are responsible for its adjustment and were intended. Latent functions, on the other hand, as those consequences which are responsible for its adjustment but were not intended. That implied that manifest functions are element of social structure whose consequences are acknowledged and intended by the people in a society. Latent functions in disparity are consequences that are not acknowledged and unintended.

This paper first and foremost, provides a brief explanation of the fundamental assumptions of structural functionalist theory; then took a look at Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Merton's work. The paper highlighted

the Merton's three postulates of functional analysis as developed by Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown which are regarded in this paper as problematic. It finally employed Merton's criticism of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown's postulation to comparatively analyse the Nigeria social system.

Structural Functionalism: The Fundamental Assumptions
SF has some fundamental assumptions which basically point to the general acceptable notions for the perspective (Burrell & Morgan, 2017). The following are the key arguments in SF:

System relationship
The fundamental idea of Structural Functionalists' system notion has been commonly attributed to the Systems Theory of Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) and Niklas Luhmann. The assumptions have been that the society is a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony for the purpose of maintaining a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. A system is regarded as constituting of regularly interacting, interconnecting, and interrelating group of activities. It is seen that the pattern of integration and interrelation of parts or elements determines the behaviour of the system. A system, therefore, represents elements or an integration of its organs. Ackoff (1981:15-16) was of the view that, "a system is a set of two or more interrelated elements with the following properties: (1) each elements has an effect on the functioning of the whole; (2) each element is affected by at least one other element in the system; (3) all sub-groups of elements also have the first two properties". The relationship states the importance of the elements and it shows that no element can, in principle, exist outside the system (Parsons and Shils, 1951:1078). This implies that the exchanges and or interactions among the system parts be individuals, groups, institutions are symmetrical and hence equitable (Malinowski, 1926: 25; Lenski, 1966: 3).

Consensus and Stability
The assumption of consensus and stability is one of the fundamental assumptions of Structural Functionalists. It is assumed that, equilibrium in the society can be attained only when there is absence of conflict. General agreement among members of the particular society brings stability and order. This assumption focuses on sustenance and maintenance of social order in the society. It states that, just like organs of a biological organism, the society maintains its stability; order and progress only when social organs, structure and institutions work harmoniously with each other (are in equilibrium and not conflict with each other. The argument is that, the

society cannot operate for any length of time on the basis of force, because it is held together by the consensus of its members. The concept of order has been used to an image of society as a system of actions unified by a shared culture or common value system and as a functional integrated system which is held in equilibrium by certain recurrent processes. Society is seen as a systemic whole with constituent parts in search of a mutually adjusted equilibrium (Damerath and Peterson 1967:2). The next in line is the functional prerequisites.

Functional Prerequisites
Structural Functionalists are of the view that there are some functional prerequisites which the social system requires in order to survive. Subedi (2013:3) identified some of the functional prerequisites as follows: (i) Society should avoid (dispersion of population, apathetic population, and war of "all against all", because such threaten the existence of the society; (ii) Society should adapt the characteristics which include: adequate methods of dealing with environment (ecology and social system); sufficient number of people with diverse interests and skills; sufficient differential roles and assignment of people to those roles (social stratification); adequate communication system; common/shared value patterns (at individual and group level); share articulated set of goals; some methods of regulating the means to achieve these goals (normative regulation of goals); socialization of new members and effective control of disruptive forms of behaviour.

Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown Structural Functionalism
Malinowski (1884-1942) was one of the founding fathers of the British social anthropology, and was said to have pushed for a paradigm shift in the British anthropology; a change from speculative and historical perspective to the historical study of social institutions. This theoretical shift gave rise to functionalism, and established fieldwork as the constitutive experience of social anthropology (Kuper, 1973; Young, 1991:445).

Malinowski was said to have propounded several theories on society. One example of this was his theory of needs which was based on his conceptions of human, society, and culture. According to the theory, there are three main needs which a human has: (i) The basic (biological) needs, which consist of metabolism, reproduction, comfort, safety, relaxation, movement and growth. These needs must be satisfied, and if not, a human being tends to react; (ii) The instrumental needs, including the kinship system, delivery, shelter, clothes, protection, etc.; (iii) The symbolic and integrative needs that come from the existence of the system of thinking and believes. These needs are satisfied by science, magic, religion, art, games,

and ceremonies. The satisfaction of these needs is realized by actions that are connected in systems.

Malinowski needs theory implies that, human beings have physiological needs (which include foods, reproduction, and shelter), and that for him it is the function of the social institutions to satisfy these needs. He stated that there are culturally derived needs and four basic "instrumental needs" (which include economics, social control, education, and political organization), that require institutional devices. Each institution has personnel, a charter, a set of norms or rules, activities, material apparatus (technology), and a function. Malinowski was of the view that uniform psychological responses are correlates of physiological needs. He argued that the satisfaction of these needs transformed the cultural instrumental activity into an acquired drive through psychological reinforcement (Goldschmidt, 1996:510; Voget, 1996:573).

Malinowski's emphasis on the concept of culture and integration is apparent in his statement:

> *It obviously is the integral whole consisting of implements and consumers' goods, of constitutional charters for the various social groupings, of human ideas and crafts, beliefs and customs. Whether we consider a very simple or primitive culture or an extremely complex and developed one, we are confronted by a vast apparatus, partly material, partly human and partly spiritual by which man is able to cope with the concrete specific problems that face him (Malinowski, 1944:36).*

According to Malinowski, institutions are an example of isolated organized behaviours. Since such behaviours always involve a plurality of persons, an institution in this sense is, therefore, a social system, which is a subsystem of the society. Malinowski believed that the central feature of the charter of an institution is "the system of values for the pursuit of which human beings organize, or enter organizations already existing" (Malinowski, 1944:52). As for the concept of function, Malinowski believed that it is the primary basis of differentiation of institutions within the same culture. In other words, institutions differ because they are organized to serve different functions. He argued that institutions function for continuing life and "normality" of an organism, or an aggregate of organisms as a species (Firth, 1957:60). Malinowski in his "Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays" states that, the primary reference of the concept of function

was to a theory of the biological needs of the individual organism. In his words:

> *It is clear, I think, that any theory of culture has to start from the organic needs of man, and if it succeeds in relating (to them) the more complex, indirect, but perhaps fully imperative needs of the type which we call spiritual or economic or social, it will supply us with a set of general laws such as we need in sound scientific theory (Malinowski, 1944:72-73).*

Malinowski's basic theoretical attempt was to derive the main characteristics of the society and its social systems from a theory of the causally pre-cultural needs of the organism. He believed that culture is always instrumental to the satisfaction of organic needs. Therefore, he had to bridge the gap between the concept of biologically basic needs of the organism, and the facts of culturally organized behaviour (Firth, 1957:63). The primary starting points of Malinowski's theory may be summarized as understanding behaviour in terms of the motivation of individuals, including both rational, 'scientifically' validated behaviour, and 'irrational', ritual, magical, or religious behaviour; recognizing the interconnectedness of the different items which constituted a 'culture' to form some kind of system and understanding a particular item by identifying its function in the current contemporary operation of that culture (Firth, 1957:55).

Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955) represents another branch of structural functionalism. Brown assumed the social world and its organization as an analogy to the body, and that is the main source of his thoughts about social structure. He was of the view that institution controlled the organization of relationships among people. He was said to be concerned with social structure which is an arrangement of the roles of which a social system is composed (McIntyre, 1966:60) rather than biological needs. He argued that a society is a system of relationships which is the broader construct under which "structure" that is, role arrangement, is subsumed (Bell and Vogel 1960) maintaining itself through cybernetic feedback, while institutions are orderly sets of relationships whose function is to maintain the society as a system. Radcliffe-Brown argued that explanations of social phenomena had to be constructed within the social level. Thus, individuals were replaceable, transient occupants of social roles. Radcliffe-Brown considered individuals irrelevant (Goldschmidt, 1996:510).

Radcliffe-Brown established an analogy between social life and organic life to proffer explanation for the concept of function. He

emphasized the contribution of phenomena to maintaining social order. His disregard for individual needs was obvious in his analogy (Goldschmidt, 1996:510). He argued that, as long as a biological organism lives, it preserves the continuity of structure, but not preserve the unity of its constituent parts. That is to say that, over a period of time, while the constituent cells do not remain the same, the structural arrangement of the constituent units remains similar. He stated that human beings, as essential units, are connected by a set of social relations into an integrated whole. He argued that, just like the biological organism, the continuity of the social structure is not destroyed by changes in the units. As such, continuity is maintained by the process of social life, which consists of the activities and interactions of individual human beings and of organized groups into which they are united. The social life of a community is the functioning of the social structure. The function of any recurrent activity is the part it plays in the social life as a whole and thereby, the contribution it makes to structural continuity (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952:178).

Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski formulated different versions of functionalism, but, there are some similarities). They all see society as a structure that works in unity, and the various parts accommodate one another for the functioning of the entire whole. Therefore, for them the function of an institution is to contribute to the maintenance of the entire whole of which it is a part. As such, each part of the system contributes as, for example, the socio cultural systems function to provide members with adaptation to environmental circumstances and to connect them in a network of stable social relationships. They argued that societies strongly seek to maintain their stability and internal cohesion, perhaps because societies had homeostatic standards (Broce, 1973:38-39).

Robert K Merton

Merton (1949) emphasized the need for the clarification of the concept of function by distinguishing between latent and manifest functions. Latent functions refer to those objective consequences of a cultural item which are neither intended nor recognized by the members of a society. Manifest functions refer to those objective consequences contributing to the adjustment or adaptation of the system which are intended and recognized by participants in the system (Kaplan and Manners, 1972). This implied that while functions that are intended (which refers to the manifest) or unintended (which refers to the latent) have a positive effect on society, dysfunctions that are unintended or unrecognized, have a negative effect on the society. Merton is of the view that parts of society should be analysed in terms of their 'effect' or 'consequences' on society as a whole and or

individuals and groups within society. These effects for Merton can be functional, dysfunctional, or non-functional.

Structural Functionalism and the Nigeria Structures and Institutions: Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown Postulates as Criticised by Merton

Merton (1968:79) criticized the Structural Functionalism of Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown. He criticized some of the more extreme and indefensible aspects of their work. The criticisms have been considered to have refined and developed the functionalist analysis. The criticisms have been seen as conceptual insights that helped give structural functionalism a continuing usefulness (Ritzer and Stephnisky, 2014). Merton separated the scientific substance of Structural Functionalism from its own historic origin in Anthropology, this according to him enabled proper framework for empirical research in SF (Holmwood, 2010). He argued that, some of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown's assumptions are too extreme and ideological. He pointed out three important postulates of functional analysis as developed by Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, and for him, the postulates are characteristics of Anthropological Functionalism (Merton, 1968). For Merton, these postulates lack a heuristic value in any case and rely on non-empirical assertions which are based on abstract and theoretical systems (Davis, 1959: 765). He stated that it is important to conduct empirical tests, and not theoretical assertions. This led him to develop his 'paradigm' of functional analysis as a guide to the integration of theory and research (Ritzer and Stephnisky, 2014). The following are the postulates: (i) The postulate of the functional unity of social system; (ii) The postulate of functional universality; (iii) The postulate of functional indispensability. The criticism of the three postulates by Merton shall be employed to comparatively analyse the Nigeria social system.

Postulate of the Functional Unity of Social system

Radcliffe-Brown: "*We may define this as a condition in which all parts of social system work together with a sufficient degree of harmony.*"

Radcliffe-Brown (1952) assumed that all parts of a social system work together with a sufficient degree of harmony. This implies that all parts of the society work together for the sustenance, maintenance and integration of the society as whole. However, this assumption has been criticized by Merton. Merton argued that this assumption is not obtainable, particularly in more complex and highly differentiated societies. He uses religious pluralism as an example to illustrate his point. Religion, according to Merton, may bring about disunity rather than unity in a society with a variety of faiths. Nigeria, for example, is a multi-religious society. It is

difficult to state the exact number of Nigeria's religious groups. However, Islam and Christianity constitute the dominant groups (Mohammed, 2008). Both religions have different sects with different ideologies which further divide the groups along a different line of thinking. Muslims in Nigeria include Sufi, Izala, women's organizations, student organizations, emirate traditions, and ordinary people, as well as Boko Haram extremists. Christians range from Catholic to mainstream Protestant to Evangelical to Pentecostal to African syncretism (Paden, 2015). Religion is a vital issue of discuss in the Nigeria domestic politics and international relations (Folola et al., 2004). The duo of Islam and Christianity preaches peace, yet, the conflicts that often arise from their relations remained a source of sorrow and agony to the Nigerian citizen. In fact, the current insurgency ravaging Nigeria and Nigerians has been largely attributed to religion. Religion has brought about disunity rather than unity in Nigeria. In some of the empirical studies conducted, the following are some serious religious crises in Nigeria (Sulaiman, 2016: Zango Kataf and Gure-Kahugu in 1987; Kafanchan and Lere in 1987; Ilorin and Jere in 1989). For example, the religious crises in Kafanchan in 1987 were a fight between the Christians and the Muslims on the campus. It later spread to other towns in Kaduna State; Kastina; Funtua; Zaria; Kankia; Daura and Kaduna. Hundreds of people were killed; many churches and mosques were set ablaze; and massive destruction of lives and property were recorded. On the 8th June 2004 another religious violence erupted between the native Bachama Christian and the local Muslim community in Numan town in the Adamawa State. It recorded more than 17 deaths and destruction of so many properties (Alanamu, 2005).

In regard to the aforesaid, Merton's criticism about religion bringing about disunity rather than unity in a complex and heterogeneous society is quite applicable in Nigeria. Political institutions may also be used an example to disregard the notion that all parts of the system work together with a sufficient degree of harmony. Currently, there are more than 20 political parties in Nigeria with different agenda, manifesto and followers. It suffices to say that, supporters of each political party tend to see each other as enemies rather than friends. This further endangers the delicate bond that binds the nation together. This can be seen in the 2019 general election and the way those who belong to the All Progressive Congress Party perceived those who belonged to the People Democratic Party and vice versa. While the former was perceived as a party with Islamic agenda, the latter was perceived as a party of looters. The perceptions about All Progressive Congress Party can be depicted in some of the allegations and criticisms that the three arms of the country's government, namely the executive, the legislative and judiciary are being controlled by President Muhammadu

Buhari; Senator Ahmed Lawan, and Justice Tanko Mohammed, all in the hands of Muslims (Omoaka, 2019). The People Democratic Party members were majorly described as those who have looted the nation's treasury. For example, Olisah Metuh and Femi Fani Kayode who were both the publicity secretary and party spokesmen respectively were alleged to have looted millions of Naira belonging to the nation.

Merton criticism, therefore, stated that the extent of functional unity must be determined by investigation, and not by assumption that it actually exists. This is because in highly differentiated societies, institutions may have a high degree of functional autonomy, where change in one institution may have little or no effect on others. The heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian cultural values may not permit the assertion to be attainable.

The postulate of functional universality
Malinowski: "*The functional view of culture insists, therefore, upon the principle that in every type of civilization, every custom/object/idea/belief fulfills some vital function.*"

Malinowski (1939) assumed that all standardized social or cultural forms have positive functions. Merton argued that this may not be obtainable in the real world. He stated that, not every structure, belief, or idea has positive functions. Merton is of the view that Structural Functionalist view of Malinowski should have a focus on social functions rather than on individual motives (Ritzer and Stephnisky, 2014). He argued that there is a clear ideological bias when the definition of function focuses only on adaptation or adjustment because they are usually positive consequences (Merton, 1949:105). Merton, therefore, developed what he called dysfunction. He argued that, the same way structures and institutions contribute to the maintenance of other parts of the system; they also could have negative consequences for them.

Discovery of the crude oil in Nigeria, for example, clearly had positive consequences on the economy of the nation. It also had and still has dysfunctions of making the nation to be over dependent on crude oil, and subsequently abandoning other productive sectors. The current economic challenges confronting the nation can be traced, to a large extent, to the dysfunctions of the discovery of the crude oil. For example, the report from the National Bureau of Statistics shows that the oil sector contributed 9.38 percent to the real GDP of Nigeria, and the non-oil sector contributed 90.62 percent in the third quarter of 2018. The implication is that the non-oil sector grew by 2.32% during the third quarter, and the percentage is driven

by the telecoms industry, trade, storage, and agriculture, transportation manufacturing, technical, scientific, and professional services. The rhetoric on economic diversification did not stop crude oil from accounting for an 81.1 percent share in the Nigeria's total exports (Okoi, 2019). The establishment and proliferation of universities in Nigeria had and has positive consequences on the Nigeria educational system. However, it has dysfunctions of reducing the standard of education as well as encouraging students' lack of dedication to study. For example, reports from the Nigeria Universities Commission show that there were 174 universities in Nigeria (Bassey et al., 2019). There are 43 federal universities, 52 state universities, and 79 private universities. The required marks for entry into any of the Nigeria universities have gone down as low as 120/150/170 marks contrary to the previous 180/200/250 marks. This is an attempt to provide opportunities for students to change to any universities that are willing to accept their score (functional). However, students are already aware that they do not need to score as much as 200 or 250 marks to secure admission into the Nigerian universities. This is a kind of encouragement for students who are seemingly unwilling to be committed to their studies (dysfunctions).

The postulate of functional indispensability
Malinowski: *"Every part fulfils some vital function of the system and has some task to accomplish, and hence it represents an indispensable part within a working whole."*

Merton also challenged the Structural Functionalist assumption of Malinowski that all standardized aspects of society not only have positive functions, but are also indispensable parts of the social system. The assumption holds that all structures and functions are functionally necessary for the society, and no other could work quite as well as those that are currently found within the society. For example, religion has been seen by the Structural Functionalists as playing a unique and indispensable role in the society (Davis and More, 1945). Merton argued against the idea of indispensability, that a range of alternative institutions may meet the functional prerequisites. He, therefore, replaced the idea of indispensability and suggested the concept of 'functional equivalent' or 'functional alternative'. That is to say that, it is possible that political ideology can provide a functional alternative to religion. In Nigeria, for example, the general political ideology was said to have been responsible for the Alliance for Progressive Change (APC) to have won the 2015 general election. The APC swept almost the nineteen northern and the six south west states except Nassarawa and Taraba states for the north and Ekiti state for the south west,

respectively. The PDP also won part of the north which is predominantly Muslim or evenly divided between Muslims and Christians. The point here is that peoples' political ideology has transcended beyond religion. People are looking for change in their biting predicament of poverty; lack of electricity; insecurity; poor road etc. As such political ideology of the APC slogan of 'Change' has provided a functional alternative to religion which usually serves as a means of collectivism. The PDP slogan of 'Transformation' may probably be responsible for some other state to have voted for it, irrespective of their religious affiliations.

Another example is the socialization process in Nigeria. It is apparent that, schools and mass media serve the same functions of the traditional functions of family in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Merton criticized the Structural Functionalists' assumption of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown of social system as consisting of different parts; the comparative analysis of a society to the organs of a living organism; that parts of social system work together with a sufficient degree of harmony; that every structure fulfils some vital function, and has some task to accomplish, and that it represents an indispensable part within a working whole. Merton basically criticized the assumption which he refers to as the problematic postulations. Merton's criticized the Structural Functionalist strands of Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown. He is of the view that some of assumptions are too extreme and ideologically based. Merton stated that it is important to conduct an empirical tests and not theoretical assertions. He stated that parts of society should be analysed in terms of their 'effect' or 'consequences' on society as a whole and or individuals and groups within society. These effects for Merton can be functional, dysfunctional or non-functional. This paper employed the Merton criticisms to systematically analyse the Nigeria structural system.

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