

The Challenges of Post-Modern Political Theory and Theorizing

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Abstract. Post-modern theory and theorizing are as critical and fundamental as they are pungent in understanding, describing and analyzing political events, actions, activities and trends in societies. Essentially, the application of political theories as dependable frameworks or tools of analysis for studying and analyzing politics in contemporary times is fraught with a number of challenges. The major objective of this paper is to examine the challenges faced by Post-modern political theory and theorizing. This paper adopts the historical descriptive method of analysis. Much of the study is based on archival and library research which include texts, journals, models and works of other scholars related to the study. In an attempt to answer the question, what are the challenges plaguing Post-modern political theory and theorizing, the paper identified interpretation, consistency and language, critical appraisal and value-judgment, background influences and objectivity, among others as some of the challenges. The paper recommended, among others, that there should be consistency and uniformity in interpretation of theories, Political theorists should come to an agreement or consensus on the role and purpose of the state instead of having different views, there should be objectivity in political theory and theorizing. The paper concluded by strongly suggesting that the earlier the challenges are addressed the better the future of political theory and theorizing.

Keywords: Post-Modern, Political Theory, Theorizing, Challenges.

1. Introduction

It is believed that politics has existed since men started to live together in communities to exchange ideas and influenced each other's behaviour. But it is also true that the actual origins of the concept 'politics' or what metamorphosed to become known as political Science today, lie in the classical period of Greek philosophy with the greatest writers and philosophers like Plato and Aristotle among others. The early Greek philosophers did not approach, in the actual sense, political Science as a specialized discipline in the modern sense, but they thought and systematically wrote about government. They were concerned, above all, with how politics can contribute to a life of excellence and virtue. Aristotle, for instance, saw political Science as a moral endeavor Committed to the betterment and well-being of the human condition. Greek philosophy, and with it the habit of systematic reflection upon government, became part of the cultural tradition of the Western World. The ideas of the Greek thinkers or philosophers laid the foundation stone and became the springboard for all other ideas and theories on politics. Political theory-modern political theories, post-modern political theory among others were all fallouts from the ideas and thinking of the early Greek philosophers. Political Science had continued to exist as a branch of moral philosophy, and important contributions were made by authors who also wrote in other areas of philosophy such as Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, Mills, Hegels, Marx, St. Augustine, Machiavelli, Rousseau etc. great names in the history of Western intellectual tradition generally as well as in its political aspect. Such writings extending over more than two millennia constituted a rich body of wisdom that is still the Foundation of Political Science and Political Theorizing.

The place of post-modern political theory and theorizing the world over cannot be over-stressed. They are as critical and fundamental as they are pungent in understanding, describing and analyzing political events, actions, activities and trends in the societies.

Inquiry in Political Science is systematic and is based on both scientific and normative approaches in attempt to strike a balance considering the importance of the two approaches to the problems of the society. Facts are important as values in trying to use empirical evidence to solve the problem of right and wrong or that of morality. More current endeavours to the study of politics have advocated interdisciplinary approach to the problems of society. This is a way of employing research instruments across relevant disciplines so as to achieve better result in our investigation.

There are abundant possibilities and resources available to mankind the world over, but despite all these, increased production and use of weapons of mass destruction, political violence, bad leadership and massive poverty prevalent in most societies, especially in the Third World countries/societies, remain some of the visible threat to human existence. Political theorization and implementation of the post-modern world have not been able to stop the dwindling poverty in the Third World societies.

Essentially, the application of political theories as dependable frameworks or tools of analysis for studying and analyzing politics in contemporary times are fraught with a number of challenges. Consequently, the central focus and objective of this paper is to generally examine the challenges plaguing or affecting post-modern political theory and theorizing.

2. Conceptual Clarification

After having briefly touched on the origin of politics and political Science, let us now turn to the understanding of the nature of political theory and theorizing. However, before that is done, it will not be out of tune to try to make the layman or those who are not in the Social Sciences understand what is meant by the term 'theory'.

The term theory is derived from the Greek word "theoria", which has to do with a concentrated mental look at a phenomenon with the intention of understanding it. A theory is an abstracted generalization which is primarily and initially, a matter of mind rather than fact (Mahajan, 2008) or as Johari (1987:8) puts it.

"It refers to set of systematically related generalizations, and involves viewings and thinking. It also generates insight loosely conceived; it comprises sets of systematically related generalizations. More specifically, it is a coherent body of generalization and principles associated with the practice of a field of inquiry."

For Anikpo (1986) a theory is a set of generalized statements made on or in relation to hypothesis inferred from a set of premises which have been confirmed true. Gauba (2003) posited that the term theory 'stands for a systematic knowledge'. Thus he believes that political theory denotes a systematic knowledge of political phenomena. That is, it is an intellectual effort to attain a systematic knowledge about the goals and methods of politics.

A theory, for Heywood (1999) cited in Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2013) is an explanatory proposition, an idea or set of ideas that in some ways seek to impose order or meaning upon phenomena.

According to Gauba (2003), political theory implies an intellectual effort to attain systematic knowledge about the goals and methods of politics. Political theory seeks to explain political phenomenon, predicts political future or prescribes solutions to political problems. It is concerned with issues pertaining to politics, state power, government, structures and institutions relating to the state or government.

For Sabine and Thorson (1973), Political theory is, quite simply, man's attempt to consciously understand and solve the problem of his group life and organization. Thus, political theory is an intellectual tradition and its history consists of the evolution of men's thought about political problems overtime'. Sabine concluded that it is the "disciplined investigation of political problems".

With respect to political theory, it is evident that political theory is as old as human existence. It is applied to defend, justify or question the status quo and aims at describing, explaining, rationalizing, justifying or criticizing existing political structures, institutional arrangements, balance of power or power equations in political communities or societies. No wonder Johari (1987) agreed that "political theory is an objective description of politics" and one of the principal functions of political theory is not only to demonstrate what political practice should be, but also what it actually means and every political theorist is bound to play both the role of a scientist and a philosopher. Political theory is also concerned

with individual or group political belief systems, orientations and values, ideologies and aspirations. According to Thakurdas (1982);

“Political theory is the speculation of a single individual who is attempting to offer a Theoretical explanation of political reality, namely the phenomenon of the state. Every theory by its very nature is an explanation built upon a certain hypothesis which is always open to criticism”.

Political theory is often used interchangeably with political thought, political philosophy, political ideology, political inquiry and political analysis. However, there are still marked differences among them.

There are variants of political theory such as formal political theory, empirical political theory and normative political theory. Formal political theories are theories which emanate from an existing political theory, for example, Neo-Marxist political theory. Empirical political theory which is descriptive in character makes use of scientific methods such as observation, hypothesis formulation, generalization etc. it is almost value-free and is concerned with political realities.

Normative political theory is a value-laden theory. It takes the study of politics into the arena of what is good or bad and suggests how political system can be made “perfect”.

Having conceptualized political theory, it can be aptly contended that political theorizing is concerned with the ability to have one’s own political view and the capacity not only to express and defend it, but to do so intelligently and persuasively.

Let us now turn to the term ‘post- modern’ for purposes of clarification in meaning. The term post-modern is linked with and influenced by post-modernism which is a style or movement in the art, literature, social sciences etc. that since the late 20th century reacts against modern style by mixing features from traditional and modern styles. Basically, few terms in the contemporary critical lexicon have been as vociferously and as persistently unstable in meaning and used as post- modernism and its various avatars, such as post-modernity. Despite this instability, post-modernity may be defined as a broad category designating the culture that historically extends from the late 1960s to the early 21st century and that is economically determined by post- industrial capitalism.

Post-modernism would refer, more narrowly to the characteristic intellectual and aesthetic currents and practices of that era reflected for example, in certain philosophical ideas or works of literature or art.

The terms post-modernity and post-modernism also suggest a break respectively with modernity, determined economically by capitalism and culturally by humanism and the Enlightenment, and with Modernism the literary and esthetic movement of modernity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While the distinction between modernity and post-modernity can be made without much difficulty, the distinction between modernism and post-modernism is more complicated. Some early critiques argued that post-modernism was not really “post” at all, but simply “late” modernism. It quickly became apparent however, that, despite its continuities with modernism, post-modernism does represent a definite break from its predecessor, as well as a broader overall phenomenon, which includes in particular post- modernist theory.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that post-modern political theories and theorizing are those intellectual efforts, movements, processes and approaches geared toward the combination of traditional and modern approaches or methods in the study of politics as a way of building political theories that can solve social problems. This will be couched against the backdrop of the recognition of the use of historical, legal, institutional, behavioral and post-behavioral approaches to executing philosophical or normative researches through empirical and other relevant methods in the study of politics with a view to bridging the theoretical Lacuna in political science.

The Paper adopted the historical descriptive method of analysis. Much of the study is based on archival and library research which include texts, journals, models and works of other scholars related to the study.

The main focus of this paper is on the challenges of post-modern political theory and theorizing. The paper therefore intends to answer the question what are the factors militating against post-modern political theories or put differently, what are the challenges facing post-modern political theory and theorizing?

3. Challenges of Post- Modern Political Theory and Theorizing

The import and purport of post-modern political theory and theorizing lie, among others, in having a proper and comprehensive understanding of politics generally and how to fashion workable, effective and efficient political system that is capable of maintaining law and order and guaranteeing sustainable socio-economic and political growth and development of society, which above all, are targeted at improving the well-being of man. It is a truism that post-modern political theory and theorizing is faced with a number of challenges. Such challenges included, but are not limited to the following:

- i. The challenge of interpretation
- ii. The challenge of critical appraisal
- iii. Value based challenge
- iv. The challenge of background influences
- v. The challenge of objectivity
- vi. The challenge of consistency and language
- vii. Methodological challenges
- viii. Challenge on the use of Abstractions
- ix. Challenge of Lack of Funds

3.1 The Challenges of Interpretation

In post-modern political theory and theorizing, evidences abound to show that political theorist have and often displayed diversity of understanding in the interpretation of both the theories of political thinkers and scholars and their application in understanding contemporary political societies as well as in advancing policy recommendations on how to sanitize the political system and institute an enduring political order, thus, post-modern political theory has the problem of critical comprehension, proper interpretation, and critical evaluation of political theories. One challenge faced by postmodern political theory is the existence of a plethora or abundance of literature on political theory, some dating as far back as antiquity (over two thousand five hundred years ago) and some as new as this year, which creates problem of interpretation.

Commenting on this, Johari (1987:63) observed that: *The most interesting as well as the most perplexing thing about political theory relates to the problem of its critical interpretation. We have abundant literature on this subject from Plato and Aristotle in ancient times to Laski and Lasswell in present times. But the problem stands out as to how we should categorize the ideas of the stalwarts of political theory. Commentaries on the political ideas of these great thinkers are varying in the nature of their description and treatment that look like hovering between the poles of full appreciation on the one side to that of uncompromising attack on the other,*

though some taking to a balanced or middle- of-the road view of things.

3.2 The Challenge of Critical Appraisal

Post-modern political theory and theorizing are equally faced with the challenge of critical appraisal of political problems, situations and circumstances. For instance, there are different views and roles assigned to the all-important political institution of the state. Whereas some political theorists feel that the state should play the role of a moralizing agency which should aspire to attain the good life (e.g. Plato and Aristotle), Marxists are of the view that the state being nothing but an executive arm of the bourgeoisies should wither away as soon as the dictatorship of the proletariat is instituted via the socialist revolution.

This shows absence of agreement among political theorist on the role and purpose of the state and creates a problem of critical appraisal in political theory and theorizing.

3.3 Value-based Challenge

There has been serious controversy as to the issue of whether political theory should be fact-oriented or value-laden over the years. Behaviouralists gained prominence for their emphasis on facts while the Normatives continued to hang on to value (Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2013).

Political theory, especially the normative typology, is value-laden in the sense that it is prone to value judgment. It is also subject to multiple perspectives in the sense that political theorists look at political problems, issues and solutions from variegated perspectives. While this may be regarded as a major source of strength for political theory and theorizing, it also poses a great challenge to the extent that the political theory and theorizing having multiple perspectives are capable of introducing complexities into political theorizing.

3.4 The Challenge of Background Influences

Political theorists are products of diverse environmental, ideological and academic backgrounds and persuasions. In engaging in political theorizing, they reflect and bring to bear, directly or indirectly influences from these backgrounds. This inevitably poses a challenge to political theory and theorizing as political theorists sharply disagree on how best the political system should be organized and operated, who should play what role, how and when as well as the best system of government,

especially in consideration of the fact that internal dynamics and circumstances greatly determine and define the character and form of political organization best fitted for any given society.

3.5 The Challenge of Objectivity

It is a general requirement and expectation that socio-economic and political experiments and analysis should be objective. Objectivity is seen as the ability to examine evidence dispassionately. It is a study or investigation which is independent of beliefs, biases, hopes and fears of any individual. Unfortunately, in political theory and theorizing, there appears to be a reasonable degree of objectivity among political theorists. Very often their personal beliefs, idiosyncrasies, motives, biases and eurocentrism inform and are demonstrated in their political theories and theorizing. Bias, as Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2013) observed, whether hidden or obvious, latent or manifest, tends to obfuscate, blur or misdirect the true essence of a theory; an example is the theory of political development.

3.6 The Challenge of Consistency and Language

A political theorist in the process of theorizing must be consistent in his views and articulations in order to be properly categorized. In providing justification for this position, Johari (1987: 67) emphasized that:

...It is desired that the ideas of a social and political theorist must be thoroughly consistent so that he may be easily and safely put into a particular rubric of school like that of an individualist, a socialist, an anarchist or a communist and the like. If this is not there, we criticize a thinker for being inconsistent and his political theory is accused of being full of contradictions...

As regards language, no doubt, political theory and theorizing are also faced with the language challenge. Generally, in the social sciences to which political science belongs, terms, words and concepts are subject to many definitional analyses and operational interpretations. Thus same words, terms or concepts used by scholars in political theory and theorizing are subject to different meanings as may be perceived or applied by such scholars.

Johari (1987: 69) posits that:

One more problem in this direction relates to the use of words and phrases by some leading thinkers, theorists and analysts of political theory. We find that

some terms have different implications at the hands of different political thinkers, theorists and analysts. ... The same problem stands out as to which meaning should be accepted and appreciated, or refuted and denounced.

Stressing on the same problem Anikpo (1986) concluded that the attempt to precisely specify the meaning of development, for instance, sparks off a barrage or rhetoric which in the end renders the concepts scientifically unhelpful.

3.7 Methodological Challenges

Another major problematic of postmodern political theory and theorizing is in the appropriate method or approach to follow. This has posed a great threat to political research/theory. This scenario had generated a lot of debate in political inquiry. While some theorists argue in favour of normative method, others accept empirical method. However, the point to note here is that both the normative and empirical approaches or methods are all valid, important and relevant tools to the study of politics.

3.8 Challenge on the use of Abstractions

Political theory and theorizing, in most cases, is fraught with abstractions. Abstractions are like mental-constructs which enables a theorist to translate his mental images into phrases or frames of reference (Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2013). Most times, the illustrations used in the theories are alien or foreign to readers and students of political science, particularly in the Third World Societies. Political theory encourages the imitation of Western or Eurocentric ideas.

3.9 Challenge of Lack of Funds and Grants

It is altruistic that research is very much a capital-intensive venture. It requires sponsorship and grants from individuals, private organizations, governments and other institutions. Lack of funds and grants had caused a wedge in the wheel of political theorizing, especially in developing societies of the Third World (Agbaenyi, 2012).

4. Conclusion

From the above analysis, it is abundantly clear that the role of political theory and theorizing in mapping out a road map to the institution of a proper political organization and order in society is indispensable. However, at the theoretical level, such exercise is ridden with the several challenges especially in the

areas of interpretation, consistency, and language critical appraisal and value judgment. Others are background influences and objectivity, Methodological Challenges, Challenges on the use of Abstractions, Challenge of Lack of Funds and Grants. It is, therefore, contended that the earlier, these challenges are addressed, the better the future of political theory and theorizing.

5. Recommendations

In the light of the above challenges associated with post-modern political theory and theorizing, this paper makes the following suggestions and or recommendations:

- (i) There should be uniformity of understanding in the interpretation of both the theories of political thinkers and scholars and their application in understanding contemporary political societies. Uncompromising attacks and commentaries on each other among political theorists should end and a balanced view be maintained. Scholars in political research should unify their efforts than allow ideological differences divide them.
- (ii) Political theorists should come to an agreement or consensus on the role and purpose of the state and its institutions instead of having divergent views.
- (iii) Political theorists should endeavor to adopt unified methods and approaches of political inquiry in order to bring about an all-encompassing process of political research that will be more responsive to solving problems facing our societies. Fact-value or normative-empirical approaches' debate amongst political theorists are not necessary in the contemporary world as these approaches are relevant in one way or the other. Efforts should, therefore, be made at unifying these approaches and methods to achieve, in the words of Agbaenyi (2012p.464) "eclectic approach more potent to the problems that necessitated its promulgation".
- (iv) Objectivity is needed in political theory and theorizing. It is seen as the ability to examine evidence dispassionately. Political theorists should generate theories that can cement together capitalist democracy with the cultures of various societies.
- (v) Postmodern Political theory and theorizing should be consistent in their views and articulations in order to be properly placed and categorized. In line with Agbaenyi (2012), Political theorists, as a matter of fact, should focus on the clarity of problems, society, circumstances and time of political theories to guard against wrong perception and application of theories by relevant executive authorities.
- (vi) Political research should be properly funded by governments, non-governmental organizations,

individuals, Multinational Corporations among others to enable political theorists/political scientists embark on meaningful and serious researches that could yield positive results.

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