

## Postmodernism and Industry

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### Abstract

*This paper takes a look at postmodernism in its epochal significance as allies of other changes such as post industrialism and post capitalism. Like modernism which heralds the scientific age and improvement in technology, postmodernism represents the epoch in which service industry in ICT, as opposed manufacturing industry takes the center stage in human productive efforts. The advanced capitalist regions seem to have matched beyond manufacturing industry and now cede the productive outcomes of the era to the developing world, which seem not to have been caught up with the service industry information age frenzy. With this dichotomy in the world's productive efforts, is this not another call for neoliberalism, a political capitalist economic philosophy by which advanced countries of the West teleguide development efforts in the underdeveloped regions by indirectly enforcing development path already trod by the West ?*

**Key Words:** Postmodernism, Service Industry, Modernism. Research

### Introduction

Postmodernism means “after the modern” (Bolton 2007). Modernism describes a collection of cultural and reforming movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (around 1890s) and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (around 1940s) in art, architecture, literature, music, applied arts, social science and several fields of human endeavors. The modern is characterized by a dramatic change of thought from traditionalism and limitations imposed by religion, whereby human intellect sought to improve the environment through instrumentality of science, knowledge, and practical experimentation in all spheres of life including philosophy, literature, art, commerce and industry. Postmodernism was a reaction to modernism. As a cultural and intellectual movement or so, though difficult to define by its various writers, it was pervasive in the western thinking. It was influenced by the disenchantment brought about by the fall-outs of the Second World War. Modernism, which started from the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment in Europe, held a wide-spread belief that science would improve the world and that social progress would be inevitable. These promises and hopes were dashed by the scientific sophistication of the military weapons displaced during the War which claimed the lives of many people. Modernism began the scientific thought pedestal led on the faith in human ability to know the world, control it and arrive at absolute knowledge via empirical investigation, thus separating matters of ‘faith’ from matters of objective knowledge about the real world (World View, 2010).

Post modernism challenged the modernist belief in the efficacy of human reason and equally opposed the authoritative and absolute claims of traditionalism before it. Postmodernism represents a new paradigm that attacks modernist paradigm in the areas of theory and methodology, embraces local narratives about happenings in the social world instead of the Meta narratives, or met theories of early social theorists (e.g. functionalism or Marxism) especially in the areas of factual knowledge and idea of progress. Postmodernism similarly repudiates the ‘Big Story’ account of religion about the world. Meta narratives or meta theories are wide-ranging theoretical explanations that give detailed account of the real world; while Big Stories are trado-religious explanations or claims about the world that answer the questions such as ‘truth’, ‘creation’, etc (Manswell, 2007). Its great writers include **Geoffrey Hartman, Harold Bloom, J. Hills Miller, Jean Francois Lyotard** (1924-1998), **Jean Bandrillard** (1929-2007), **Michael Foucault** (1926-1984), **Richard Rorty** (1931-2007), while the ancient writings of people like Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Karl Marx envisaged postmodernism.

(Piercy vpiercy, 2010).The rest of this chapter aims at fleshing out main issues involved in postmodern development and state of current debate on industry. The chapter is structured as follows: characteristics of postmodernism, postmodern theory and research methodology and impact of postmodernism on industry and the conclusion.

### ***Characteristics of Postmodernism***

The followings distinguish postmodernism from other epochs of thought. Those characteristics are found in churches, colleges, social life, and work environment as it shall soon be fully discussed (Encyclopedia.Com and High Beam Research Inc. 2010).

- Postmodernism rejects the idea of absolute truth ‘as held by traditionalism and modernism and maintains that truth is a contrived illusion, misused by people or interest groups to gain advantage over others.
- Truth and errors are synonymous - facts are too limiting to determine anything contrary to modernist thinking. Truth according to postmodernism changes from time to time. Moreover, what is fact today can be false tomorrow
- There is a rejection of scientific method with its logic and objectivity. It relies, rather, on opinion rather than facts; on local narratives instead of Meta narratives, as claimed by science.
- Rejection of past experiences and history unlike modernism, but relies on the current experiences saying that the past has no relevance for the present. It is therefore a historical.
- It repudiates traditional authority by rejecting religion, morals and secular authority (especially as held during the medieval period concerning divine rights of kings). That morality and ethics are personal concerns.
- Rejection of absolute exclusive claims of religion. All religions are valid; hence, no religion can claim exclusive knowledge. For example, in postmodernism, Jesus is not the only way to God. Therefore, it is personal, not collective.
- Postmodernism bemoans the unfulfilled promises of science, technology, government, and religion.
- Postmodernism holds liberal ethics, and as such, defends the cause of feminists and homosexual movements.
- Support for globalization claiming that national boundaries are a hindrance to human communication. It views nationalism as a veritable source of war and promises unlimited intervention in relations of people. Recognition of human diversity stressing those socio-cultural identities has little value in the “market places of that new world” (Corson, 1998:4).
- It advocates protection of the “Mother Earth” and blamed Western societies on world’s environmental degradation.

### ***Theory and Research Methodology in Postmodernism***

Manswell (2007) in Weis and Wesley (2010) argued that one of the essential elements of postmodernism is that, it is an attack against theory and methodology. Postmodernism denounces any relationship between thought and the world, possibility of empirical testing and asserts that things are not ‘discovered’ by empirical processes but are constituted socially and theoretically through prioritization of local knowledge over met theories. Postmodernism argues that science does not really delve into inner workings of the object of study so; qualitative approach in methodology is major in postmodern research. This paradigm shift has made the old school modernist researchers to feel that some research may not be able to achieve “scientific results” through social qualitative research (Hoch, 1984).

Actually, I do not seem to share the mutual--exclusive treatment of both qualitative and quantitative methods as espoused by this argument. This is because the nature of data suggests which method will be applied, and sometimes, the two methods may be used together in a single research. Postmodernism research combines anthropological methods of observant participant and case study with pragmatism and phenomenological techniques in carrying out social research. Coetzee (2005:23) argues that participant observation both makes the researcher a participant, either residing or working there; and an observer- “listening, seeing, and noticing things that you might normally over look”. This method according to him, is “appropriate for explorative, descriptive studies, and those studies that aim at generating theoretical interpretation and critically examining other claims of knowledge, appropriate for studies focusing on processes, relationship between people and events, continuities over time and patterns” (Coetzee, 2005:23)

According to Allmendinger, 2001:22, cited in Coetzee, 2005), pragmatism does not require necessary and certain knowledge but reasons, description and belief that others can easily recognize, understand and use to guide them (2005:23). Pragmatism does not differentiate but identify and describe consequences of action (Hoch, 1984). Coetzee (2005) indicates that there are types of pragmatism but the particular type that relates to postmodernism, phenomenology and hermeneutics is being referred to in this case. According to Allmendinger (2001:24) in Coetzee 2005:26), “phenomenology proposes that people are studied without any preconceived theories or suppositions about how they act”. Hermeneutics is concerned with looking for the meaning behind action: looking for the “Why” of how things take place rather than explanation about them (Allmendinger, 2001). Pragmatic phenomenology and hermeneutics like the postmodernism are based on the tenet that human knowledge is subjective that only naturalistic styles as employed in anthropology could bring about legitimacy in research (Grillham, 2001). Postmodern paradigm assumes “multiple realities with their particular complexities, so, only naturalistic approach could get at their root to find out what really happens seeing the case from the inside” (Grillham, 2001: 11).

Research in the modernist paradigm is aimed at developing theory - possibly, the grand theory to provide answers to structured observations, but postmodernist naturalistic research aims to create a “good product theory” (Coetzee, 2005:27). A productive theory is a working, practical theory that is presently useful in addressing important social phenomena. As Foucault (1972: 16) in Coetzee (2005) argues, “theories are not intended to be permanent structures but rather temporary scaffolding erected for those who might find it useful”. Another important aspect of postmodern research is in the report writing. Scientific reports are written in formal dictions devoid of any narrative. However in postmodernism, reports are written in the narrative form - a form of storytelling describing the significance of events explaining why a situation or an event involving human action has taken place; thus, the narrative emphasizes actual concerns of people- their feelings, opinions, etc. by describing in details; such as where, when, who, what impact does an event have on a person or group. It demonstrates the flexibility as against the rigid scientific styles, that postmodernism applies (Polkinghorne, 1998).

In sum, special interview and questionnaire methods may still be used in naturalistic research to corroborate some of the things already observed and to include the opinion of key role players in order to further enrich the study (Coetzee 2005). It may be argued that the use of triangulation method which facilitates combination of several methods in the study of a social problem in postmodern research could be an added knowledge in social research. The formal style of scientific reporting is in consonance with the pure scientific legacy bequeathed to the social science but ironically, given the value-laden, human-centered character of the social science as against the inanimate things that constitute the subject-matter of the physical science. In order words, the adoption of the physical scientific paradigm affected and that to date, the social science theorizing which should have been more flexible, reflecting the dynamic nature of its subject-matter.

### ***Impact of Postmodernism on Industry***

The focus of this chapter, so far, has been on the intellectual impact of postmodernism however, its far-reaching effect transcends the mental to the material aspect of life. Postmodernism has had profound impact on architecture, art, literature, music, religion, fashion, commerce, industry, etc. Subsequent attention will now be drawn to the second part of this topic, regrettably on the impact of post modernism regarding the industry alone. The industry is defined in Encyclopedia Britannica (2010) as “a group of productive enterprises or organizations that produce or supply goods, services, or sources of income in the economy.

Industry may be viewed as a combination of manual labour and machinery to transform raw materials into products on a manufacturing, large scale, basis. Industry is generally classified as primary, those dealing with extraction of raw materials from nature; as secondary, which is mainly manufacturing and heavy-duty energy and construction sectors, and as tertiary industry which is also called service industry. In the service industry, there is no production of tangible products but intangible services of information, financial services, trade services, communication technology, hotel and tourism, transport, contract and real estate services. It also includes professions such as teachers, doctors, lawyers, social workers, the police, security services, etc.

Postmodern industry concerns, mainly, the service industry which corresponds to the postindustrial or postcapitalist era. Postindustrial economy is an economy that has undergone transformation from production of goods - the capitalist economy- to the production of services – the post capitalist economy. These services are not merely as part of manufacturing process but a separate sector, an entity of its own.

Postindustrial economy according to Bell (1974) and Stroeve (2007), comprises modern businesses that facilitate intangibles as playing a more prominent role in the wake of manufacturing decline. Examining the sectoral contributions to the Gross National Products (GNP) of industrialized societies, Stroeve (2007) argues that manufacturing which used to engage half of the population now shrinks to between half and two-thirds of the workforce. The economy, according to Stroeve (2007) is fully taken over by the service sector in industrial societies where it employs between half and two-thirds of the workforce and accounts for more than half of the GNP. The situation is different in most developing economies. For example while the service sector contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 5 developed economies of the USA, UK, Germany, Japan and France average 75.1%, it stands at 47.4% in 5 developing countries of Brazil, South Korea, India, Egypt, and Nigeria, as at 2009, Nigeria being the lowest at 25%, less than Sub-Saharan average of 53% (World Bank, 2002). In addition, only 20% of the total 47.33 million workforce is engaged in the services sector in Nigeria, as against 75% in developed countries (Wikipedia, 2011). Thus in comparison, the economy is still largely 'industrial' in developing countries especially Africa. Speaking on the transformation, Bell (1974) argues that in postindustrial economy, not production of goods but production of ideas is the main ways of growing the economy. Main concerns of the post industrial or the postmodern industry is the value of production to the citizens not in monetary terms, but its consumption pattern and effects on the welfare of the citizens. It has been argued that industrial economy itself which started 200 years ago in the West, can no longer sustain the western economies. It is reasoned that since the industrial is a short-term optimization of resource in monetary terms, it is incompatible with the goal of economic and social sustainability which is a long-term thing (Stroeve, 2007). The service industrial paradigm provides the only viable option to attain sustainability needed for postindustrial society in the postmodern world (Stahel, 2003).

The postmodern or postindustrial society views the entire industrial process from the perspective of sustainable development. Sustainable development is a development process that takes a holistic or comprehensive view of the development of a people – its survival, not only for the current generation but generations yet unborn (Akinde, 2009). It is a development that goes beyond production of goods as earlier noted, “but covers the wealth and welfare of the citizenry in the protection of their environment from now through to the future in the areas of global ecological support systems and ensuring proper balance in the carrying capacity of nature. It also includes protecting the health and safety of people and animals from such health hazards that affect life of citizens” (Holland, 2010: 8). Carrying capacity of nature refers to the effects of human activities and lifestyles on the environment. The above accounts for the current efforts on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and debate on climate change.

A significant component of the service economy is the information and communication technology (ICT). In the postmodern and postindustrial economy, ICT produces and disseminates knowledge and ideas that propel the economy. Through high level network, computers are not only tied to machines for robots to create automated production processes, but facilitates the only habitat of modern network communities (Bell, 1974; Drucker, 1993)). These communities are not physical but extraterritorial ones enabling wide interaction on the social space. Thus, in the postmodern world, the existence of human communities has shifted from physical to the information one (Stroeve, 2007). Labour is de-emphasized in the postmodern and post capitalist world, Postmodern world places high premium on knowledge which according to Drucker (1993: 35) “represents the “brains” of an organization.... They know how to set up company infrastructure, keep it going and improve upon its structure..... knowledge is brain power... removing the knowledge, then remove the expertise and the organization stagnates”. There is heavy investment in ICT whose contribution to the GDP is significant in the advanced economies. In 1999, for example ICT contributed only 3.5% to GDP in Nigeria and paltry 1.8% in Ghana in 2008, to mention but a few sub-Saharan societies (General News, 2010). Apart from the financial sector and more particularly in banking, the impact of ICT is yet to be widely felt in most sectors of the Nigerian economy. However, awareness in industrial and service sectors is high especially in financial and educational institutions in Africa.

### **Conclusion**

The chapter has sought to inform the reader on the pervasive influence of postmodernism and the state of affairs in the industrial development in the advanced economies. As pervasive as postmodern is on the social life and industrial life in the West (the advanced economies) - the question remains as to the extent of awareness of its impact in the developing societies of the world.

Efforts have been made by the West in the last five decades to brace up with the resultant challenges of postmodernism and its allies – postindustrial and post capitalist trends, to ensure economic and social sustainability.

As the developing countries are still grappling with the challenges of developing their manufacturing sectors, efforts towards postmodern and post capitalist economic challenges which are services based, are still at low ebb. Postmodern has its weaknesses. Few of them are presented here. First, it is viewed that although modernism is criticized for its scientific rigidity, postmodernism is equally criticized for dominating certain research and for its inability to satisfactorily explain human action. Second, critics feel postmodernism is reactionary as it is anti-Enlightenment and anti-scientific. Third, it has the tendency to contribute to deviant behaviour due to its moral relativity, attack on religion and somewhat atheistic stance. It may be asked: how far is postmodern in the current world since most societies are still largely doing things in the modern way? On the other hand, could the paradigm represent another call to neoliberalism by the West?

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