

## A CRITIQUE OF KARL MARX'S THEORY OF ALIENATION

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### **Abstract**

*The Age of discovery which came at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century brought an end to the remaining elements of Feudalism and inaugurated the flourishing era of capitalism especially in Europe. But with the dawn of Industrial Revolution with its practical application of technological knowledge there was also the emergence of classical capitalism and the rise of industrial capitalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It was this period that created a vast population of industrial workers whose miserable and pitiable conditions inspired Karl Marx revolutionary ideology that envisioned the complete eradication of capitalism. According to him, capitalism seeks total control over the workers by maximizing their labour without any commensurable benefits while creating an illusion that appear contrary. Marx noted that the capitalist system creates Alienation through their mechanical and repetitive work pattern that is devoid of intrinsic value for workers. He noted that Alienation depraves workers of good authentic lives, it limits human capabilities and do not allow workers to discover their full potentials. This according to Marx is not true of human beings who have the capability to develop dynamic thinking through the pursuit of multiple endeavours. He noted that human beings at all times retain the ability to contemplate the surrounding environment and develop robust challenges to problems. Marx's theory of alienation therefore attaches value to things that promote human freedom, development and well-being. In Marx's concept of alienation he tried to explain how workers generally do not feel at home with their environment. For instance, workers are alienated when they feel "external" to productive force and other workers; a worker is not allowed to take control of the work process, he is only been told what to do, a worker is not working for himself but rather someone else, and the worker help produce to his material world those things that appear alien and hostile to him. This paper therefore seeks to provide a systematic critique of Marx's theory of Alienation. To achieve this, the work engages Expository, Historical and Critical-Evaluative methods to*

*lay bay the thematic issues in Marx's theory of Alienation, to historically locate the rise of capitalism and Alienation and to critically interrogate the idea of Alienation as enunciated by Karl Marx.*

**Keywords:** Alienation, Marxism, Capitalism, Labour, Productivity, Civil Society, Feudal society, Human Essence

## **Introduction**

Since the dawn of industrial revolution the conditions of workers has become the issue of concern for many scholars. With the rise of industrial Capitalism after the Industrial Revolution the conditions of workers especially in Europe inspired the Karl Marx to call attention to the evils of capitalism and the need to get rid of it. Marx noted that this is because a new class relationship that exists in capitalism has stifles the creativity and innovation of human beings and has created resentment which is pregnant with serious consequences. At the heart of capitalist system is the negation of Kantian principle that insist that human beings must always be treated as ends in themselves but not means to an end. In the capitalist pursuit of wealth accumulation maximisation of profits is elevated above any other value. It is from this background which was the dominant ideology of the time that Marx opined that capitalism in its operational ideology confines labour to the position of a commercial commodity. This means that social relationships are ignored while human beings under the system strive to attain endurance or betterment. The competitive nature of capitalism eventually creates conflicts and disputes. This can cause high levels of alienation and resentment among the masses. The basic structure of the capitalist system is such that it can cause deterioration in social structures and relationships since workers must compete for scarce resources in order to survive. So the struggle for survival has yielded exploitive powers in the hands of those who own the means of production.

So wherever capitalism is practiced those elements of exploitation of the working class still prevail. Despites Marx's efforts to redefine and reconfigure Alienation as an inescapable experience of workers in a capitalist system the experience still persist. In Nigeria for instance many workers are employed but under employed by the private sector with a heavy demand of labour and production placed on them. Many of such experiences abounds especially in the private sectors in Nigeria is a typical example of dehumanizing conditions in which labour is extracted from employers without proportionate wages. The labourers go hungry while the capitalist maintains maximum profit. Due to the prevailing economic conditions created by the capitalist system, the worker has lost his

bargaining power which is the labour he has to offer. Karl Marx understands alienation as something rooted in the material world. So from his theory of materialism he tried to demonstrate how our physical environment and the conditions in which we live impact on our humanity.

Consequently, Marx argued that Alienation has shown that our capitalist world is now defined by economics which to large extent has also impacted our thought processes. This alienation has numerous negative effects, but one of the most significant is that it precludes the opportunity for self-actualization, which is the point at which an individual sees the fulfilment of their potentials. Being disconnected from their humanity and denied the right to self-actualization causes the individual to see himself or be seen by others as nothing more than an object in a capitalist system of production. Karl Marx developed his theory of alienation to reveal the human activity that lies behind the seemingly impersonal forces dominating society. He showed how, although aspects of the society we live in appear natural and independent of us, they are the results of past human actions. Marx's theory 'dissolves the rigid, unhistorical, natural appearance of social institutions; it reveals their historical origins and shows therefore that they are subject to history in every respect including historical decline'. Marx showed not only that human action in the past created the modern world, but also that human action could shape a future world free from the contradictions of capitalism. What makes the problem of economic alienation so persistent is that, the mind of the worker is alienated as well. With the alienation of the mind the worker loses the ability to determine his life and destiny, when deprived of the right to think as the director and controller of his actions. Karl Marx developed a materialist theory of how human beings were shaped by the society they lived in, but also how they could act to change that society, how people are both 'world determined' and 'world producing'.

Having realized that man is not just a labourer but a world producing agent one wonders why these alienating conditions created by capitalism still persist. Therefore, this paper therefore seek to critically interrogate this idea of Alienation particularly as conceived by Karl Marx in view of advancing ways of doing away with Alienation in our work places so as to enhanced human dignity in productivity.

## On the Concept of Alienation

The term alienation has a very ancient origin which is closely associated with religion but has over time undergone conceptual evolution with different contextual usage. In the philosophical circles, the concept has been engaged by almost all the classical philosophical trends in the West as well as in the East. Etymologically, the term alienation is rooted from the French *alienacion* meaning “transfer of ownership, action of estranging” and connected directly to the Latin *alienationem* (norminative alienatio) meaning “a transfer, surrender, separation”. It is also linked to the noun of action from past-participle *alienare* meaning “to make another’s, part with; estrange, set at variance,” as well as from *alienus* “of or belonging to another person or person or place,”<sup>1</sup>. The term is also a translation of German word *Verfremdungseffekt* which literally means “to make stage, to make another’s”. But the noun “alienation”, like the German *Entfremdung* and unlike *Entausserung*, used in a special context where it functions as a technical term means a human state of being alienated or estranged from something or somebody<sup>2</sup>.

The feeling of being stranger or sense of loneliness, strangeness or sense of having no belonging in the surroundings is termed ‘Alienation’. So, to separate legally a person’s possessions or rights to property (or liberty, in the case of slaves) becomes a kind of alienation, and because some kinds of property or rights could not be taken away, they came to be known as inalienable,...”<sup>3</sup>.

Alienation is a state in which a person feels one-self alone, estranged, worthless and meaningless. This may be the result of socio-political setup or due to capitalist surroundings but it is accepted fact that a person who suffers this has to bear a psychological agony. In our history of religions, it has been reported that Adam complaint loneliness and asked God for a companion. This makes clear that loneliness makes a man estranged from one’s own surroundings. This estranged situation, for some thinkers is purely psychological, for some ones it is an intellectual phenomenon but for Karl Marx it is a material and social process which affects human beings. In modern time, psychologists have explored its variety of forms and their effects on persons and society<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See Alienation: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/alienation>. Accessed 07/06/2020

<sup>2</sup> Richard Schacht. Alienation.(With an Introductory essay by Walter Kaufmann), London: Allen & Unwin, 1971. P.22

<sup>3</sup> Garrett Ward Sheldon (ed). *Encyclopedia of Political Thought*. New York: Facts on File ,2001.p.121

<sup>4</sup>See Karl Marx on Alienation.. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/alienation/> Accessed 06/06/2020

Alienation is the process whereby people become foreign to the world they are living in. The concept of alienation is deeply embedded in all the great religions and social and political theories of the civilised epoch, namely, the idea that sometimes in the past people lived in harmony, and then there was some kind of rupture which left people feeling like foreigners in the world, but sometime in the future this alienation would be overcome and humanity would again live in harmony with itself and Nature.

Marx had a specific understanding of the very sharp experience of alienation which is found in modern bourgeois society. Marx developed this understanding through his critique of Hegel<sup>5</sup>.

### **Marx's Notion Of Alienation**

According to Marx, however, the man that lives in a capitalist society has been separated from his natural being and is subject to an economic system that does not provide him with the means for self-realization. It is this malformation that is explained through the phenomenon of alienation – characteristic of modernity and which no person living in modernity is free from. Marx applied the concept of alienation to work in industrial capitalist societies, arguing that emancipation for workers lay in their wresting control away from the small, dominating ruling class. Ollman express the core of the theory clearly: “it is the intellectual construction in which Marx displays the devastating effect of capitalist production on human beings, on their physical and mental states and on the social processes which they are part”<sup>6</sup>.

Marx's discussion of alienation can be divided into his implicit and explicit discussion of the notion. In his explicit discussion, Marx introduces the key concepts of his understanding of alienation, and when he introduces his grander framework, although alienation becomes an implicit consideration, we can see that this understanding remains an inseparable part. Hence, alienation is the foundational concept upon which Marx's further critiques towards his contemporary economic system and its domination by surplus value develop. The notion of alienation does not disappear from the later writings of Marx, therefore, but rather remains as an inescapable aspect of the capitalist production process. It is a popular view that the term “alienation” disappears from Marx's

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<sup>5</sup> See (<https://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/a/1.htm>). Accessed 06/06/2020

<sup>6</sup> B Ollman, *Alienation* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p143.

later economic writings, largely as a result of translations of *Capital* that do not include an index.

However, "alienation" is several times mentioned in books I and III of *Capital*, as well as in *Theories of Surplus Value* and *Grundrisse*<sup>7</sup>. More in-depth arguments for alienation's importance throughout Marx's writings can also be found in S. Sayers, A. MacIntyre and E. Fromm (amongst others).

Marx's concept of alienation rises from capitalist society in which members have lost their former status of division through their field of work and have been reduced to two classes: property *owners* and property-less *workers*. In the historical development from craftsmen to factory workers, owning capital has changed to becoming capital<sup>8</sup>. And thus, a class-struggle driven society arises from the division of labour.

It must be noted that the analysis of capitalist society begins with the investigation of economic fact: alienation of the worker and his production. Marx's aim is to grasp the connection between the system of alienation (production process) and the system of money. He expresses this through the conceptual term - alienated labour - understanding of which should lead to further understanding of both mere economic fact and also the reality in which it reveals itself<sup>9</sup>.

Karl Marx considered capitalism to be a dynamic chronicled stage that would in the end stagnate because of disagreements, tensions and misunderstandings existing between the Laborers and capitalists in the society. Marxists characterize capital as "a social, financial connection" between individuals (instead of amongst individuals and things). In this sense, the relationship between labor and its products are eliminated, thus breeding alienation.

In Karl Marx's view, the element of capital would in the end devastate the common laborers and along these lines make the social conditions ready for revolution. Studies in Alienation reveal that Marx was not the first to develop an analysis of human alienation. Marx's philosophical predecessor, Hegel, saw alienation as part of the development of the human mind. Ludwig Feuerbach also in His analysis had put forward a materialist analysis of alienation, pointing

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<sup>7</sup> B Ollman, Alienation.P.304

<sup>8</sup> B Ollman, Alienation.P. 91

<sup>9</sup> B Ollman, Alienation. P.85

out how men transfer the power to change the world to imaginary gods, although he tend to believe that religious alienation could only be eliminated through rational argument alone. Alienation therefore, under the context of this paper is the transformation of people's own labour into a power which rules them as if by a kind of natural or supra-human law. In other words, it describes a situation whereby Man is reprieved from enjoying the products of His labour. This brings into question the issue of Surplus Value which is man's sweat (Labour), appropriated by another (Capital). In Marx's view, the origin of alienation is to be traced to commodity fetishism - the belief that inanimate things (commodities) have human powers (i.e., value) able to govern the activity of human beings. Alienation is an idea that was developed by Marx in the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and later developed in his critique of political economy in *Capital*.

The Issues and Socio-economic Conditions of His Time: The 19th century Europe in which Karl Marx lived and died was a century of great hope, of dream of the perfectibility of man, of new religions of science and humanity, when men were eager to reform the world in order to solve the problem of poverty. But it was also a violent and volatile century, characterized by strong feelings of nationalism and revolutions in Germany, Italy, France and England. It was a period when capitalism had emerged as the dominant mode of production and prevailing economic order, following the breakdown of Feudalism and its Absolutist Monarchy; and thus had created new wealth and power all over Europe as a result of the Industrial Revolution<sup>10</sup>.

Capitalism itself is simply a system of economic organization which recognized private ownership of the major means of production and propelled by profit motive, competition, self-interest and in a word, individualism. While emphasizing the negative socio-economic conditions of the society at that time especially as it affected the common workers<sup>11</sup> noted that in the 19th century capitalist Europe, the socio-economic conditions were such that there was social differentiation among the people in terms of social inequalities in status, wealth, power, privileges and opportunities, and more importantly, in the control of economic, political and social resources. It was a time when the European Society had already been bifurcated into two classes namely - the working class and the

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<sup>10</sup>Okechukwu S. Amadi and Inyikalum Daniel R." Reflections on Hegelian Ethical Doctrine Of State Issues in political Theory". In *International Journal of E-Government & Business Research*, Vol 1, Issue 1, July-Dec, 2016. P. 16

<sup>11</sup>Okechukwu S. Amadi and Inyikalum Daniel R." Reflections on Hegelian Ethical Doctrine Of State Issues in political Theory".P.20



capitalist class. The working class served basically as elements of manipulation and exploitation in the process of capital accumulation while the emergent middle class (i.e. the capitalist class) enjoyed its glorious moments in wealth and power, and thus, wanted to consolidate its position in both economic and political scheme of things, by rationalizing with some principles and ideas be it that of liberty, reason or material progress<sup>12</sup>.

Already, there was in existence, an ideology called liberalism and its economic correlate capitalism which had developed in the 17th and 18th century by the efforts of the enlightenment thinkers and classical economists of that Age – respectively. Liberalism and by extension capitalism identified the individual rather than the society as a whole as the unit of analysis upon which social justice, virtues and capabilities could be judged. Social justice was determined by the extent to which freedom was allowed the individual in order to demonstrate his own virtues and capabilities. This invariably, made life very difficult for the poor labourers who were at the mercy of the capitalists. It is pertinent to state at this point that, the term alienation cannot be found in the later writings of Marx, but modern commentators are in error when they contend that Marx abandoned the idea. It informs his later writings, more particularly *Das Kapital*<sup>13</sup>.

In the notion of the "fetishism of commodities," which is central to his economic analysis, Marx repeatedly applies the concept of alienation. Commodities are alienated products of the labor of man, crystallized manifestations, which in Frankenstein fashion now dominate their creators. "The commodity form," writes Marx in *Das Kapital*, Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labour is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration. Capital has its rights, which are as worthy of protection as any other rights. Marx's Conception of Alienation: However we decide to look at it, the concept of alienation was the central notion of Marx's teachings and analysis. For instance, he rightly noted that "The oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class are to represent and repress them". Therefore, explicitly stated or tacitly assumed, the notion of alienation remained central to Marx's social and economic analysis. In an alienated society, the whole mind-set of men, their consciousness, is to a large

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<sup>12</sup> Rodee, et al. *Introduction to Political Science*. International edition, McGraw-Hill, 1972.P.172

<sup>13</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development". *International Journal of Science Invention Today*. Vol. 6. No 2. 2017. P.117



extent only the reflection of the conditions in which they find themselves and of the position in the process of production in which they are variously placed<sup>14</sup>.

Marx famously noted while describing the state of constant war between labour and capital; Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, that each time ended, either in the revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes<sup>15</sup>.

From the above, it is obvious that Karl Marx acknowledged the fact that there are indeed two classes constantly in conflict with each other. But due to the disadvantaged position of the working class, will always be dominated by the owners of the means and factors of production. 'Alienation', then, is used by Marx to refer to any state of human existence which is 'away from' or 'less than' unalienation. It is in this sense and on this scale, however, that Marx refers to alienation as 'a mistake, a defect, which ought not to be'. Both the individual and his way of life can be spoken of as 'alienated', and in the latter case the tag 'realm of estrangement' is applied to the most infected areas. Marx further declares: What requires explanation is not the unity of living and active human beings with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolism, with nature, and therefore their appropriation of nature; nor is this the result of a historical process. What we must explain is the separation of these inorganic conditions of human existence from this active existence, a separation which is only fully completed in the relation between wage-labor and capital<sup>16</sup>.

Judging from the above, one can rightly conclude that for Marx, the history of mankind had a double aspect: It was a history of increasing control of man over nature at the same time as it was a history of the increasing alienation of man. From the foregoing, Alienation may also be described as a condition in which men are dominated by forces of their own creation, which confront them as alien powers. Karl Marx's concept of Alienation further reveal that alienated man is an abstraction because he has lost touch with all human specificity. This is because, He has been reduced to performing undifferentiated work on humanly

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<sup>14</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.112

<sup>15</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.118

<sup>16</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.118

indistinguishable objects among people deprived of their human variety and compassion. There is little that remains of his relations to his activity, product and fellows which enables us to grasp the peculiar qualities of his species. Consequently, Marx feels he can speak of this life as 'the abstract existence of man as a mere workman who may therefore fall from his filled void into the absolute void'. Though Marx clearly overstates his case in calling alienated man a hole in the air, it is in such an extreme notion that the term 'abstraction' is rooted<sup>17</sup>.

At the same time that the individual is degenerating into an abstraction, those parts of his being which have been split off (which are no longer under his control) are undergoing their own transformation. Three end products of this development are property, industry and religion, which Marx calls man's 'alienated life elements'. Eventually, it attains an independent life, that is, takes on 'needs' which the individual is then forced to satisfy, and the original connection is all but obliterated. It is this process which largely accounts for the power that money has in capitalist societies, the buying of objects which could never have been sold had they remained integral components of their producer<sup>18</sup>.

What occurs in the real world is reflected in people's minds: essential elements of what it means to be a man are grasped as independent and, in some cases, all powerful entities, whose links with him appear other than what they really are. The ideas which encompass this reality share all its shortcomings. The whole has broken up into numerous parts whose interrelation in whole can no longer be ascertained. This is the essence of alienation, whether the part under examination is man, his activity, his product or his ideas. The same separation and distortion is evident in each. To Marx, all major institutional spheres in capitalist society, such as religion, the State, and Political Economy, were marked by a condition of alienation. Moreover, these various aspects of alienation were interdependent. Objectification is the practice of alienation. Just as man, so long as he is engrossed in religion, can only objectify his essence by an alien and fantastic being; so under the sway of egoistic need, he can only affirm himself and produce objects in practice by subordinating his products and his own activity to the domination

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<sup>17</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.118

<sup>18</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.119

of an alien entity, and by attributing to them the significance of an alien entity, namely money<sup>19</sup>.

Karl Marx further notes that "Money is the alienated essence of man's work and existence; the essence dominates him and he worships it." The State is the intermediary between men and human liberty. Just as Christ is the intermediary to whom man attributes all his own divinity and all his religious bonds, so the state is the intermediary to which man confides all his non-divinity and all his human freedom. Alienation hence confronts man in the whole world of institutions in which he is enmeshed. But alienation in the workplace assumes for Marx an overriding importance, because to him man was above all Homo Faber, Man the Maker. Marx while speaking about Hegel's position viz the alienated man notes that; The outstanding achievement of Hegel's Phenomenology . . . is that Hegel grasps the self-creation of man as a process . . . and that he, therefore, grasps the nature of labor and conceives objective man. . . as the result of his own labour<sup>20</sup>.

Economic alienation under capitalism is involved in men's daily activities and not only in their minds, as other forms of alienation might be. "Religious alienation as such occurs only in the sphere of consciousness, in the inner life of man, but economic alienation is that of real life. . . . It therefore affects both aspects." Karl Marx notes that Alienation in the domain of work has a fourfold aspect: Man is alienated from the object he produces, from the process of production, from himself, and from the community of his fellows. The object produced by labor, its product, now stands opposed to it as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer. . . . The more the worker expends himself in work the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself, the poorer he becomes in his inner life, and the less he belongs to himself. Interestingly, Karl Marx in his analysis on the different dimensions of Alienation further explains that; However, alienation appears not merely in the result but also in the process of production, within productive activity itself. . . . If the product of labour is alienation, production itself must be active alienation. .

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<sup>19</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.119

<sup>20</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.119

. . The alienation of the object of labour merely summarizes the alienation in the work activity itself <sup>21</sup>.

Being alienated from the objects of his labor and from the process of production, man is also alienated from himself. This act of alienation ensures that he cannot fully develop the many sides of his personality. "Work is external to the worker. . . . It is not part of his nature; consequently he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself. . . . The worker therefore feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless." "In work [the worker] does not belong to himself but to another person." "This is the relationship of the worker to his own activity as something alien, not belonging to him activity as suffering (passivity), strength as powerlessness, creation as emasculation, and the personal physical and mental energy of the worker, his personal life. . . . as an activity which is directed against himself, independent of him and not belonging to him." Analysis of Alienation in Ancient Feudal Society as against capitalist societies: In ancient feudal societies, humans had not yet developed the means to control the natural world, or to produce enough to be free from famine, or to cure diseases. All social relationships were 'conditioned by a low stage of development of the productive powers of labour and correspondingly limited relations between men within the process of creating and reproducing their material life, hence also limited relations between man and nature'. Land was the source of production, and it so dominated the feudal-manorial system that men saw themselves not as individuals but in relation to the land<sup>22</sup>.

Marx described this in the his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*: In feudal landownership we already find the domination of the earth as of an alien power over men. The serf is an appurtenance of the land. Similarly the heir through primogeniture, the first born son, belongs to the land. It inherits him. The rule of private property begins with property in land which is its basis. Ownership of land was dependent on inheritance and blood lines: your 'birth' determined your destiny. In an early work Marx described how 'the aristocracy's pride in their blood, their descent, in short the genealogy of the body...has its appropriate science in heraldry. The secret of the aristocracy is zoology'. It was this zoology which determined your life and your relationships with others. On the one hand, the low level of the productive forces meant constant labour for the peasants,

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<sup>21</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.119

<sup>22</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.120

while on the other, the feudal lords and the church officials took what they wanted from the peasants by force. Thus alienation arose from the low level of the productive forces, from human subordination to the land and from the domination of the feudal ruling class. However, there were limits to these forms of alienation. The peasants worked their own land and produced most of the things they needed in their own independent family units. 'If a person was tied to the land, then the land was also tied to the people... The peasant, and even the serf of the middle ages, remained in possession of at least 50 percent, sometimes 60 and 70 percent, of the output of their labour'. The social relationships in feudal society were relationships of domination and subordination, but they were obviously social relationships between individuals<sup>23</sup>.

In *Capital*, Marx described how the social relations between individuals in the performance of their labour appear at all events as their own mutual personal relations, and are not disguised under the shape of social relations between the products of labour.

However, the constraints of feudalism were very different from the dynamic of capitalism. The bourgeoisie wanted a society in which everything could be bought and sold for money: 'Selling in this case is the practice or function of alienation'. The creation of such a society depended on the brutal enclosures of the common land. This meant that, for the first time, the majority in society were denied direct access to the means of production and subsistence, thus creating a class of landless labourers who had to submit to a new form of exploitation, wage labour, in order to survive. Capitalism in such a case therefore involved 'a fundamental change in the relations between men, instruments of production and the materials of production'. These fundamental changes meant that every aspect of life was transformed. Even the concept of time was radically altered so that watches, which were toys in the 17th century, became a measure of labour time or a means of quantifying idleness, because of the 'importance of an abstract measure of minutes and hours to the work ethic and to the habit of punctuality required by industrial discipline'. Men no longer enjoyed the right to dispose of what they produced how they chose: they became separated from the product of their labour<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> <sup>23</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.120

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Peter Linebaugh in his history of 18th century London, *The London Hanged*, explained that workers considered themselves masters of what they produced. It took great repression, a 'judicial onslaught', in the late 18th century to convince them that what they produced belonged exclusively to the capitalists who owned the factories. During the 18th century most workers were not paid exclusively in money. The above was true of Russian serf labour, American slave labour, Irish agricultural labour and the metropolitan labour in London trades'. By the 19th century, however, wage labour had replaced all other forms of payment. This meant labour was now a commodity, sold on the market. Capitalists and workers were formally independent of each other, but in reality inextricably connected. Production no longer took place in the home, but in factories where new systems of discipline operated. The mechanization of labour in the factories transformed people's relationship with machines, 'those remarkable products of human ingenuity became a source of tyranny against the worker'<sup>25</sup>.

In *Kapital*, again Marx compared the work of craftsmen and artisans to that of the factory worker: In handicrafts and manufacture, the workman makes use of a tool, in the factory; the machine makes use of him. There the movements of the instrument of labour proceed from him, here it is the movements of the machines that he must follow. In manufacture the workmen are parts of a living mechanism. In the factory we have a lifeless mechanism independent of the workman, who becomes a mere living appendage. One of the most important, and devastating, features of factory production was the division of labour. Prior to capitalism there had been a social division of labour, with different people involved in different branches of production or crafts. With capitalism there arose the detailed division of labour within each branch of production. This division of labour meant that workers had to specialize in particular tasks, a series of atomised activities, which realised only one or two aspects of their human powers at the expense of all the others. Harry Braverman pointed out the consequences of this division: While the social division of labour subdivides society, the detailed division of labour subdivides humans, and while the subdivision of society may enhance the individual and the species, the subdivision of the individual, when carried on without regard to human capabilities and needs, is a crime against the person and humanity <sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.120

<sup>26</sup> Braverman H. *Labour and Monopoly Capitalism*. Monthly Review Press, 1974.p.

John Ruskin, the 19th century critic of industrialization, made a similar point when he wrote that the division of labour is a false term because it is the men who are divided. In this system workers become increasingly dependent on the capitalists who own the means of production. Just as the worker 'is depressed, therefore, both intellectually and physically, to the level of a machine, and from being a man becomes an abstract activity and a stomach, so he also becomes more and more dependent on every fluctuation in the market price, in the investment of capital and on the whims of the wealthy'. It became impossible for workers to live independently of capitalism: to work meant to be reduced to a human machine; to be deprived of work meant living death. Without work, if capital ceases to exist for him, Marx argued the worker might as well bury himself alive: 'The existence of capital is his existence, his life, for it determines the content of his life in a manner indifferent to him'. There is no choice involved - work is a matter of survival. Therefore labour became forced labour; you could not choose not to work, you could not choose what you made, and you could not choose how you made it. Marx noted: The fact that labour is external to the worker, does not belong to his essential being; that he therefore does not confirm himself in his work, but denies himself, feels miserable and not happy, does not develop free mental and physical energy, but mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind. Hence the worker feels himself only when he is not working; when he is working he does not feel himself. He is at home when he is not working, and not at home when he is working. His labour is therefore not voluntary but forced, it is forced labour. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need, but a mere means to satisfy need outside itself. Its alien character is clearly demonstrated by the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists it is shunned like the plague<sup>27</sup>.

### **A Critique of Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation**

It is pertinent to note that the concept of alienation is a central but controversial aspect of Marxism whose main focus is on the struggle between capitalists and the working class. He envisioned the possibility of the conflict resulting ultimately in a revolution in which capitalism will be overthrown by the working class who will then take control of the economy. Marx's theory of alienation argues that workers are disenchanted with their work because it is controlled and supervised by hierarchies of managers and supervisors. In the process the individual creativity and freedom especially of the working class is stifled in the name of efficiency and effectiveness. He attributed all these to capitalism whose

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<sup>27</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.120



development at the time proved irresistible and consequently brought in alienation on a scale previously unimaginable.

Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta in their analysis of Marx's concept of Alienation observed that that in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (also known as the 1844, or Paris Manuscripts) Marx identified four specific ways in which alienation pervades capitalist society as follows;

**The product of labour:** The worker is alienated from the object he produces because it is owned and disposed of by another, the capitalist. In all societies people use their creative abilities to produce objects which they use, exchange or sell. Under capitalism, however, this becomes an alienated activity because The worker cannot use the things he produces to keep alive or to engage in further productive activity... The worker's needs, no matter how desperate, do not give him a license to lay hands on what these same hands have produced, for all his products are the property of another<sup>28</sup>.

Thus, workers produce cash crops for the market when they are malnourished, build houses in which they will never live, make cars they can never buy, produce shoes they cannot afford to wear, and so on. Marx argued that the alienation of the worker from what he produces is intensified because the products of labour actually begin to dominate the labourer. Interestingly, this domination of dead labour over living labour lies behind Marx's assertion in the Manuscripts that The alienation of the worker means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien. For Marx this state of affairs was unique to capitalism. In previous societies those who work harder could usually be expected to have more to consume. Under capitalism, those who work harder increase the power of a hostile system over them. They themselves, and their inner worlds, become poorer. 'The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more goods he creates. The devaluation of the human world increases in direct relation with the increase in value of the world of things'<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.120

<sup>29</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.121

**The labour process:** The second element of alienation Marx identified is a lack of control over the process of production. We have no say over the conditions in which we work and how our work is organized, and how it affects us physically and mentally. This lack of control over the work process transforms our capacity to work creatively into its opposite, so the worker experiences 'activity as passivity, power as impotence, procreation as emasculation. The resulting rigidly repetitive process buries the individual talents or skills of the worker, as Marx described: Factory work exhausts the nervous system to the uttermost; it does away with the many-sided play of the muscles, and confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and intellectual activity... The special skill of each individual insignificant factory operative vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity before the science, the gigantic physical forces, and mass of labours that are embodied in the factory mechanism and, together, with that mechanism, constitute the power of the master<sup>30</sup>.

Modern methods of production have increased the fragmentation of the labour process since Marx's day. The organization of modern production is still based on the methods of the assembly line. Scientific research is used to break the production process down into its component parts. This has led, firstly, to the deskilling of white collar jobs and to a situation where managers have a monopoly of control over the production process: 'The unity of thought and action, conception and execution, hand and mind, which capitalism threatened from its beginnings, is now attacked by a systematic dissolution employing all the resources of science and the various engineering disciplines based upon it'. Conditions of work, from the length of the working day to the space we occupy, are predetermined: The entire work operation, down to its smallest motion, is conceptualized by the management and engineering staff, laid out, measured, fitted with training and performance standards - all entirely in advance. Workers are treated as machines, with the aim of transforming the subjective element of labour into objective, measurable, controlled processes. He finds it already pre-existing and self-sufficient, it functions independently of him and he has to conform to its laws whether he likes it or not<sup>31</sup>.

**Our fellow human beings:** Thirdly, we are alienated from our fellow human beings. This alienation arises in part because of the antagonisms which inevitably

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<sup>30</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.121

<sup>31</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.121

arise from the class structure of society. We are alienated from those who exploit our labour and control the things we produce. As Marx put it: If his activity is a torment for him, it must provide pleasure and enjoyment for someone else... If therefore he regards the product of his labour, his objectified labour, as an alien, hostile and powerful object which is independent of him, then his relationship to that object is such that another man - alien, hostile, powerful and independent of him - is its master. If he relates to his own activity an unfree activity, then he relates to it as activity in the service, under the rule, coercion and yoke of another man. In addition, studies reveal that we are connected to others through the buying and selling of the commodities we produce. Our lives are touched by thousands of people every day, people whose labour has made our clothes, food, home, etc. The commodities of each individual producer appear in depersonalized form, regardless of who produced them, where, or in what specific conditions. Commodity production means that everyone 'appropriates the produce of others, by alienating that of their own labour'<sup>32</sup>.

Marx described how mass commodity production continually seeks to create new needs, not to develop our human powers but to exploit them for profit: Each attempts to establish over the other an alien power, in the hope of thereby achieving satisfaction of his own selfish needs...becomes the inventive and ever calculating slave of inhuman, refined, unnatural and imaginary appetites. He places himself at the disposal of his neighbour's most depraved fancies, panders to his needs, excites unhealthy appetites in him, and pounces on every weakness, so that he can then demand the money for his labour of love. We see other people through the lens of profit and loss. Our abilities and needs are converted into means of making money and so we consider other human beings as competitors, as inferiors or superiors.

**Our human nature:** The fourth element is our alienation from what Marx called our species being. What makes us human is our ability to consciously shape the world around us. However, under capitalism our labour is coerced, forced labour. Work bears no relationship to our personal inclinations or our collective interests. The capitalist division of labour massively increased our ability to produce, but those who create the wealth are deprived of its benefits<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.122

<sup>33</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.122

Marx's descriptions of this process in the Manuscripts are extremely powerful indictments of the system: It is true that labour produces marvels for the rich, but it produces privation for the worker. It produces palaces, but hovels for the worker. It procures beauty, but deformity for the worker. It replaces labour by machines, but it casts some of the workers back into barbarous forms of labour and turns others into machines. It produces intelligence, but it produces idiocy and cretinism for the worker. Human beings are social beings. We have the ability to act collectively to further our interests. However, under capitalism that ability is submerged under private ownership and the class divisions it produces. We have the ability to consciously plan our production, to match what we produce with the developing needs of society. But under capitalism that ability is reversed by the anarchic drive for profits. Thus, rather than consciously shaping nature, we cannot control, or even foresee, the consequences of our actions. For example, new, cheaper techniques of production may, when repeated across industry, produce acid rain or gases which destroy the ozone layer. Similarly, when one capitalist improves production in his factory, he is unwittingly contributing to the slowing up of the rate of profits for his class as a whole by lowering the rate of profit<sup>34</sup>.

Again, one understands that alienation can equally be conceived of as state of mind, and not just an understanding of how social organization affected human beings. It is however important to state at this point that, Marx's writings on alienation, from the Manuscripts and Capital, demonstrates that for him alienation was not merely a state of mind, but also viz the material life of the individual. As one Marxist described it, The life activity of the alienated individual is qualitatively of a kind. His actions in religion, family affairs, and politics and so on, are as distorted and brutalised as his productive activity... There is no sphere of human activity that lies outside these prison walls<sup>35</sup>.

It therefore beholds that Marx's theory offers us an indispensable method of understanding how the production process shapes the entire society. Our studies in Marx's concept of Alienation further depicts that Labour itself is a commodity and its value is determined by the labour time which went into its creation. It is therefore this value which the capitalist places on Labour time and by extension

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<sup>34</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.12

<sup>35</sup> Inyikalum Daniel B and Daniel Uranta." Karl Marx's Concept of Alienation; A study of its impact on Nigeria's socio-economic development".P.122

products of labour that encourages him to alienate the worker, thus, appropriating the surplus value to himself.

In the 1844 *Manuscripts*, Marx distinguishes four aspects of alienated labour, of which such alienation from the object of labour is the first. Workers are also alienated in relation to the activity of labour. This is the second aspect. Work is experienced as painful and unpleasant, as forced and not free. This is the way in which classical economics conceives of work, and it is how work is often experienced in fact. According to Marx, however, this is characteristic of alienated labour, it is a feature only of specific social and historical conditions. For implicit in the concept of alienation is the idea that labour need not have this character. Work can be a self-realizing activity, alienation can be overcome.

Marx takes over the Hegelian account of human nature and of the role of work in human life that I have been explaining. This is embodied by Marx in the notion of "species being". This is our distinctively human being. Work is our "species activity", the activity which distinguishes humans from other animals. These are driven by appetite and instinct. Their activities are directly the means to satisfy their material needs. In conditions of alienation, our work is reduced to its 'animal' character-it becomes a mere means to satisfy our purely material needs. Thus we become alienated from our 'species being'. This is the third aspect of alienation that Marx distinguishes.

When Marx's key work on alienation, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, was eventually published in 1932, it had a dramatic impact on the tradition known as 'Western Marxism', which included writers like Herbert Marcuse and John Paul Sartre<sup>36</sup>. However, in the hands of the Western Marxists, the theory of alienation became intermingled with idealist theories, which explained alienation in terms of psychology rather than the organisation of society. The New Left which emerged in the late 1950s reacted against the theory and practice of Stalinism, but some of the writers associated with the New Left threw the Marxist baby out with the Stalinist bathwater. They abandoned some central aspects of Marxism, such as the central role of the economic structure in shaping the rest of society and the objective class antagonisms at the heart of capitalism. As Perry Anderson wrote, 'The most striking single trait of Western Marxism as a common tradition is thus perhaps the constant presence and influence on it of successive types of European idealism'<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Perry Anderson. *Considerations on Western Marxism* :New Left Books, 1976. Pp50-51.

<sup>37</sup> Perry Anderson. *Considerations on Western Marxism* :New Left Books, 1976. Pp56

Alienation was seized upon to explain the miseries of modern life, and the 'lonely crowd', 'those aggregations of atomised city dwellers who feel crushed and benumbed by the weight of a social system in which they have neither significant purpose nor decision-making power'<sup>38</sup>. Alienation came to refer predominately to a state of mind, rather than an understanding of how social organisation affected human beings.

Typical of the confused ideas about alienation fashionable in some quarters at this time is a book edited by Eric and Mary Josephson, *Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society*, first published in 1962 and reprinted eight times before 1968. For the Josephsons, alienation describes 'the untold lives of quiet desperation that mark our age', and the long list of those suffering from alienation includes such diverse group as women, immigrants, sexual deviants, drug addicts, young people and artists<sup>39</sup>.

But the editors understand alienation exclusively as a psychological state, 'referring to an extraordinary variety of psycho-social disorders, including loss of field, anxiety states, anomie, despair, depersonalisation, rootlessness, apathy, social disorganisation, loneliness, atomisation, powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, pessimism, and the loss of beliefs and values'<sup>40</sup>. If alienation is only a specific psychological problem, then it follows that the solution to alienation must be sought exclusively in the individual consciousness. If alienation is predominantly a state of mind, there is an implication that it can be cured without fundamentally changing the organisation of society. As Eric Fromm suggested, forms of alienation were 'chains of illusion' which can be broken within the context of capitalist society, because they arise from 'stereotyped alternatives of thinking'<sup>41</sup>.

However, Marx's writings on alienation, from the *Manuscripts* to the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, demonstrate that for him alienation was not merely a state of mind. The roots of the individual psyche were to be located in how society as a whole is organised. As one Marxist described it, 'The life activity of the alienated individual is qualitatively of a kind. His actions in religion, family affairs, politics

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<sup>38</sup> Mandel E. and G Novak G. *The Marxist Theory of Alienation*:Pathfinder, 1970, p20.

<sup>39</sup> Josephson E. *Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society* :Dell Publishing C;1968, p12.

<sup>40</sup> Josephson E. *Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society* :Dell Publishing C;1968,p 13

<sup>41</sup> Eric Fromm.*Beyond Freud: From Individual to Social Psychoanalysis*: Newyork: American Mental Health Foundation. 2010.p17

and so on, are as distorted and brutalised as his productive activity... There is no sphere of human activity that lies outside these prison walls<sup>42</sup>. Marx's theory offers an indispensable method of understanding how the production process shapes the whole of society. There are two areas of activity which are particularly controversial in relation to alienation. This first is the place of intellectual, or mental labour, and creativity in alienated production.

The division of labour described herein leads to a sharp division between work and creativity. Work is regimented, broken down into separate tasks. The creative elements in each process are dispersed into a million fragments. Labour itself is a commodity and its value is determined by the labour time which went into its creation, for example, the amount spent on training or educating a worker. A highly skilled technician or engineer will therefore be paid more than an unskilled labourer. As Braverman wrote, "In this way, a structure is given to all labour process that at its extremes polarises those whose time is infinitely valuable and those whose time is worth almost nothing"<sup>43</sup>.

However, this does not mean that the intellectual whose time is valuable escapes from the general pattern of alienation. On the contrary, one of the features of modern capitalism is the commercialisation of knowledge<sup>44</sup>. The design of microchip or computer software is just as much the property of the capitalist as a tin of beans or a car. Capitalists enrich themselves through the appropriation of mental labour in the same way as they do through material labour.

The same processes are at work in the production and consumption of art in capitalist society. As Eugene Lunn explained in his book: *Marxism and Modernism*, bourgeois society offers artistic freedom on one hand and snatches it back with the other: 'Bourgeois society - with all its progressive advance over "feudal" constrictions - is also inimical to many forms of art, for example because of division of labour, the mechanisation of many forms of human activity, and the predominance of quantitative over qualitative concerns"<sup>45</sup>.

Marx argued that artists, like scientists and intellectuals, could not escape from the general conversion of all human creativity into commodities. Firstly this is

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<sup>42</sup> B Ollman, *Alienation*.P.202

<sup>43</sup> Braverman H. *Labour and Monopoly Capitalism* :Monthly Review Press, 1974, p73.

<sup>44</sup> Carchedi G. *Frontiers of Political Economy* (Verso),1991, p18

<sup>45</sup> Eugene Lunn. *Marxism and Modernism: An historical Study of Lukas, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno*. University of California Press,1982.p.15



because artists, like all other workers, are dependent on their ability to make money: 'The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyers, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers'<sup>46</sup>. Secondly, Lunn points out how commodity production shapes art. The fact that works of art are sold on the market shapes every level of their conception and production. Marx gave one example of this in his critique of the novels of Eugene Sue, in which he 'stresses the influence upon the author of the ethical and political assumptions of its intended bourgeois public'<sup>47</sup>. Neither can art escape commodity fetishism: 'If one form of spiritualising mystification has been eroded by expansion of commerce - the romantic apotheosis of the arts as soaring above material reality - a new fetishism has replaced it: the fetishism of commodities'<sup>48</sup>. This also points to how new challenging cultural developments are rapidly incorporated into the system as mere commodities.

This does not mean that works of art can be reduced to exactly the same status as a tin of beans. Art stimulates our imagination and emotions. It enriches our understanding of society and can reveal something of the contradictions behind reified appearances: 'It can pierce through the ideological clouds which enshroud social realities.' Some artists devote their energies to attempting to reach beyond capitalism, while others choose to celebrate the system as it exists, but even then the art they produce can penetrate the reified appearance of capitalism. As Lunn wrote:

We cannot reduce art to exchange rates reflecting the pervasive alienation. Even with its halo removed, art was capable of diagnosing, and pointing beyond alienating social and economic conditions... All art has the capacity to create a need for aesthetic enjoyment and education which capitalism cannot satisfy. Although coming increasingly under the influence of the marketplace, art is produced and consumed in relative autonomy and is not identical to factory work or to a pure commodity<sup>49</sup>.

The second controversial application of Marx's theory of alienation is in the formulation of an analysis of other activities outside the sphere of work, which we undertake through choice rather than necessity. The more the world of work confronts us as hostile, exhausting and miserable, the more people pour their

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<sup>46</sup> Eugene Lunn. *Marxism and Modernism: An historical Study of Lukas, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno*.p.16

<sup>47</sup> Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol.1. New York: International Publishers, 1867. P.12

<sup>48</sup>Eugene Lunn. *Marxism and Modernism: An historical Study of Lukas, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno*. P.16

<sup>49</sup> Eugene Lunn. *Marxism and Modernism: An historical Study of Lukas, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno*.P.15-16

energies into their lives outside work. As the system develops new markets are constantly being carved out of our needs and wishes. For example, consider the multimillion pound industries which have developed around commodities which are said to make us look thin or young, our desire to play games, to experience nature or enjoy art. The very fact that we have the 'leisure industry' and the 'entertainment industry' points to the fact that the separation of work from leisure has left a void in our free hours:

Thus filling time away from the job also becomes dependent upon the market, which develops to an enormous degree those passive amusements, entertainments, and spectacles that suit the restricted circumstances of the city and are offered as substitutes for life itself<sup>50</sup>.

In addition, Meszaros describes how the retreat into private life simply increases the power of capitalism over us:

The cult of privacy and of individual autonomy thus fulfils the dual function of objectively protecting the established order against challenge by the rabble, and subjectively providing a spurious fulfilment in an escapist withdrawal to the isolated and powerless individual who is mystified by the mechanisms of capitalist society which manipulate him<sup>51</sup>

Meszaros also makes the point that alienation has deprived us of our ability to have genuinely human relationships. We are forced to seek compensation for the loss of our humanity in the limited area of our privatised personal lives, yet this merely reinforces our alienation from each other: 'To seek the remedy in autonomy is to be on the wrong track. Our troubles are not due to a lack of autonomy but, on the contrary, to a social structure - a mode of production - that forces on men a cult of it, isolating them from each other<sup>52</sup> .

The attempts to express the creativity of which capitalism has deprived us cannot negate the totality of alienation. The eradication of alienation depends on the transformation of society as a whole. However we organise our personal lives and leisure time, we cannot individually fulfil our collective ability to shape the natural world we live in. Lifestyles and leisure activities cannot liberate us from alienation, or even create little islands of freedom in an ocean of alienation. As alienation is rooted in capitalist society, only the collective struggle against that society carries the potential to eradicate alienation, to bring our vast, developing

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<sup>50</sup> Braverman H. *Labour and Monopoly Capitalism*.p.278

<sup>51</sup> Meszaros. *Marx's Theory of Alienation*. London: Merlin Press, 1986.p.276

<sup>52</sup> Meszaros. *Marx's Theory of Alienation*.p.276

powers under our conscious control and reinstitute work as the central aspect of life. As Marx wrote in *Capital*,

The veil is not removed from the countenance of the social life process, ie the process of material production, until it becomes production by freely associated men and stands under their conscious and planned control<sup>53</sup>.

## Conclusion

We have interrogated in the foregoing Karl Marx's theory of Alienation which he noted is a consequence of capitalist work pattern that breeds estrangement in the process of productivity. We observed that alienation can equally be conceived of as a state of mind, and not just as an understanding of how social organization affects human beings. It is however important to state at this point that, Marx's writings on alienation, from the *Manuscripts* to *Capital*, demonstrates that for him, alienation was not merely a state of mind, but also the material life of the individual. There is no sphere of human activity that lies outside these prison walls. It therefore beholds that Marx's theory offers us an indispensable method of understanding how the production process shapes the entire society.

This paper further notes that Marx's concept of Alienation also depicts that labour itself is a commodity and its value is determined by the labour time which usually goes into its creation. It is therefore, this value which the capitalist places on labour time and by extension products of labour that encourages them to alienate the worker, thus, appropriating the surplus value to themselves to the detriment of the working class. It is obvious that Marx developed his theory of alienation to reveal the human activity that lies behind the seemingly impersonal forces dominating society. He has showed in his theory of materialism that human action in the past created the modern world, but also that human action today could shape a future world free from the contradictions of capitalism. He sees alienation as a natural consequence of capitalism because of several reasons. This is because in the system the workers are manipulated by the forces of capitalism in order to increase productivity and output for the owners of production. The implication is that workers ultimately lose hope and determination because the capitalists strive to ensure that the work activities of the workers are oriented towards specific goals and objectives which are aimed chiefly at attaining the maximum surplus value. Hence the worker is considered to be merely an instrument which leads to the loss of personal identity. This experience is still the lot of workers today wherever capitalism is activated as an economic principle. We therefore submit that human dignity must be respected

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<sup>53</sup> Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol.1. New York: International Publishers, 1867.p173

in the process of productivity to avoid alienation in work places as seek to create wealth through human labour