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## **Revolutionary Potentials of the Peasantry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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#### **Abstract**

*Research reveals that from Latin America to southern Asia, down to Nigeria, peasants have undergone waves of displacement and have seen healthy crops turn poisonous, thus, the cry or campaign for a revolution that will help liberate the peasants from the shackles of domination, exploitation and marginalization. La via Campesina, the international poor peasant movement made up for this fight against those who believe in peasantization. The potential of this struggle to succeed in the world generally and specifically in Nigeria is the basis of this paper. This research work is therefore interested in the revolutionary potentials of peasants, as a basis for transforming their socio- economic lifestyle and positions in the society.*

***Keywords: Peasants, revolution, marginalization***

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**(I) Introduction:** The word 'peasant' is derived from the 15th century French word 'paisant' meaning one from the countryside. The peasants are relatively independent actors who produce exclusively for consumption and exercise considerable autonomy in deciding what to produce. The word 'peasant' as a concept has different connotation but irrespective of the enormous perspectives of peasants by people, it has been defined by eminent scholars. According to Atieno - Odhiambo (Africa social studies and radical reader) peasant is defined as:

those whose ultimate security and substance lies in their having certain rights in land and in the labour of family members on the land, but who are involved, through rights and obligations, in a wider economic system which includes the participation of non-peasants.

The fact that peasants ultimate security and substance rests upon maintaining rights in land and rights in family labor(s) is an important determinant shaping and restricting their social action. It is also the characteristic which peasants share with 'primitive agriculturalists' though not with capitalist farmer who seem to depend upon his land but does not rely upon the land as a last instance, which however differentiates it from the peasants but both share in general terms the integration into a complex social structure characterized by stratification and economic differentiation. Peasantry base on Ken Post perspective can be defined under three categories as include:

**The Relationship between the Peasant and the Land:** Peasantization in this process is the transformation from the right to the use of land to private ownership of land. In the peasant society

property in land is communal but each peasant cultivates and manages his plot on his own account. This the socialist refer to as Usufruct meaning the right to use the land or access to it, but due to a gradual shift from communal ownership of lands to individual private ownership of lands led to the peasants losing control of the lands.

**The Relationship between the Peasant and the Market:** Post Ken in this aspect view peasantization as a shift from the ‘market place’ to the ‘market principle’. A useful analytical distinction between market place and principle was differentiated by Bohannan and Dalton; Market price serve to allocate resources incomes and outputs through an unstable price base on recognition of relationship in the market while market principle means price formation by impersonal forces of supply and demand. However it may be suggested that part of the process of peasantization is a movement away from the market place towards the market principle, which implies a decline control of the producer over the disposal of his product in terms of its exchange value.

**The Relationship between the Peasant and the State:** In this case Post Ken sees the peasant in his relationship with the state as they involve in a relationship with other members of the society that are no longer involve in production. This simply imply the emergence of classes of unequal power and political hierarchy basic on territory rather than Kinship and above all the imposition of obligations upon the individual enforced by power the ability to coerce rather than through the influence of mutually recognized kinship duties.

Furthermore, still on the definition of peasant, Teodor Shanin (peasant and peasant societies in Africa) sees peasantry as consisting of small agricultural producer, who, with the help of simple equipment and the labor of a family member produce meanly for their consumption and the fulfillment of obligation to the holder of political and economic power. In a nutshell, peasant is a small holding farmer producing crops for family consumption and for market exchanging, using family labor throughout the farming cycle. They engage in face to face relations with neighboring farmers. They are the least in the social class groups of the society and most populated. The peasant though being the basic foundation where the development of the state began has for decades lost their value as they are been suppressed, depressed, oppressed and exploited by the state. They are emancipated of their lands being their only means of survival, therefore hundreds of thousands of peasants ended up setting on a quarter or beggar’s allotment. In point of fact, the peasants were not only extracted of the lands but were also force to work on the lands and in return paid stipends or nothing from the surplus generated from their labor which goes into the pocket of the exploiters. Imposition of high taxation was not excluded as the peasants were forced to pay different taxes such as poll tax, flat tax, and hunt tax from their low income. In fact the peasants where used as a tool to generate revenue by the state which serves as an instrument by the capitalist/bourgeois to exploit them.

In consideration of the above description on the in-human treatment imposed on the peasant generates a question “what is the way out, by what means can the lost of the peasantry be improved? Suffice it to say that the above question have been answered by different scholar on various perspectives but the generate view is that the formation of social group by the peasant and the distribution of the existing exploitive state through a hegemonic revolution. Base on Karl Marx view the peasants does not consist of a revolutionary face in the society, in other words, incapable of organizing an hegemonic revolution, this he attributed to three reason: the lack of organization among the peasant as indicated and elaborated in his book the 18 premier. He argued that the peasants lack organization because of their conservative nature. Even some organization formulation

by the peasants is always headed by non-peasants who hide under the coverage of the peasants plight pursue their personal aims and aspirations.

Also lack of leadership according to Marx has attributed to them incapability of the peasants to form a class due to their disorganization, he few who took over leadership eventually ended up exploiting them e.g. Nelson Mandela, Tyler, Rehoboam of the biblical era are examples of such.

### **Research Question**

1. Are peasants capable of conducting a hegemonic revolt or revolution?
2. What are the basic issues that trigger peasant revolts or revolutions?
3. Do peasant revolts in Nigeria or the world over have any advantage, significance or positive contribution to societal development?

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. Peasants are not capable of conducting an hegemonic revolt and /or revolution, because there's no design behind peasants revolts to crush the machinery of the state and institution a peasant state.
2. A lot of issues can trigger peasant revolt but chief among them are excessive taxation, struggle for land etc.
3. Though peasants become ultimate victims after most revolts especially in Nigeria, they have the potential to revolutionize the society. In other words, there's usually a change in the society prior, during and after peasant revolts.

### **Significance of Study**

This research work/study is vital because it unfolds the following:

1. It unfolds to public reason why peasant must revolt and fight for their rights.
2. It will be important to the government because it will make useful recommendations on how the peasants can be better understood and their needs met.
3. It will also search as a guide to as many peasants who intend to engage in revolutionary activities in the future...as it will some them ways through which revolts can be effectively conducted.
4. This study will be a source of reference for further research on the subject matters.
5. It will also provide useful information for policy makers.

**Research Methodology:** The research work titled "*The peasantry and the Nigerian revolution*" will make use of secondary source of data collection and analysis. By adopting this, the research work will make use of materials such as newspapers, documents, library sources, archival records, textbooks, journals, etc.

**Theoretical Framework:** Due to the nature of this research paper, the conflict theory as a theoretical framework will be adopted. According to conflict theory, inequality exists in the society because those who are in control of a disproportionate share of society's resources actively defend their advantages. The masses are not bound to the society by their shared values, but by coercion at the hands in power. This perspective emphasizes social control, not consensus and conformity. This theory encourages social change (even when this means social revolution). The theory notes that unequal groups usually have conflicting values and agendas, causing them to complete against one another.

The conflict theory is seen to be the best theory for this research work which focuses on the peasant and social revolution, specifically in Nigeria. The major reason for the conflict is based on

inequality between the “*haves*” who own and control the means of production and the “*have-nots*” who only sell their labour to survive. Therefore, this causes them to compete among themselves. As argued by Karl Marx can only obtain their right and stand equal with the exploiter, if they conflict with the existing exploitative class, crush and abolish its existence. In other for social order to be maintained, the peasants must carry out a hegemonic revolution and establish a new state where the means of production and collectively owned, democratically controlled base on the view of equal opportunity and equal benefit to all.

**(A) A Typical Example of Peasant Revolt in Germany:** German revolution was a popular revolution in the Holy Roman Empire in the years (1524/1525). It consists of a series of economic as well as religious revolt by peasants, townfolk and nobles. The movement possessed no common program. The revolution began as a petition made to the Holy Roman Emperor on behalf of some German peasants in 1524. The petition was called twelve articles which sought relief from some of the particular oppressions that the German peasants were facing. The petition began as a religious sounding document. The main articles of the petition dealt with the economic hardships faced by the peasants. The remaining articles of the twelve articles petitioned the Holy Roman Emperor to abolish the “*cattle tithes*”, and the death tax and to preserve of all “common fields, forests and waters for use by the peasants rather than allowing these lands fall into private hands. The petition also requested that the peasantry be allowed to hunt on the common lands and fish in the common waters.

Despite the fact that the petition made no attacks on the government, the Emperor ignored the twelve articles, which led to a revolt. A primary example of this underlying economic tension driving the great peasant war was Thomas Münzer. Although he was a religious leader from Luther’s own home the kingdom of Württemberg. He was worried about religious question than he was in social position of the people. Furthermore Munzer’s concentration on the secular rather than the religious led him to become the main leader of the peasantry of Saxony in the great peasant war. The conflict took place in Germany and spread to many parts of Europe including Austria, Switzerland, France and Italy. About 300,000 peasants were involved in the revolt and one-third (1/3) of the peasants were killed (one hundred thousand). It was the Europeans largest and most widespread popular uprising before the 1789 French revolution. Martin Luther wrote two responses to the peasants’ revolt admonition to peace concerning the twelve articles of the peasants, which expressed sympathy for the peasants, and against the murderous and robbery attitudes of the peasants but hated vehemently denounced them. So he supported their aims, but hated the robbery and murder.

Historians disagree on the nature of the revolt and its causes, whether it grew out of the emerging religious controversy centered on Martin Luther, whether a wealthy tier of peasants saws their own wealth and rights slipping away and sought to re-inscribe them in the legal, social and religious fabric of the society, whether it was peasants resistance to the emergence of a modernizing, centralizing political state. Perhaps the best way to view the great peasant revolution of 1524- 1525 is to regard the revolt as a struggle that began as an upheaval immersed in the rhetoric of Luther’s protestant reformation against the catholic church but which really was impelled far beyond the narrow religious confines by the underlying economic tension of the time.

**(B) The Egbe Agbekoya Revolt (1968- 1969):** The EgbeAgbekoya revolt was a peasant revolt in Nigeria’ former western region, home to the majority of the country’s Yoruba population. It is the most well-known peasant –driven political riot in western Nigerian history and is referred by

grassroots organizations as a successful example of collective action against unpopular government policies. During the 1950's, the colonial government of Nigeria established local commodity depots in many parts of the country. The depots served as stores of exchange for goods the government was interested in buying from peasants. The prosperous western region was one of the world's most prolific producer of cocoa, hence the regional government increased its tax revenue from the peasants by introducing price-stability-policy regulating the sale of the crop through state-regulated agricultural cooperatives, also known as marketing boards. Most of the products to be sold were to undergo a process of grading, examination and sometimes bargaining before purchase. As a result of this, a farmer's organization was created. Yoruba workers in various professions traditionally organized themselves into 'Egbes' peer groups that protects the interest the members in situations that required collective action.

The primary problems the peasants had was the arbitrary standards used for examination, which meant that significant amount of harvested cocoa were discarded as unfit for sale, and the low prices they received for the accepted produce that reached the market place. The peasants complained about the neglected infrastructure of roads they had to travel to reach the depots. Moreover, they were also taxed (flat tax). However, due to the political crisis such as the descendent of military rule in Nigeria and the combination of some political elites mixed with much more sophisticated leadership among Agbekoyaparapo, Created a juxta- position of sort and a stronger political movement was born. The Agbekoya leaders of the time were Mustapha, Okrikirungbo, Tofapopoola, AdeniyiEda, AdewgboKobiowo, RafiuIsola and MudasiruAdeniran who all decided to set an organizational target as follows:

- The removal of local government officials pillaging their villages.
- The removal of some bales.
- A reduction of the flat tax rate from \$8.
- An end to the use of force in tax collection.
- An increase in the prices of cocoa.
- An improvement of the roads leading to many villages.

However, the farmers took to violent reprisals on government structures, ransacked the offices of officials, attacked major symbols of state power like court houses, and setting free thousands of prisoners alongside their jailed members. The release of chiefObafemiAwolowo helped to quell the riots as he negotiated directly with the movement leader's. The aftermath of the riots resulted to the removal of local government official administering the villages, removal of Baales, reduction in flat tax rate, end of the use of force for tax removal, increase in price of cocoa and the improving of roads heading to the villages.

**Conclusion:** The relevance of the peasantry cannot be over emphasized despite its state of marginalization by the exploiters who owned and control the means of production. The basis of development of a society is narrowed down to the peasants as they generate wealth for the society and provide almost more than half of the food consumed by the people. Irrespective of the obvious importance of the peasants in the society they are been relegated to the background. However, as the rate of inequality between the state and the peasants led to the division of society into two classes, the exploiter and exploited. For the society to become free from the existence of the challenge, the need for social change arises, which in other words refer to social change which in other words refer to social revolution. No wonder a lot of revolutions by peasants have been experienced, which are basically on the grounds of economic liberation.

**Recommendations:**

1. Peasants place in the society has been in a state of constant marginalization, suppression, exploitation and domination, it is therefore necessary for Nigerian peasants to engage in a revolt or revolution that will liberate them from the shackles of poverty, damnation and suppression.
2. Just like the EgbeAgbekola peasant revolt in Western Nigeria, Nigerian contemporary peasants must stand up and reject suffering. The struggle this paper recommends must begin with the middle peasants who have the well withal to initiate such revolutions.
3. As much as the theoretical framework recommends conflict as the basis for resolving the class difference among peasants other society, there should equally be room for negotiations as this will help impact adequately on the lives of the peasantry without bloodshed.
4. The government, in partnership with NGO's and the Organized Private sector must ensure that development will be equitably distributed among the different sectors of the country. This implies that developmental policies and programs should be extended to peasants who reside in rural areas. If this is done it will help improve their socio-economic conditions and well-being and thus equally reduced their revolutionary tendencies or potentials.

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