MODERNITY AND THE METHODOLOGY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract
This paper discusses the philosophy of modernity as a methodological tool for analysing social reality in International Relations. To achieve this goal, the paper attempts to answer such fundamental questions as: what is modernity? When and how was the concept introduced into social science academic discourse? What are its methodological imperatives? How are they reflected in the study of International Relations to the extent of attracting the kind of academic attention it presently commands? It is in the light of the above that the paper concludes on the continued relevance of the philosophy to the study of International Relations.

Introduction
Among the plethora of problems confronting social scientists is that of having to conduct researches in a huge 'laboratory' where accurate precision in predictability and generalization is difficult, if not absolutely impossible. Bailey (1987:7) aptly captures this in his postulation that the crucial question in social science is what constitutes the proper understanding of society, and how that understanding can be achieved. Given that the overall purpose of research is to generate new knowledge (a characteristic that confirms the uniqueness of man among all living organisms), the credibility of the knowledge generated in any research is directly dependent on the credibility of the methods or procedures used in generating, collecting and evaluating data for the research.

Over the years, scholars have examined phenomena along the line of normative, scientific, applied, instrumental and analytical activities, Kuhn coins the concept of "paradigm shift" to show how every significant breakthrough in scientific endeavour marks a break with traditions, old ways of thinking and old paradigms (Aseka, 1997:5). Paradigms, Kuhn argues, are the result of a chaotic stage, otherwise referred to as "pre-paradigmatic", in which the insights and mode of discourse become universally accepted after a successful fight with competing explanations. It is instructive that virtually all fields of study experienced this situation in their historical development.

Kuhn's argument, in the opinion of Rabinow and Sullivan (1987:3), could be construed to the defence of social sciences waiting to "take off in a paradigm stage of science. The various schools of materialism, behavioralism, postbehavioralism, among others, have at various times offered themselves as paradigm candidates in social science research methodology. And it is difficult to agree that any of these paradigms has ever succeeded in silencing the other opponents with absolute authority and triumph. This is because approach to paradigm in social science requires that one accept the analogy of natural science in which "human actions can be fixed in their meaning by being subsumed under the law-like operations of the epistemic subject". In doing this, the key focus is on holism, and holistic explanation, as evident in the philosophy of modernity, seeks to organize a wide variety of social phenomena.

This paper is thus an attempt to examine the concept of Modernity as a tool for analysing social reality in International Relations. The focus here is a modest one that is aimed at espousing on the philosophy, against the background of its methodology in the study of international relations. The paper is structured into five sections. This introduction is followed by the condition of modernity, and then by a discussion of modernity and its methodological imperatives. This dovetails into the analytical aspect of the work - modernity and International Relations methodology. The concluding part summarises the main theses of the work.

The Condition of Modernity
"Modernity" or "modernism" (as will be used interchangeably in this paper) is derived from "modern" which has its root in the Latin word "modernus". Philosophers and Christian theologians first used it in the 15th Century in their attempt to modify their teachings in the light of latter-day scholarship and scientific findings. It differentiated the present (officially known as Christian) from the Roman and pagan past. It is a concept that expresses, repeatedly, the thought, awareness and feelings of an epoch "that relates itself to the past of antiquity, in order to view itself as the result of transition from the old to the new" (Habermas, 1987:142; Ezeh, 2000:60).
Aseka (1997:4) defines modernity as "institutional transformations, which have their origins in (he West within the mapping of the Enlightenment discourse”. Using the concept with a characteristically qualified inflection, Jane Austen defines modernism as "a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement”. However, the 18th Century contemporary of Austen used "modernize", "modernism" and "modernist" to show updating and improvement (Inglis, 1989:48). If the above different definitions of modernity by various scholars portend anything, it is that the etymology of the concept accounts for its ambiguity. It also depicts a reflection of the varied understanding and the environment in which writings on the concept have emerged.

Although some writers are today persuaded to restrict the concept of modernity to the early period of the Renaissance (i.e. 1420 AD), others have seen this attempt as too narrow, historically, because people have regarded themselves as modern as far back as the period of Charles the Great in the 12th Century, as well as in the 17th Century of "Querelle des Anciens et des Moderns". It is of course worthy to note that by the 19th Century, modernity began to enjoy more favorable and progressive ring as its reference became shifted from "now" to "just now" or "then"; or even a designation constantly going into the past in which "contemporary" has been used to contrast its presentness (Habermas, 1987:142).

The difficulty in determining a fixed date for modernity notwithstanding, the fact remains that the concept represents an avant-garde of a cultural movement and moment, which appeared in those periods of Europe when the awareness and feelings of a new epoch emerged from a renewed relationship to the ancient. It was a revolt against all normalizing functions and all that is normative, in that it depicts an abstract opposition between tradition and the present.

In a nutshell, much of what is known about the project of modernity was formulated by the philosophers and theologians of the Enlightenment in the 18th Century in their efforts to develop science, morality and art that meet their inner logic by way of utilizing the accumulated specialized culture for the rational organization of everyday social life. The three separated spheres became differentiated when the unified worldviews of religion and metaphysics fell apart to warrant inherited problems regarding specific aspects of validity, otherwise known as truth, normative Tightness, authenticity and beauty. These offered answers to questions of knowledge, or of justice and morality or of taste, through which scientific discourse, theories of morality, jurisprudence and the production and criticism of arts became institutionalized; thus bringing to the fore, the intrinsic structure of cognitive-instrument, of moral-practical, and of esthetic-expressive rationality (Ibid).

**Modernity and Its Methodological Imperatives**

Modernity has gone through series of "paradigm shift", to use Kuhn's term, in the indefinite progress of knowledge and advancement towards social and moral betterment. Its struggle to free itself from all historical ties has forced the relation between "modern", "romanticism" and "classical" to a definite loss of fixed historical reference (Habermas, 1987:142-143; Ezeh, 2000:60). This shift in perception of human-nature relationship characterized in the development of science, morality and art (though, has come to mean the independence of segment) has, through a scientific revolution, culminated in a huge expansion of human activity at the expense of the non-human realism. The situation, when viewed against the backdrop of the shattered optimism of modernity by the 20th Century development, shows that the spread of what was referred to as "Enlightenment" has been nothing but the spread of darkness, of extinction of life and its enhancing process; which thus becomes the basis of contemporary rethinking of (and concern about) the way human beings interact with nature, while bearing in mind that all non-human nature exists to serve man.

Having said that, it is important to note that science is the umbrella thrust of modernity. And as chronicled by Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996:5-7), science is all about six basic assumptions: (1) Nature is orderly, which means that there is a recognizable regularity and order in the natural world, even though it is not necessarily inherent in the phenomena of nature. (2) We can know nature because individuals and social phenomena are replete with sufficient recurrent, orderly and empirically demonstrable patterns that are amenable to scientific investigation. (3) All natural phenomena have natural causes (i.e. cause and effect relationship) epitomizes the scientific discovery of empirical regularities and order that underlie social phenomena; a situation which obviously challenges authoritarian and mystical modes of knowledge creation. (4) Nothing is self-evident, as all claims for truth must be demonstrated objectively by process of scientific verifications. (5) Knowledge is derived from the acquisition of experience, meaning that science can only assist us in understanding our real world via empirical reliance on perceptions, experience and observations. (6) Because knowledge is superior to ignorance, the former should be pursued both for its own sake and for the sake of improving human condition.

The above assumptions enlist modernity in the methodological thrust of social science, the latter
being part of the intellectual forerunners of science. The main objective of social science is to present a cumulative body of verifiable phenomena in general terms, instead of holding on to subjective beliefs otherwise known as "traditional" approach. This objective is packaged along certain assumptions. The first among these is the acclaimed issue of a single, correct objective reality. Reality, in the opinion of modernists, is independent of the observer of social phenomena, seeking to be discovered. It thus depicts the externality of facts and the neutrality of language.

There is also the point of objective rationality. Social scientists (as members of a popular and social culture) are groomed to believe in the concept of scientific rationality. Scaff (1991:224) observes that "Max Weber made a number of claims about modernity: it is a rationalized, driven by purpose-rational or instrumental orientations, divided into opposed life-orders and value-spheres, without genuinely new prophetic truths, yet racked by endless searches for absolute experience and spiritual wholeness". Though its discontents are assembled under the heading of "capitalism" and economic "rationality", the fact remains that "the most elemental and significant reality taught the historical imagination in the modern age is the literary de-magnification of life". Given this, Weber's summation on the themes of modernity is that "the fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the disenchantment of the world" (Ibid).

Modernity also relies on the use of theories to capture all aspects of reality. Put differently, it emphasizes grand-theorizing, arguing that every reality must be tied to, explained, or analysed in the context of an existing theory. Behavioralism, post behavioralism, and the various schools of materialism (including Marxism which, though criticizes modernity's reliance on theories, but claims to have explanation for social phenomena) are apparently part of grand theories. Modernization and radical political economy theories are obviously distinct in this regard, in view of the leading role they play as competing paradigms in the explanation of world politics and socio-economic conditions, especially as manifested from the 1950s down to the 1970s. There is no single modernization/development theory; rather a variety of complementary and competing perspectives (i.e. evolutionism, diffusionism, structural-functionalism, world-system theory and interactionism) combine to form the mish-mash of ideas referred to as modernization theory. This notwithstanding, (he basic assumptions about it are that: (1) Underdevelopment is an "original state" of socio-economic process that long predates the emergence of modern capitalism. (2) Underdevelopment is the result of internal deficiencies of a society. (3) Underdevelopment is the result of the absence of modern rational techniques obtainable in developed countries. (4) Underdevelopment is the dearth of the kind of consciousness or mentality required for the promotion of development (Sanderson, 1991:197).

Smelser and Rostow are the foremost of the theorists on stages of modernization. While Smelser theorizes about periods of simple complex technology, subsistence farming to cash crops, animal and human power to industrialization and increasing urban population, Rostow's evolutionary interpretation (perhaps the most widely known in spite of all its criticisms) like the Marxist's view which delineates stages of development as primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism and socialism/communism, identified stages of limited output, resulting from inaccessibility of science and technology (i.e. traditional society); pre-conditions for "take, off, arising from new ideas generated in education, entrepreneurship and institutions capable of mobilizing capital; "take off, where traditional barriers to economic growth are overcome; drive to maturity, where 10-20% of national income is invested and the economy takes its place in international order; and high mass consumption, where leading economic sectors specialize in manufacturing durable consumer goods and services (Ibid, Pp. 197-199; Harrison, 1988:22-27). Obviously concerned with later problems of security, welfare and constitutional order which allocation of investment and distribution of wealth brought to the fore, Rostow added another stage - "the search for quality" - a decade later (Bill and Hardgrave, 1973:60).

The grand theories of modernization/development remained for a long time the basis for academic study of Third World situations until 1960s and 1970s when the dependency and world-system theoretical approaches (offshoots of the Marxian theory of capitalism) were developed in the writings of Baran and Hobsbawm (1961), Frank (1966, 1967, 1971, 1979) and Amin (1974), to challenge their acclaimed empirical tenability, theoretical weight and sufficiency as well as their practical capability of generating development in the underdeveloped world. They accuse the capitalist West of causing Third World underdevelopment. Apart from arguing that colonialism underdeveloped the Third World, as against modernizing it, they also stress that it is doubtful if western development actually went through the theorized pattern. Worse still, they posit that such an ideal-typical approach to modernization, "in all its variants, ignores the historical and structural reality of the underdeveloped countries" (Harrison, 1988:27) otherwise referred to as periphery formations. The divergent claims of theories of modernization,
dependency and world-system notwithstanding, there is no denying the fact that they all represent an exercise in grand-theorizing which modernism advocates.

Modernity also thrusts on scientific investigation of social phenomena and use of generalizations. It believes that to explain the "why" questions of social phenomena, there should be reliance on empirical findings which are not only based on general laws and theories, but could also be used for inductive and deductive generalizations (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996:8-9); even though this is being recently contested in the new philosophy of postmodernism.

Modernity and International Relations Methodology

Even though International Relations has passed through stages of utopianism, realism, behavioralism, and even postbehavioralism (i.e. normative, empirical-normative, behavioral-quantitative and the bridging gap between normative and behavioral-quantitative theory and between theory and policy), it remains indisputable that the discipline did not exist as a field of study until after World War I. Prior to this period, the writings on the subject existed in form of diplomatic history and international law, in peripheral reflections of philosophers, as well as in speeches, dispatches and memoirs of statesmen and diplomats. While studies in diplomatic history were about the chronological presentation of events between and among states, international law focused on the formal obligations of states and their actual performance in the game of power struggle (Morgenthau, 1993:17-18).

It is discernible from this initial approach that studies in International Relations in academic institutions were particularly static and legalistic; and thus lacked attempts to theorize on the subject and formulate policy relevant information that could help in realizing foreign policy goal. Worse still was that no attention was paid to promoting social science methodology on the subject by way of investigation into the processes of international system. The only probable theory that received the attention and thinking of the period was that of "Balance of Power", which was somewhat dearer to practicing diplomats than to academics. Balance of power theory, a body of thought that contends that peace will result when military power is distributed in such a way that no one state can dominate the others, was a sort of collection of what appeared to be commonsense axioms other than a theory evolved as a result of a rigorous academic exercise (Kegley and Wittkopf, 1995:597; Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 1990:2).

The devastation occasioned by World War I stimulated early interest in International Relations as a field of study. The holocaust, which claimed estimated 9 million lives, increased the concern of scholars and statesmen about the cause of conflicts and ways to avoid war and maintain peace. Considering this, in-depth analysis of issues of security, war, disarmament and balance of power took the centre-stage. Modernity first manifested in the study of International Relations through the philosophies of "idealism" (or utopianism) and "realism". Both philosophies are grand theories brought about by the devastation occasioned by World Wars I and II respectively. They however differ fundamentally in their beliefs and conceptions about the nature of man, politics and society, upon which the conduct of international relations rest. The differences are expressed in grand-theories of hegemonic stability, balance of power and collective security. Carr (1978:11) quoted Albert Sorel as saying that the two methods of approach to the study of International Relations as exemplified in utopianism and realism determine opposite attitudes towards every political problem as "it is the eternal dispute between those who imagine the world to suit their policy, and those who arrange their policy to suit the realities of the world". A bit of historical analysis will suffice here.

Post World War I environment led to the setting up of two major research institutions - the Royal Institute of International Affairs and the Council of Foreign Relations, at the University College of Wales in Aberystwyth in 1922 and the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1923 respectively. Among the very first research focus of these institutions was the traditional descriptive analysis of political institutions, foreign policies and international phenomenon, where "Utopianism" or "Idealism" was developed as a way of preventing another war in the international system.

Although scholars and publicists who led the intellectual movement and introduced it into the vocabulary of International Relations hold divergent views about world politics in the periods between (he two world wars, they were nevertheless joined by the assumptions about reality and homogeneity of their conclusions that: (1) Human nature is essentially "good". (2) The fundamental concern for the welfare of others makes progress possible. (3) Bad human behavior is the product of evil; not of people, but of institutions and structural arrangements that motivate people to be uncooperative - including the making of war. (4) War is not inevitable, and removing the institutional arrangements that encourage it can reduce its frequency. (5) War is not an international problem that requires collective or multilateral rather than national efforts to control it. (6) International society must re-organize itself to eliminate the institutions that make war likely (Kegley and Wittkopf, 1995:20). The founding of the League of Nations, the signing of the
Kellog-Briand Pact in 1928 and the attempting of global disarmament and arms control as evident in the Washington Naval Conference of the 1920s were the results of the different ideas that dominated academic discussions and policy rhetoric of the time. Although overtures of moralism, optimism and universalism laced the assumptions of the Utopian or idealist project, it was nevertheless a mere social construct of World War I victors, with the intent to maintain hegemony of victory. That it was used to set a general standard for a European dominated world made it one of the grand theories of modernity that directed (he methodology of International Relations; though it was later challenged by realism.

With the outbreak of World War II, widespread debate, criticism and rejection of idealism as a paradigm for guaranteeing international peace and security in the then emerging world system ensued, and notable scholars like E.II. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Thompson, Reinold Niebuhr, George Kennan, and later Henry Kissinger among others, emerged with a new political movement known as "Realism", to challenge idealists with such philosophical assumptions that: (1) Politics is governed by laws, which have their roots in human nature. (2) Interests are defined in terms of power. (3) The concept of defining interests in terms of power is an objective category that is universally valid, though (he concept is not endowed with any fixed meaning at any particular time. (4) Though there is moral significance of political action, universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation, rather they must be filtered through circumstances of time and place. (5) And lastly, the difference between political realism and other schools of thought is real and profound (Morgenthau, 1993:4-14).

Unlike idealists, proponents of realism appealed to historical precedents to theorize on such issues like balance of power, hegemonic stability and collective security. They urged nation-states to secure their survival through armament and military alliances, arguing that countries that relegate these requirements will simply fall victim of the power of others. Carr's The 20 Years' Crisis 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations and Morgenthau's Politics Among Notions: The Struggle for Power and Peace, first published in 1939 and 1948 respectively, made a remarkable breakthrough in this regard.

Political realism thrived on the emergent Cold War and the nuclear competition that lasted till 1990, when the fall of the Berlin Wall (marking the unification of Germany) heralded the so-called New World Order. During the Cold War and its accompanying nuclear weapon development, researchers in International Relations directed more of their attention to study interstate relations, motivations and patterns of behavior of statesmen, as well as how to maximize international security through armament and military alliances. Given this, grand theories of balance of power, hegemonic stability and collective security, commanded considerable attention. Afterward, the greatest theoretical and methodological problem in International Relations came to be associated with the realist school of thought, as emphasis was shifted from traditional approach to empirical explanation of the study of certain aspects of international politics. In spite of their opposing positions, it is necessary to observe that both realism and idealism are nonetheless constructs of World Wars I and II victors respectively. In theoretical forms, both philosophies express the real entities in International Relations in terms of states, multinational corporations and international organizations.

The revolution, which was initiated by the "scientific" induced behavioral school, relegated idealists' normative principles to embrace empirical-normative and behavioral-quantitative principles. After then, postbehavioral attempts have also effected a bridge between normative and behavioral-quantitative theories and between theory and policy. The emergence of many other grand theoretical approaches such as structuralism, structural-functionalist, liberalism and neo-liberalism, among others, including Marxism, which attempt to offer explanation for all social phenomena, has also helped to widen the debate on how research in international relations should be conducted over the years.

Today, as the world manifest in a much larger and complex post-Cold War order of about 200 sovereign states, the scope and complexity of group interactions across borders continue to make International Relations a challenging field of study. The discipline has moved beyond the studies of nation-states, which were originally dominated by European countries, and of international history, to include the study of the international system as a whole and if its institutions and processes. This has increased concern in both the interaction of states and non-state actors and the web of other transnational politics in the international system.

Conclusion

So far, this paper has examined modernity as a tool for analyzing social reality in International Relations. Even though the etymology of the concept accounts for its ambiguity, especially with respect to its origin, modernity nevertheless represents an avant-garde of a movement and moment which began in Europe to herald the awareness and feelings of anew epoch. Indeed. It is a revolt against all
normalising functions and all that is normative; given its abstractive opposition between tradition and the present.

Science is the umbrella thrust of modernity; and social science being part of the intellectual forerunners of science, it shares as its objective the task of presenting a cumulative body of verifiable phenomena as against holding on to subjective beliefs otherwise known as "traditions". This is how modernity came to lay claim to a single, correct and objective reality, which is not only adjudged as be independent of the observer/researcher, but is also captured in grand to explain social phenomena.

Modernity first manifested in the discipline of International Relations through grand-theories of hegemony, balance of power and collective security, expressed in the philosophies of "idealism" (or utopianism) and "realism". Since then, the "scientific" revolution the philosophy depicts has ranged through empirical-normative, postbehavioural-normative and quantitative, to several other grand-theoretical approaches like liberalism, neoliberalism, structuralism, structural-functionalism, including Marxism which, in spite of its condemnation of grand-theories, lay claim to having explanation for all social phenomena.

By and large, even as the scope and complexity of the interactions among state and non-state actors in the post-cold war world order widen, the need to pursue a single, correct, objective reality which, in the fundamental thesis of modernity, is independent of the observer (i.e. researcher) of social phenomena, remains relevant in International Relations.

References


