

# **RELEVANCE OF ANOMIE THEORY ON FRENCH REVOLUTION AND ITS IMPLICATION IN NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

The pervasive and reoccurring nature of anomie has plagued Nigeria for a while now thereby making a jest of the Nigerian society. Lawlessness, frustration, ethnic jingoism, unemployment and poverty among most Nigerians at the bottom of the economic ladder have become rife and provoked fear towards better stable Nigeria. This paper examined these core issues of the anomic restiveness, agitation, attacks and counter attacks ranging from diverse regions and localities in Nigeria. The study adopted documentary sources of data collection such as textbooks, journals, magazines and newspaper publications anchored on anomie theory. This paper contended that every facet of our national life has drifted into a state of lawlessness or a state of normlessness as people are becoming disappointed with the Nigerian project. Also, the paper recommended the need for policy makers to provide such an environment and conditions which are conducive for entrepreneurial activities which will first reduce the incidence of unemployment to a great extent and as such would have dealt a massive blow to the problem of criminality and lawlessness.

**Keywords:** Anomie, Anomie theory, Deviance, French revolution, Normlessness

## **1.0 Introduction**

In the intellectual world, efforts are made to explain, analyze and predict the operation of a phenomenon, its diverse manifestations and the possibility of bringing it under control or adapt to its existence and changes. The intellectual efforts in doing the aforementioned activities are captured in the explanation/understanding of the concept of theory. Theory can be seen as a cause effect or logical explanation of a phenomenon and prediction of its subsequent development. In this regard, the anomie theory is the highest form of generalization in a scientific discipline that contains all essential elements of explanation embodied within the laws, principles and hypothesis which clarify issues at corresponding level of analysis (Okafor, 2015). Accordingly, Messner, Thome and Rosenfeld (2008) rightly observed that the anomie theory is an attempt to explain certain factors which can

encourage deviance in the society as a result of breakdown in moral constraints in the society.

Similarly, Greeks (2005) argued that anomie is the state of mind of a person who has no standards or lost his/her sense of continuing living by rejecting all social bonds in the society. In anomic state, the individual is feeling disappointed with leaders or authorities in the society for being indifferent to his/her needs, values and aspirations. This feeling of disappointment will make the individual to see life to be frustrating as a result of the society lacking order which deprives him/her from realizing individual goals. The individuals in the state of anomie may also have a sense of futility and conviction that associates are not supportive, but have abandoned them.

Relatedly, Okafor (2015) rightly observed that Durkheim saw anomie as a breakdown of the ties that bind people together to make society functional. Anomie can be described as a state of social derangement of individuals in the society. In periods of anomie, a society becomes unstable, chaotic and often rife with conflict as some members of the society have lost connect with reality and reasoning. This is because the social force of the norms and values that otherwise provided stability in the society is weakened or missing. This state otherwise known as normlessness is as a result of the breakdown of social bonds that previously bind the individual and the society together (Haralambos & Holborn, 2011). Anomie can best be understood as existence of insufficient normative regulation in the society, especially in periods of social change, economic recession and political upheavals, such as the French Revolution in 1789 and the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria since July 2009.

## **2.0 Statement of the Problem and Objectives of the study**

Nigeria is degenerating into a state of anomie which has been a prominent issue in recent times. There has been an increase in the occurrence of acts of violence and lawlessness, including things like terrorism, kidnapping and hostage-taking of prominent citizens and expatriate oil workers, as well as illegal oil bunkering, arms insurgence, cultism (Anasi, 2010).

Surprisingly, a rightful observation of the Nigerian society, particularly of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century show that Nigeria is pervaded with lawless events and circumstances. It is believed that lawlessness and normlessness are becoming endemic in the society. Since the 1980s, oppression and injustice have been rife, poverty has spread like wild fire, and frustration/deprivation of the basic needs and aspirations of the vast majority of citizens, including the children and the youth, has been a cardinal feature of our decadent society. One result of widespread and severe frustration of the legitimate needs and aspirations of the masses of Nigerians has been the development in the personalities of ordinary Nigerians of varying degrees of hostile and destructive traits, which manifest in most cases, in criminal behaviour and crises orchestrated by frustrated youths in the society.

In view of the foregoing, the Northeastern part of Nigeria has literally erupted with unrivalled violence. Bomb blasts, kidnapping, killing of Nigerians and others have become the prevailing trend. Despite beefing up of security in these areas, the problems still loom. It is also believed that another dangerous dimension of anomie is the lack of respect for the established social and moral values experienced lately in Nigeria. There has been increased

media visibility of war mongers, ethnic jingoists, irredentists, and religious bigots beating war drums precariously threatening the peaceful co-existence of the different ethnic groups and supporting disintegration of our country. This uncontrollable situation in Nigerian has revealed the leaders to be helpless as anarchy is reigning supreme across board in in the country. Since literature on theanomic situation in Nigeria is still inadequate and europocentric, this paper is set to bridge this knowledge gap. The study will critically investigate the institutional factors that breed lawlessness in Nigeria and suggest better ways to responded to it.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The study adopted documentary method. In the words of Ugwuoke, Ameh and Ogbonna (2017), documentary research is the use of documents to support the view point or argument of an academic work. In this research method, data are collected through reading existing documents such as: newspapers, textbooks, government publications, internet materials and pictorials of sources, among others.

### **4.0 Emile Durkheim's Anomie Theory**

Anomie is a social condition in which there is a disintegration or disappearance of the norms and values that previously held members of the society together. The concept 'anomie' was developed by Émile Durkheim, one of the founding fathers of the discipline of sociology. According to Aspers (2010), Durkheim postulated that anomie occurs in societies during or follow-up periods of drastic and rapid changes in the social, economic, or political structures. The concept of anomie is basically associated with Durkheim's study of suicide, in his book 'The Division of Labor in Society' written in 1893. Ritzer (2011) rightly observed that Durkheim in his book wrote about an 'anomic division of labor', a phrase he used to describe a disordered division of labour in which some groups no longer fit in with others in the society. Durkheim's work greatly influenced sociologists such as Robert K. Merton to give more dimension to anomie theory.

Accordingly, Macionis and Linda (2010) observed that Durkheim believed that one of the pivotal points in history relating to terms of crime and deviance was the Industrial Revolution. This is because as the revolution evolved, there was a steep increase in immigrant migration to modern societies. The increased migration and evolution towards modern societies was the first sign of problems in the new societies. The migration to modern societies gave rise to individualistic lifestyle and flexibility indiversity amongst belief system of individuals. These immigrants were therefore confronted with the problem of adapting to their previously held norms or belief systems with that of the modern society's values. Inevitably, there was a sense of imbalance between the previously held norms and values and the new and evolving ones.

Similarly, Smith and Bohm (2007) argued that it is this imbalance of norms and values that Durkheim deemed 'anomie'. Durkheim also noted that anomie reflects a sense of normlessness, the lack of societal norms that spurs individuals towards the tendency to act in a deviant way. The Durkheim's theory of anomie proposes that because of industrialization and the need for cheap labour in these new modern societies, immigrants brought with them their own sets of norms and values which conflict with those of the

modern societies. Thus, the societies experienced an imbalance of norms and values which enhances individual's propensity to commit crime in search for a stable environment (Cao, 2010).

Corroborating the above assertion, Macionis and Linda (2010) rightly observed that Durkheim saw that the imbalance of norms and values occurred as European societies experienced industrialization and change in the nature of work along with the development of a more complex division of labour. Durkheim framed this as a clash between the mechanical solidarity (homogeneous, traditional societies) and the organic solidarity that keeps more complex societies together. Durkheim argued that anomie occurs mostly in homogeneous societies as compared to heterogeneous or modern societies as organic solidarity allows for the division of labour to evolve where individuals are encouraged to play a meaningful role (Macionis & Linda, 2010).

Relatedly, Cao (2010) rightly stated that Durkheim found in his study that suicide rate among Protestants was higher than Catholics in nineteenth-century Europe. This is because understanding the value placed on suicide by adherents of these two denominations in Christianity, the Protestant tradition places more emphasis on individualism, while the Catholics believe in using intermediaries to connect God. This therefore made Protestants less likely to develop close communal ties that might sustain them during times of emotional distress and susceptible to suicide as a way out of trouble (Cao, 2010). Corroborating this view, Criminol (2002) reasoned that belonging to the Catholic faith provided greater social control and cohesion to a community, which would decrease state of anomie and the risk of anomic suicide. The strong point of Durkheim's perspective implies that strong social ties in the society help people and groups to survive in periods of change and tumult.

## **5.0 Robert K. Merton and Anomie Theory**

Robert K. Merton who pioneered the sociology of deviance is considered as one of the foremost American sociologists. He was greatly influenced by the Durkheim's theory of anomie. Accordingly, Ritzer (2011) observed that Merton built on Durkheim's theory by postulating that anomie is a social condition in which people's norms and values no longer sync with those of society. Ritzer further stated that Merton created the structural strain theory, which explains how anomie leads to deviance and crime in the society. The Merton's structural strain theory states that when society does not provide the necessary legitimate and legal means for the people to achieve culturally valued goals, the people will seek for alternative means that may break away or violate the laws, values and norms. For example, if society does not provide enough jobs or alternative means of sustenance for the masses, many of them will indulge in criminality and other forms of vices such as suicide bombing, armed robbery, kidnapping and prostitution for a living (Aspers, 2010). This implies that Merton's conception of deviance and crime in the society is largely as a result of anomie, which is a state of disconnect between the individual and the society that creates social disorder in societies.

## **6.0 Analysis of Durkheim's and Merton's Theories of Anomie**

In the words of Bernburg (2002), Durkheim's theory of anomie is related to ill-formulated goals within the culture of an industrial society. Robert Merton relies on the Marxist explanation of anomie which postulated that there is normlessness due to the inadequate means available to fulfill societal goals. Corroborating the above view, Asper (2010) argued that these two theories revolve around the weight that the market economy holds on the culture in the pursuit of self-interest, attraction to monetary rewards and economic dominance stimulated by the emergence of anomie as a cultural value. In regard to crime, the theorists emphasized on the impact of competition and materialism in the society which has sparked off a disregard for the moral status in which one achieves his/her goals. Accordingly, Aspers (2010) further observed that this strain of anomic theory is called 'Institutional anomie theory'. It incorporates the idea that, if the market economy is left unregulated by other social institutions, it will ultimately be obtrusive to society. This is because the social structure of the society lacks capacity to give equal opportunities to the citizenry.

In his analysis of Durkheim's and Merton's theories of anomie, Aspers (2010) argued that Durkheim focuses on the social make-up of the society while Merton highlighted the exiting imbalance of the components that make-up the society. Accordingly, Durkheim's theory progressed as a base for modern theories to adapt the values and norms of a modernized and industrialized society (Aspers, 2010). Hence, Durkheim's analysis of institutional anomie became a basis for analyzing the concepts of normlessness, crime and deviance in the society. Institutional anomie sees monetary, family and educational success dominating the non-economic institutions and they are given economic value in the society. This has awoken community values and social bonds by controlling (i.e. vastly reducing) self-serving behaviours such as deviance and crime.

Ritzer (2011) rightly observed the similarity between institutional anomie theory and Merton's strain theory of crime and deviance. According to him, Merton's strain theory asserts that there exists a discrepancy between culturally defined goals and the means available to achieve these goals. Merton believes that the culturally defined goals are wealth and material success and that happiness is equivalent to these goals. Hence, the institutionalized means of acquiring these goals are hard work and education. It is also widely accepted that those who do not succeed are inherently lazy or inept in some way. The application of Merton's strain theory validates the problem facing the lower and middle classes to achieve wealth and material success in the society. This is because formal education and material success are believed to be attained by only the wealthy or financially stable individuals in the society. It is this imbalance that justifies the mode of adaptation that the disadvantaged persons are resorting to in the society. The mode of adaptation is more often than not criminal, but supporting Durkheim's anomie theory.

## **7.0 The French Revolution**

The French Revolution of 1789 was a revolutionary movement that shook France between 1787 and 1799. It reached its climax in 1789, hence the conventional term 'Revolution of 1789' denoting the end of the ancient régime in France and serving also to distinguish that event from the later French revolutions of 1830 and 1848 (Mason and Tracey, 1998).

Before the revolution, France was one of the most powerful states in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe that influenced European economic, political and cultural development. French language was not only spoken in the Court of Versailles, but across the Courts of Europe. The French culture, including its arts and literature, was emulated by the European elites. The ruler of France, King Louis XVI was both a despotic tyrant and a monarch pursuing active reform agenda for his country (Guettner, 2015). However, the revolution that destroyed the ancient régime in France is considered by many as the first of the modern revolutions. It is one of the great turning points of the modern era because never before had the society of a powerful country been transformed to give political representation to its entire population on the basis of the principle of popular sovereignty.

In the words of Girigiri (2006), the long-established social, political and economic foundations of French society, based on privilege, hierarchy and tradition were being challenged in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The French king, Louis XVI, faced with pressure from elite groups in his kingdom, recognized the need for reform, which in his assessment was limited to the issue of taxation. Girigiri (2006) further observed that “the Comptendu” the first ever statement of the Crown’s finances which reflected and encouraged the growing interest by the French public in economic affairs was made in 1781.

These challenges, together with the Crown’s financial difficulties as a result of France’s involvement in costly foreign wars, convinced Louis XVI and his successive finance ministers to implement a range of radical reforms intended to increase the income of the Crown. Although there is no consensus among historians on the causes of the revolution, there is a broad acknowledgement of the complex nature of the tensions and problems that became apparent when an unfolding political crisis brought them to the surface (Suzanne, 2013).

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, France was an absolute monarchy ruled by the Bourbon dynasty, which claimed the throne by divine right. As the century progressed, France’s system of government, and indeed the whole structure of society, came under increasing pressure for change. It made the crisis possible, but not unavoidable; it was not evident that France was on the brink of a revolution. The fluctuating economic activity in the 1770s and 1780s had not made most peasants poorer and had not prevented the bourgeoisie from increasing its wealth. The need for change was caused mainly by the financial difficulties King Louis XVI government faced as a result of France’s involvement in foreign wars (Suzanne, 2013).

Relatedly, Barnes (2006) observed that in the 1780s, the financial situation of the French monarchy was the key reason for the monarchy seeking a new national consensus with the summoning of the Estates-General. The meeting of this representative institution, the first in more than 150 years, set in motion a chain of events that challenged the very foundations of absolute monarchy. Many underlying tensions in France’s institutions made a revolution, if not inevitable, at least conceivable. King Louis XVI reform agenda was overtaken by revolution, as ideas became action. The year 1789 marked the transition of France from a kingdom ruled by a divinely ordained ruler to a constitutional monarchy, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen heralded the birth of the new order.

The establishment of the new society was marked by division and idealism, which turned into extremism. Religion, position of the king and the definition of who could be considered a citizen each proved to be contentious. In France, series of political and economic crises forced the revolution into the paths of emergency measures and war (Suzanne, 2011). In 1793, terror became the order of the day 'as France's new republican government became more authoritarian'. The revolution cannot be summed up in simplistic terms as the confrontation between feudalism and capitalism, or a bourgeois clash with nobles and the monarchy. It progressed in a complex and unpredictable way, often contradicting the revolutionary ideas of universal rights of man. The process of change exacted a high human cost. The violence of the Terror and the imperial ambitions of Napoleon were examples of the compromise of the revolutionary ideals that first proclaimed, '*Men are born and remain free and equal in rights*'. Suzanne (2011) further observed that one of the most significant outcomes of the revolution is the endurance of the principle of popular sovereignty and civil equality, the foundations of modern liberal democratic societies.

### **8.0 The Relevance of Anomie Theory on French Revolution**

The concept of anomie obviously depicted the state of lawlessness and normlessness that held sway during the French revolution. In this regard, anomie theory clearly described the high level of disorderliness and instability that took place in France and its resultant effects. It is in this view that Linda and Marsha (2004) observed that France lost thousands of her countrymen in the form of émigrés, or emigrants who wished to escape socio-political upheaval and save their lives. Relatedly, anomie theory explained the social disintegration, high rates of egocentric behaviour, norm violation, and consequent delegitimation and distrust of authority that took place in France.

Similarly, this revolution led to shaping of French politics, society, religion and ideas polarizing socio-economic and political life for more than a century. Also, there was high growth of individualism which is an inevitable result of the increasing division of labour, and this individualism can only develop at the expense of the common values, morality, beliefs, and normative rules of society, the sentiments and beliefs that are held by all. With the loosening of these common rules and values, sense of community was lost. The social bond is thereby weakened and social values and beliefs no longer provide us with coherent or insistent moral guidance. And this loosening lends itself to anomie (Elwell, 2003).

The changes in France caused by this anomic situation were enormous, some were widely accepted and others were bitterly contested against even up to the late 20th century. For instance, before the Revolution, the people of France had little power or no voice in the administration of the country. The kings had so thoroughly centralized the system of administration that most nobles spent their time in Versailles, and played only a small or insignificant role in the administration of their home districts. Thompson (2003) cited by Girigiri (2006) says that:

The kings in France have ruled by virtue of their personal wealth or recourses, this greatly affected their patronage of the nobility, their disposal of ecclesiastical offices, their provincial governors (intendants),

their control over the judges and magistrates, and their command of the Army (Girigiri, 2006:73).

After the first year of revolution, this power had been stripped away. The king was stripped of his privileges and became a figurehead; the nobility too lost all their titles and most of their land. The Church also lost its monasteries and farmlands; and bishops, judges and magistrates were elected by the people. The army too was not spared of revolutionary changes as it was rendered almost helpless/powerless as military power was transferred into the hands of the new revolutionary National Guard. The central elements of 1789 were the slogan '*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*' and '*The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*', which Lefebvre calls "the incarnation of the Revolution as a whole (Linda & Marsha, 2004).

The long-term relevance of anomic theoretical view on France was profound, shaping politics, society, religion and ideas, and polarizing politics for more than a century. Girigiri (2006) quoting Historian Francois Aulard said:

From the social point of view, the Revolution consisted in the suppression of what was called the feudal system, in the emancipation of the individual, in greater division of landed property, the abolition of the privileges of noble birth, the establishment of equality, the simplification of life. The French Revolution differed from other revolutions in being not merely national, for it aimed at benefiting all humanity (Girigiri, 2006:94).

## **9.0 Its Implication in Nigeria**

After independent in 1960, Nigeria was considered as one of the most powerful nations in Africa. This was because it was influencing economic, political and cultural development in Africa. This feat was made possible because the founding fathers of Nigeria built the country on the foundation of honesty, sincerity of purpose and patriotism. However, in recent times Nigeria's case is becoming pitiable among comity of nations as there has been sustained increase in violence and lawlessness. Other vices include terrorism, agitations for restructuring/true federalism, kidnapping of prominent citizens and foreigner, arms insurgence, cultism, armed robbery and prostitution. This is because supposedly critical stakeholders or principal actors in the Nigerian project are now more interested in making money by killing and maiming or destroying fellow human beings. Every facet of our national life has drifted into a state of lawlessness or a state of normlessness as people are becoming disappointed with the Nigerian project. The country can be described as being in a state of anomie, where majority of her citizens are becoming uninterested in the existence of the country as a result of frustration and poverty. That is, our moral compass of collective interest of taking Nigeria forward is broken. The acceptable standards of measuring human behaviour in Nigeria have been distorted. The Nigerian state handed over to our generation by the founding fathers has been compromised (Ekpeyong, 2011).

The country is now characterized by violence, where both temporal and spiritual matters are taken over by chaos and anomie. For instance, churches and mosques that are

supposed to preach hope and tolerance have degenerated to become the temple of criminality. This is because prosperity preachers, money crazy Pastors/Imams, false prophets, deluded messengers of 'God', magicians, Alfas and sorcerers have taken over churches and mosques. This has therefore generated to money, materialism, and riches no matter how ill gotten, naked and base acquisition of property and unearned wealth are eulogized by churches and mosques. It is believed that this has polluted the larger community beyond words as depressed citizens now carry out violence against the Nigerian State. In Nigeria today, a phenomenon of violent cattle herdsman constantly using their herds of cattle to invade farmlands destroying lives and properties in the southern and middle belt states. Generally, Fulani cattle herdsman known for their meek and friendly disposition in the past are now armed and ready to kill without provocation. As the herdsman overwhelm the land, kidnappers too have emerged as an equally virulent danger we face in the country. School children, businessmen, politicians and expatriates are kidnapped at will and only released when ransom of considerable amount is paid. People are now kidnapped on the highway, their homes, offices and in unimaginable places. In some occasions, Herdsman take over the highways and kidnap motorists only to release them when huge ransom is paid. Nigerians can no longer travel to their villages because of the menace of violence and criminality existing in the societies. The problem is compounded by bad motor roads.

Again, a new dimension of the crisis has emerged pitching the people of the north against the people of southern Nigeria. This has caused the Federal and State governments to be confused and frightened. For instance, communities that have lived together in peace for generations are preparing to tear and destroy each other. In 1992/1993 when the citizens of Republic of Rwanda called each other disparaging and dehumanizing names little did the world know that a massacre of unearthly proportion was gathering momentum. It later became conflagrated and uncontrollable. Learning from the Rwanda experience, it is believed that Nigerians are now playing with a keg of gun powder. Nigeria is in a state of anomie where it is steeped in infamy. The people of Nigeria are in perpetual torment in all fronts, where we are yearning for a way out or divine intervention (Ekpeyong, 2011).

## **10.0 Conclusion**

Anomic condition of Nigeria has led to a breakdown of law and order, low productivity due to disruption of production activities, increasing crime rate, intra-ethnic hostilities, and harassment of prospective developers and other criminal tendencies in the country. This scourge has been around for a long time and it looks as though it is defying solutions. This is because of the continuous increase in ethnic and religious conflict and radicalization, as a result of growing numbers of people frustrated due to their inability to achieve the societal set goals.

## **11.0 Recommendations**

In this regard, as we reflect on the perplexing issues confronting the country, we need to join in praying for Nigeria. Nigeria has been in distress for too long. At both individual and

family levels, we have to pray for Nigeria and with good intentions in our hearts. The times are very delicate as frustration is gaining momentum.

Similarly, there is need for policy makers to provide such an environment and conditions which are conducive for entrepreneurial activities. Different policy initiatives encourage and motivate people to come up with new ideas, start their own enterprises and challenge situations of anomie. This will first reduce the incidence of unemployment to a great extent and as such would have dealt a massive blow to the problems of criminality, lawlessness and anomie. To do this effectively, the policymakers need to realize that public spending is not going to contribute towards the welfare of the people. It is the policies of the states that must be created in a way that will help to stimulate the people as well as their communities to invest in themselves.

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