

A Comparative Study of Hegel's Dialectic of Master-Slave Relationship with Child Labour in Nigeria

Inameti, Etim Edet (Ph.d Candidate)
Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Calabar- Nigeria
E-mail: inametietim@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is to establish a correlation between Hegel's Dialectic of Master-slave and the Child Labour Syndrome in Nigeria. Hegel in his Dialectic of Master-slave Relationship makes the point that this relationship expressed itself in terms of "Domination and servitude" a situation that tends to put the slave at a vantage position over the master in terms of acquisition of skills and mental acumen. This assertion by Hegel can be juxtaposed with the Child Labour Syndrome, where the Labour of the house helps are often maximized to the detriment of their masters' children. To check this imbalance in children up-bringing, this paper is proposing the reverse of the status of the House Help to that of "Complementary Children" as their roles are meant to complement that of their masters "Biological Children."

Keywords: Hegel, Dialectic, Master-Slave, Child-Labour, Philosophy Nigeria.

1. Understanding Hegel's Dialectic of Master – Slave

Relationship Hegel's dialectic of Master slave relationship is a product of the second phase of his phenomenological development of consciousness, which we called "self consciousness". The preamble of the dialectic of self — consciousness in Hegel's Phenomenology of mind is expressed in terms of "domination and servitude" or the relationship between a master and a slave.

According to Hegel:

No individual will rest satisfied with a conquest that fails to secure the conscious acknowledgement of other men. Hence, there is a struggle for both power and recognition (Edwards 438).

Here, Hegel makes the assertion that the fulfillment of an individual self - consciousness is premised on securing the acknowledgement or recognition from his fellow man. To further buttress his claims, Hegel goes on to say,

In this struggle some take greater risks than their competitors, those who risk the least will become the slaves or bondsmen -
-- In order to preserve his life, the slave submits to the master, who regards as nothing but a means to his own designs. (Edwards 438).

What this means is that the self - conscious individual (that is the slave when he encounters another self (master) attempt to resist becoming an object for this other self. But on the contrary, this self-conscious individual gradually realizes that mere self-assertion is self-defeating or efforts in futility. Consequently, this self-conscious individual (the slave) has no option than to be forced to work while the master enjoys the fruit of his Labour. Thus according to Hegel;

The slave is forced to work, whereas the master can enjoy leisure in the knowledge that the slave is reshaping the natural world to provide the products of his labour for the master to consume. (Edwards 438)

Hegel makes another point by exposing the disadvantage position of the master who takes delights in consuming the products of the slave's Labour to the detriment of his own creative aptitude. For Hegel:

The master's leisure protects him from experience of the Negativity of nature, whereas the slave, in struggling with nature's recalcitrance, learns its secrets and put mind into it. (Edwards, 438)

Since the master is disadvantaged in creative aptitude, but gifted to living in leisure. The master is bound to be wasteful as well as being destructive and impermanent while the slave following the rigorous nature of his work creates as well as accumulates knowledge for future self-development. As Hegel point out;

The master, in consuming, destroys; the slave, in working, creates. But the master's consumption depends upon the slave's work and is thus impermanent, whereas the slave's labour passes into things that have a permanent existence. (Edwards, 438).

The above assertion by Hegel happens to be the bane of the master, who is now pushed into a disadvantage position owing to his assumption of artificial supremacy over the slave.

2. SLAVERY -AN OVERVIEW

Slavery is a human condition in which a person is owned by another. A slave is considered in law as property or chattel, and is deprived of virtually of all rights and freedom. Slavery has existed in various forms throughout most of the world history slave are involuntarily obtained by capture or trade during military and commercial expeditions; as punishments or through direct sales by parents, guardian or chieftain or by the transfer of ownership from one master to another (Britannica, 874).

In some parts of the world slave helped master to tend their flocks; cultivate their farm land and so on. (Derrick, 10).Slavery is accepted all over the world as illegal and shameful, and the international obligation to end it is clearly laid down. In 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations which declared that “all forms of slavery and involuntary servitude must be abolished throughout the world. However, the committees set up to study the problem discovered that “slavery in modified forms persist in many under developed countries” for example, children are frequently exploited in the name of househelps, who are further subjected to hard labour, street trading and so on.

In Africa, terminals located in the riverine areas with easy access to the interior of the continent, were the ideal locations or routes for the collection of unwilling cargoes (slaves). These locations were convenient for both the African dealers and the European purchasers. Tobacco, Cachaca (Cane brandy), Cloth, hats, muskets, mats, and many other items of European manufacture served as the medium of exchange. (Toplin, 120)

3. Child Labour and Child Rights: A Conceptual Clarification

Prior to the conceptual clarification of the issues at stake - Child Labour and Child Rights, there is need to give a thought to certain fundamental questions. Do children have rights at all? It will be quite unfair for one to discuss Child Labour cum child abuse without asking this question. Secondly, Help - less and dependent as they are, is their life safeguarded by any form of justice or are they mere beings meant to be manipulated by their predators? As a response to the above question, Children do have rights. The General Declaration of Right of the Child (1954) and the International covenant on Civil and political Rights (1966), Plus the United Nations convention on the Rights of the child declare that, like other individuals, children have specific rights. These rights are behind any law seeking to protect the little one from would - be abusers. An awareness of what rights a child has or should have will assist any individual who seeks to do what is fair and just in the care of the child.

Among the rights considered by the United Nations convention on the rights of a child; the Draft Charter AU (on the Rights and welfare of the child (1990) in addition to the

provisions of; An Act to provide and protect the Rights of the Nigerian Child and other Related matters 2003 (Abridged Version) are as follows:

- Every child has the right to survival and development. No one therefore should murder, starve or do any deliberate action that causes the death of a little one, or be in constant threat to his survival.
- Every child has the right to a name and nationality, and has his or her birth registered. These attributes enhance the feelings of belongings necessary for his or her development.
- Every Child has a right to enjoy parental care. This entails the right to be born to both Father and Mother. This goes hand – in- hand with the responsibility of providing the best environment for child’s complete physical, mental and spiritual development.
- Every Child has a right to proper food and medical care. Every parents is expected to make sure that the child is well fed and that treatment for illness is immediately sought in addition to the state ensuring that necessary infrastructure for prompt health care delivery are put in place.
- Every child has a right to moral upbringing. Parents and as a whole have the responsibility of teaching the value

system and setting limits to the child when behaviour tends to stray beyond expectation.

- Every Child has a right to be protected ‘from all kinds of harm. These include all forms of economic injurious to the child. The protection practices injurious to the child. The protection is also intended to defend the child against all types of sexual abuse, sale of or trafficking in children or forced Labour.

-Every Child has a right to education. This education is aimed among others, at promoting and developing the child’s personality and talents, as well as fostering respect for humanity. These are so far and some other factors ‘constituting the “Child’s Rights”

Like the Child’s Right, the possibility of attempting a conceptual clarification of the term “Child Labour lend credence to answering the question - When is a Child considered to be involved in child labour? Going by UNICEF classification of what constitute “Child Labour”. The following classifications were made:

- When children 5 to 11 years of age during the week preceding the survey did at least one hour of economic activity or at least 28 hours of domestic work;

- When children 12-14 years of age during the week, preceding the survey, did at least 14 hours of economic activity or at least 42 hours of economic activity and domestic work combined. (Mviti 89)

Utilizing this classification, UNICEF (2005) indicates that Africa has the highest involvement of children in various forms of labour. Up to 41% of male and female children aged 5-14 years are used for domestic work, trafficked to work in plantations or mines/abducted by militia, and abusive labour activities. The international Labour Organization in 2005 estimates that there are 8.4 million children working under horrific circumstance. Forced into debt bondage or other forms of slavery, prostitution and pornography or participation in armed conflict or other illicit activities”.

Generally, here are five types of children involved at work:

- Domestic work: these include children at home helping in fetching water, baby sitting, cooking, washing of clothes and so on, which frees adults for other work.

- Non-domestic and non-paid work: This work is mostly agricultural input in poorer countries between age 6 to 10 years. Tied or bond labour: These children work to pay off debts their parents and even grand parents accumulated.

- Wage labour: These children are paid minimal enslaving wages to work in farms, industry, bakeries, building sites, markets and so on. The working hours are usually too long leaving the child with no room for play or rest.

- Marginal Labour Activities in Town: These include children involved in anything from shoe shining, street vendors or hawking and even prostitution. (UNICEF Vol 4, 12-13)

4. Comparing Hegel’s Dialectic of Master -Slave Relationship with Child Labour in Nigeria

Hegel’s phenomenology of mind as expressed in terms of domination and servitude or the relationship between a master and a slave marks the initial stage of his dialectic of self- consciousness. Hence in using it for comparative analysis with “Child labour in Nigeria” we shall be focusing on children that are involuntarily acquired for use in domestic work VZV or otherwise known as “House Helps” This is a modernized form of slavery or servitude. In the beginning of the dialectic of self - consciousness, Hegel has this to say:

No individual will rest, satisfied with a conquest that fails to secure the conscious acknowledgement of other men. Hence, there is a struggle for both power and recognition (Edwards, 438).

The claim Hegel is making here, is that, the fulfillment of an individual self - consciousness is premised on securing the acknowledgement or recognition from his fellow man. Comparing this claim with what holds between children acquired for use in domestic work as “House Help”. The idea of securing acknowledgement or recognition from his fellow man, is not attainable here. Rather, the case is that of frequent exercise of power in addition to the issuance of various commands by the master which is a violation of the child’s right or respect for the dignity of his person” No room is given for self expression by the master, except the expectation of total compliance from the slave or House - help with regard to the master’s command. In view of this development Hegel further makes the point:

In order to preserve his life, the slave submits to the master, who regards as nothing but a means to his own designs. (Edwards, 438)

The child Right Acts in Nigeria provides under the Right to leisure recreation and cultural Activities that “Every child is entitled to rest and leisure and to participate in the cultural and artistic activities of the Nigeria Communities. However this is contrary to Hegel’s dialectics of Master - slave Relationship as Hegel makes the points as follows:

The slave is forced to work, where as the master can enjoy leisure in the knowledge that the slave is reshaping the Natural world to provide the products of his labour for the master to consume. (Edwards, 438).

Another interesting point to note, in the attempt to compare Hegel’s dialectic of Master-Slave Relationship with child Labour cum the House - Help syndrome is thus - According to Hegel,

The master, in consuming destroy, the slave, in working, creates. But the master’s consumption depends upon the slave’s work and is thus impermanent where as the, slave’s labour passed into things that have a permanent existence. (Edwards, 438).

Here Hegel makes the point that, since the master is disadvantage in creative aptitude, but gifted in living in leisure. There is the tendency for the master to be wasteful in addition to being destructive and unstable, where as the slave owing to the rigorous nature of his work creates and accumulates knowledge for future self-development. This is the bane of the master “in Hegel’s dialectic of Self-consciousness

5. Critical Evaluation

Our critical evaluation stems from the citation below as posited by Hegel:

The master, in consuming, destroys the slave, in working, creates. But the master is consumption, depends upon the slave's work and is thus impermanent, where as the slave's labour passed into things that have a permanent existence. (Edwards, 438)

Relating the above citation to the predicament of the House- Helps or a modernize form of slavery in Nigeria. Some 'investigations have shown that majority of the children acquired for domestic work as "house-helps" are often very industrious having promising future than the children or off-springs of their master or mistress. The consistent engagement of the house-help in domestic chores builds potentiality in them. According to Hegel "the master in consuming, destroys, the slave in working, creates". This is typical of present day House-Helps in comparison with the children of their boss. The House-Helps engage in various domestic chores such as cooking, washing of clothes, stitching of torn clothes, sweeping, domestic farming and so on. Where as the children of their boss are good at eating the food prepared by the House-helps, throw their cloth at them for washing or stitching; leave the floor of their room for them to sweep and similar domestic chores. In the long run the House - Help depending on the number of years or period he or she stays with the boss, end up gathering so much in terms of industry and experience. While the off-springs of the boss due to their dependence on the industry of the House-Help make no allowance for creativity, instead, they are wasteful and destructive.

In view of this development we will suggest the need for a re-orientation and re-positioning with regards to the concept of Child labour cum House-Help syndrome in Nigeria. In the bible times, there was some kind of engagements of House-Helps, studies shows that these children played complementary roles alongside the biological off-springs of their boss. The case of the "Little maid" from Isreal captured by Syrians Army and handedover to Naaman and his wife for keep or up-bringing is a good (example 2 Kings 5:2-3). The contribution of this young girl led to the cure of Naaman's Leprosy; Prophet Joel in his prophetic ministration on the "Out pouring of the Holy Spirit" recognize the role of the 'Servants and Handmaids' as co-beneficiary of the new dispensation. (Joel 2: 28 - 29); Even Mordecai, brought up his Late uncle's daughter, Esther, one of the source of engaging house helps, as his own daughter, not knowing that he was preparing her for future prominence in life. (Esther 2: 7).

6. Conclusion

The comparative study of Hegel's Dialectic of Master - Slave Relationship as expressed in terms of "Domination and servitude" with child Labour cum House-help syndrome in Nigeria shows that the concept of House - help has been grossly abused by those involve and so needs a re-orientation. A close study of the Child Rights Acts and the few citations from the Holy Scriptures are indicative of this claim. These children rather than utilizing their potential as "complementary" alongside the "Biological children" of the home are, rather, treated as slaves. This situation requires an urgent redress.

Finally we will rather suggest that the status of the House- helps be reverse to that of "Complementary Children" as their roles in the house is meant to complement that of their master "Biological Children".

WORKS CITED

- Derrick, Johnathan, *Africa's Slaves Today*. London: George Allen And Unwin Ltd; 1975.
Edwards, Paul (ed). *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Vol. 3. London. Collier Macnillan Inc. 1967
Mwiti, Gladys K; *Child Abuse: Detection, Prevention and Counselling*. Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 2006.
Toplin, Robert, B. (ed) *Slavery and Race Relations in Latin America*. London: Greenwood Press, 1974
Federal Government Gazzette Notice. No 211 (Abridged Version of the Child Rights Act 2003)
National Child Rights Implementation Committee Reports. UNICEF Publication Vol. 4, 1998
The Holy Bible (King James Version).
The New Encyclopedia BRITANNICA London Encyclopedia Britannica Inc. 1988.

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page: <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

Academic conference: <http://www.iiste.org/conference/upcoming-conferences-call-for-paper/>

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

