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ANALYZING THE EARLIER AND MODERN THINKING IN CONVERGENCE THEORY

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ABSTRACT
The convergence theory has two variants. One is the economic, which is based on the thesis that capitalism and socialism are gradually drawing closer and that the differences between them are disappearing. The other is the sociological variant, which holds that not only the economic but also the social systems, including the entire range of political, economic and other social relations, reveals this trend towards mutual drawing together and eventual merger into single system. A general sociological study of convergence theory is beyond the scope of this study, which is intended as a study of the theory only on its economic aspect. With the aid of secondary data, we analyzed the earlier and modern thinking in convergence theory and argues that the earlier one represented attempts by the capitalist and socialist countries to achieve social peace through welfare-related reforms and programs, while the core notion of the convergence theory of today is modified in recognition that as nations achieve similar levels of economic development, they becomes more alike in terms of different aspects of social life. Growing attention to large-scale changes in economic, technological, and cultural relations which were inspired by globalization has renewed interest in today's idea of convergence. Criticisms of both the old and modern convergence theory are also presented in this paper.

KEYWORDS:
Convergence Theory, Capitalism, Socialism, Social Democracy, Welfare State, Globalization.

I. INTRODUCTION

This study discussed the earlier and modern thinking in convergence theory. The earlier version of the theory articulated by John Kenneth Galbraith (1967) and Raymond Aron (1967), focuses on the idea that economic, political, and ideological differences between the capitalist and socialist systems are gradually diminishing and leading ultimately to a merger of the two systems. Necessitated by the possibility of taking the best of capitalism and socialism, the convergence theory of yesterday sought to strike a compromise between strict private and public ownerships where the interests both the worker the investor are secured. This is a progressive social policy that tends to achieve social equality through social democracy. However, the achievement of peaceful coexistence from the idea of convergence is essentially a refined form of apology for capitalism, argues the critics like Ellman (1980) and Skinner (1976). They maintains that although the theory appeared to place itself above capitalism and socialism, it essentially proposes a synthesis of the two systems on a capitalist basis. That is, on the basis of private ownership of the means of production and distribution. Despite this criticism however, we argues that the convergence theory of yesterday represented an attempt to provide the capitalist and socialist countries with ways of establishing social peace through social-related reforms such as the intervention in the areas of job creation, poverty alleviation, fuel subsidy, minimum wage, healthcare, and consumer protection. In recent years however, particularly from 1960s, the convergence theory has been modified in recognition that the whole world was entering an era of complete industrialization. The core notion of today's convergence theory is that as nations achieve similar levels of economic development, they will become more alike in terms of different aspects of social life. The idea is that as nation transition from the beginning stages of industrialization

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International Journal of Engineering Technology Research & Management

to highly industrialized economy, the same societal patterns will emerge and eventually create a global culture. Growing attention to large scale changes in economic, technological, and cultural relations which were inspired by globalization has renewed interest in the ideas of convergence. The interest in convergence today has also been given a boost by various political developments in 1990s, particularly the collapse of state socialism in Europe and the progressive weakening of economic and political barriers globally. Also the continuing movement towards unification associated with the European Union (EU), the Economic Community of Western States (ECOWAS), and other regional bodies are worthy of note of another significant cases of political and economic convergence on regional scale.

II. GENERAL NOTION OF THE CONVERGENCE THEORY

In ideology and politics, as well as economics, convergence theorists basically argue that a movement was taking place away from the polar opposites of state socialist and capitalist economies as each system adopt elements of the other. The term "convergence" is borrowed from natural science (Ellman, 1980). In biology, it means the acquisition or development of similar characters by different groups of organisms due to similarity in habits or environment (Gaitonde, 1974:38). According to Obasi (2007:93), convergence theory is a "one form of a long-existing view about the essential unity of objectives of all ideologies, especially Capitalism and Socialism, dictating their necessary evolution towards convergence". The advocates of convergence theory hold that economic systems can achieve a rapprochement primarily by one, gradually overcoming their own shortcomings, and two, by adopting positive features of the other system.

John Kenneth Galbraith (1967), and Raymond Aron (1967), were among the earliest proponents of the convergence theory, Obasi (2007: 93). Others are P. Sorokin (1964), and J. Tinbergen (1961). These scholars claims that capitalism and socialism are becoming similar in socioeconomic respects. Under capitalism, they argues, the role of the state in directing the economic development of the society is increasing, whereas it is decreasing under socialism because the economic reforms carried in the socialist countries allegedly lead to a departure from the centralized management of the national economy and to a return to market relations. Tinbergen argues "each system is learning from experience and trying to overcome some of its weaknesses. On the other hand, the system the system begin to influence each other more and more" (Tinbergen, 1961). Their arguments follow two basic lines. One states that technological progress is spreading to the countries of both socialist and capitalist systems and drawing them together. The other maintains that the two systems are beginning to resemble each other in certain socioeconomic respects as well (Ellman, 1980). This is said to be manifesting in the economic role of state that is growing in the capitalist countries, while it is becoming somewhat weaker in the socialist countries owing to the development of market relations; a trend towards the mitigation of economic inequality in capitalism is at work, while in socialist societies, inequality is alleged to be on the increase. Inspired by the functionalist perspective of economics which assumes that societies have certain requirements that must be met if they are to survive and operate effectively, and encouraged by the possibility of taking the best of capitalism and socialism which should secure both the welfare of the workers and the interest of the private entrepreneurs, the advocates of convergence theory seeks to create social democracies or welfare states based on the "compromise between strict private and public ownership" (Obasi: 2007: 486).

III. THE WELFARE STATE

The development of the welfare state has inspired active theoretical debate and empirical research on convergence theory. The essence of the welfare state is government-protected minimum standards of income, health, safety, education and housing assured to every citizen as social right, not as charity (Bregel, 1968). It is based on equality of opportunities, equitable distribution of wealth, and public responsibility of those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for good life. Because the welfare state is about shared risks that cut across localities, classes, ethnic group, and educational levels, it is a major source of social integration in modern society.

Marshall (1950), described the modern welfare state as a distinctive combination of democracy, welfare, and capitalism. Esping-Andersen (1990), classified the most developed welfare state systems into three categories; social democratic, conservative, and liberal. The welfare states involves a transfer of funds from the state to fund welfare services mentioned above, as well as directly to individual beneficiaries. It is often referred to as a

iJETRM
International Journal of Engineering Technology Research & Management

type of mixed economy (O'Hara, 1999). The activities of present-day welfare states extend to the provision of both cash welfare benefits such as old-age pensions or unemployment benefits, and in kind welfare services.

IV. HISTORY OF THE CONVERGENCE THEORY

The idea that differences among societies will decrease over time can be found in many works of eighteenth and nineteenth century social thinkers (Weinberges, 1969). As early as 1848 in the Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx contended that human civilization developed in stages from pastoral to communist harmony, driven by dialectical materialism.

Dialectical materialism is a scientific method developed by Marx for interpreting history. In other words, dialectic is a method employed to discover truth by exposing contradictions through a clash of opposite ideas. Marx argues that growth takes place from contradiction and collision of thesis and antithesis. Synthesis which resulted from this clash again becomes thesis which have antithesis and the cycle goes on until perfection is reached because at perfection, there will be no antithesis and according to Marx, communism is that stage of perfection.

There are five historical epoch in which people were defined by their labor (Qwato, 2017), and these stages are primitive communalism, the slave system, feudalism, capitalism and socialism. Primitive communalism was the stage where there was communal ownership of the means of production; bows, stone, arrows, etc. And there was no private property (Singh, 2015). The produce; meat, fruits, food, etc., were for subsistence consumption and there was no surplus for profit making. And as there was no surplus, there was no private property, class division, class struggle and exploitation (Singh, 2015). As the technology grew, so does the productivity. With surplus production came private ownership of property, class division, exploitation and class struggle. Now, the produce was not merely for self-consumption but for earning profit. Marx defines exploitation as deprivation of benefit of the surplus to the working class (Singh, 2015).

In slave system, the produce of the slave becomes property of the master and the slave gets barely enough to sustain himself. The surplus goes to the master. Same in feudal system, where the serf has to work for say three days in his farm to sustain himself and another three days on the lord's farm and everything the serf produces in that three days goes to the lord. Again, the serf has no right over the surplus he produces in three days he worked in the lord's farm. Marx believed that surplus produced by the worker should belong to him but in slave system, feudal system, and capitalism, the worker is denied the surplus produced by him (Singh, 2015).

In capitalism, labor is commodity which is sold in return for wages. The value of commodity is determined by the amount of labor put into it. If a wage is paid in proportion to the amount of value created by the laborer, then there is no exploitation, but this is not the case in capitalism. For example, a worker produces value of ₦1, 000 in a month but gets a wage of ₦600, the surplus of ₦400 goes to the owner of the means of production which he re-invest as he deems fit and the worker has no say. With the growth of capitalism and the rise in competition, the wages of the worker to continues to fall. Thus cut-throat competition in capitalism leads to deterioration of the condition of the working class (proletariat). This intensifies class struggle and eventually leads to revolution.

Capitalism from this perspective was an internally contradictory phase to be destroyed by a proletarian revolution, ushering in a transitory socialist epoch before arriving at the end of history; communism, where class conflict will be resolved and the means of production held in common.

For Marx, private property was the original sin that caused humanity's expulsion from the Garden of Eden (Encyclopedia, 2008). It provided a legal basis for concentrating community wealth in a few powerful hands, the emergence of market exploitation, the class struggle, and in Marx's view, inevitable triumph of communism. According to Marx, private ownership of means of production was intrinsically exploitative, unjust, and inferior to communism. Marx also believes there is no room for blended solution between capitalism and socialism. Capitalism and communism cannot converge, and socialism cannot be anything but transitory.

Now enters the democratic free enterprisers like Francis Fukuyama (1992), who used similar historical logic to reach the opposite conclusion. He argues that private ownership of the means of production was essential for individual utility maximization. Original sin for him was any power including the state that prevented people

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International Journal of Engineering Technology Research & Management

from achieving consumer sovereignty in the private sector, and democratic sovereignty over the provision of public goods. Fukuyama claims that momentum was building and democratic capitalism will be the end of history. This is equated by many with globalization (Encyclopedia, 2008).

On the contrary, there were social democrats such as Nobel Laureate Jan Tinbergen (1961), Buckingham (1958), among others who preferred various third ways. In his *Theoretical Economic Systems, A Comparative Analysis* published in1958, Walter S. Buckingham, an American economist and one of the founders of convergence theory, writes that one of the main conclusion of his study was that the actual functioning of economic systems were growing more similar than dissimilar. Also, Jan Tinbergen, the Dutch economist published an article in 1961, titled "Do Communist and Free Economies Show a Converging Pattern?" His answer to the question was in the positive.

In 1965, Tinbergen produced another article on the subject. In this later article, he reached the conclusion that "both systems are developing and that many of the changes occurring in them show a converging pattern." (Tinbergen, 1965). Tinbergen further argues that "both systems are moving towards a system which is better than pure capitalism or pure socialism in the accepted sense of these terms." The end of history, according to Tinbergen and Buckingham, would blend democracy, private ownership of the means of production, individual utility-seeking, and market with planning and state-supervised social justice. As noted by J. Galbraith (1967), the market relations must give way to planned relations in any society with an advanced technology and a complex organization of production. Moreover, Galbraith declares that the system of planning and organization of production are similar under capitalism and socialism and views this as the basis for the convergence of the two systems. As Sik (1991), pointed out also, the convergence of the two systems could go the way of substituting authoritarianism for democracy, and Stalinist injustice for the welfare state.

It follows, according to social democrats, that the gulf between communism and capitalism was only a matter of efficiency- the practical effectiveness of markets and plans. In an imperfect world where markets are sometimes exploitative and plans inefficient, neither communism nor perfect democratic free enterprise is attainable, and once this is appreciated, according to Tinbergen (1961), "democratic socialism would gradually become universally accepted as the pragmatic second best". Jan Tinbergen regards the development of planning as one the most important recent changes in the capitalist system. In this regards he writes:

> The policy in question like any other one must necessarily be planned; this element of socialist system has now been universally adopted. This is one of the channels for the penetration of the socialist ideas. Both western and southern countries, one after another, are introducing a definite type of planning…True enough, their type of planning is less rigid than in the eastern countries. But both types are changing and we are looking for the best method of centralization in planning (Tinbergen, 1961).

Concurrently with the view that the capitalist economic system is increasingly becoming a planned system, Tinbergen equally maintains that the trend observed in socialist economy is for the role of planning to decrease as a result of developing market relations.

V. MAJOR PROPOSITIONS OF THE CONVERGENCE THEORY OF YESTERDAY

There are three main propositions which distinguish the earlier convergence theory ((Ellman, 1980). One is the proposed existence of a growing similarities between capitalism and socialism. The second proposition is the disappearance of the difference between capitalism and socialism as a result of drawing together based on reciprocity. That is, based on assumption that socialist system is gradually acquiring some of the features of capitalism and that capitalist system is also coming more and more to resemble socialism. The third is the far-reaching conclusion regarding the tendency towards a merger of the two systems, their transformation into a single socio-economic system of a mixed type, which synthesizes some of features of modern capitalism with elements of socialism (Ellman, 1980).

The convergence theorist hold that economic systems can achieve rapprochement primarily gradually overcoming their own shortcomings and by adopting the positive features of the other system. Tinbergen (1961)

iJETRM
International Journal of Engineering Technology Research & Management

says "each system is learning from experience and trying to overcome some of its weakness. On the other hand, the system begin to influence each other more and more".

VI. CRITICISM AGAINST THE EARLIER CONVERGENCE THEORY

Perhaps, the most ardent critic of the earliest convergence theory is Ellman, (1980). He sees the theory as a refined form of apology for capitalism. Ellman maintains that although convergence theory appeared to place itself above capitalism and socialism, it essentially proposes a synthesis of the two systems on a capitalist basis. That is, on the basis of private ownership of the means of production and distribution. He further states that "integration" and "synthesis" are essentially smokes thrown up to conceal the intended absorption of socialism by capitalism. Accordingly, convergence theory has "reflected, though in a distorted manner, some of the features of the modern capitalism." It "reflects the following actual phenomena of the modern capitalist economy: (1) the progressive socialization of production in connection with the scientific and technological revolution; (2) the growing economic role of the state, and (3) the introduction of elements of planning. Making further clarifications, Micheal Ellman states thus:

> It should be noted right away that the thesis on the growing role of the state in the capitalist economy is not in itself objectionable. However, by recognizing this role, bourgeois economists are saying nothing new. Half a century ago, Lenin pointed out that monopoly capitalism was gradually being transformed into state monopoly capitalism, and explained the nature of the later. Extensive state intervention in the economy is truly characteristics of modern capitalism. However, the interpretation given to this phenomenon by the proponents of the convergence theory is entirely erroneous. (Ellman, 1980).

Convergence theory has also been criticized for lacking in scientific validation. As noted by (Ellman, 1980), there are good number of fact which confirm the convergence theory which have become apparent in recent years. Nevertheless, the existence of confirmation is not decisive for the scientific standing of theory. Following this line of thought, Ellman states that the fundamental methodological error of the "synthesis" conception is its "idealist, wishful thinking approach to the long-term economic development of society". Anchoring his argument against the assumption of the proponents of the convergence theory that in the process of converging, the merits of socialism and capitalism will synthesize, Ellman states that economic development of society is not a matter of free choice or free will, but is governed by objective economic laws. He concludes that "the future belongs not to any visionary mix-type economic system but to socialism and communism."

Supported in this lack of scientific standing nature of convergence theory is Reinhard J. Skinner (1976). In his 1976 thesis titled *Technological Determinism: A Critique of Convergence Theory*, Skinner state that:

> Convergence theorists enjoy an almost unique intellectual position: they are supported by both academics and non-academics without really having been subject to a comprehensive analytical examination. Theirs is a hypothesis encompassing many, if not all, spheres of sociology, and applicable to the whole of industrialized nations. It is this very breadth of scope which has denied it the enquiry it deserves. Those who wish to initiate such an inquiry are assured of such resistance that they will be compelled to be rigorous in their investigation. (Skinner, 1976).

VII. MODERN THINKING IN CONVERGENCE THEORY

In recent years, particularly from 1960s, the convergence theory has been modified in recognition that the whole world was entering an era of complete industrialization. The core notion of todays' convergence theory is that as nations achieve similar levels of economic development, they will become more alike in terms of different aspects of social life. The idea is that as nations transition from the beginning stages of industrialization to highly industrialized nations, the same societal patterns will emerge and eventually create a global culture. Growing attention to large-scale changes in economic, technological, and cultural relations which were inspired by globalization has renewed interest in the ideas of convergence.

iJETRM
International Journal of Engineering Technology Research & Management

Interest in the convergence theory of today, has also been given a boost by various political developments in the 1990s, particularly the collapse of state socialism in Europe, and the progressive weakening of economic and political barriers globally. Also, the continuing movements toward unification associated with the European Union (EU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and other regional bodies are worthy of note of another significant cases of political and economic convergence on regional scale.

In Africa, the gradual abolition of restriction on trade and travel among the ECOWAS member countries for instance, the establishment of the ECOWAS passport, and the on-going discussion to harmonize a single ECOWAS currency appears also to offer support to the convergence theory of today. Adams (1955), saw the common interdependence of parts of modern economic systems to be such that, given an implied common goal, the functional relations would compel adjustment of the whole social structure to the needs of the economy, and the common goals and needs of international systems, themselves inter-related would lead to a convergence of economies and societies. One of the most controversial application of convergence theory has been in the study of modernization, where it is associated with the idea that the experience of developing nations will follow the path charted by western industrialized nations. Related to this idea is the notion of a relatively fixed pattern of development through which developing nations must pass through as they modernize (Rostow, 1960).

Walt Whiteman Rostow's stages of economic growth model argues that there are five stages of economic development. In 1960, Rostow published *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* which states that modernization occurs in five stages: traditional society, preconditions for take-off, take off, drive to maturity, and high mass consumption.

The traditional society is characterized by primary sector economy, including subsistence and traditional farming, and hunting; primitive technology and limited economic growth; lack of class or individual economic mobility, among others. This stage is where the society begins before transiting to the next stage which is Pre-conditions to take-off. In this second stage, individual social mobility begins with development of national identity and shared economic interest, increasing spread of technology and advances in existing technology, external demand for raw materials which initiate economic change towards the development of more commercial agriculture and cash crops and widespread investment in irrigation, canals, and ports. Others in this stage also includes change in social structures with flux in social equilibrium. There are three important dimensions to this transition: one, the shift from an agrarian to manufacturing society begins slowly. Two, trade and other commercial activities starts to take international dimension. Three, the surplus attained are spent on industries, infrastructure instead of being wasted on conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, agriculture becomes commercialized and mechanized through technological advancement, increasing cash crop farming and growth of agricultural entrepreneurship.

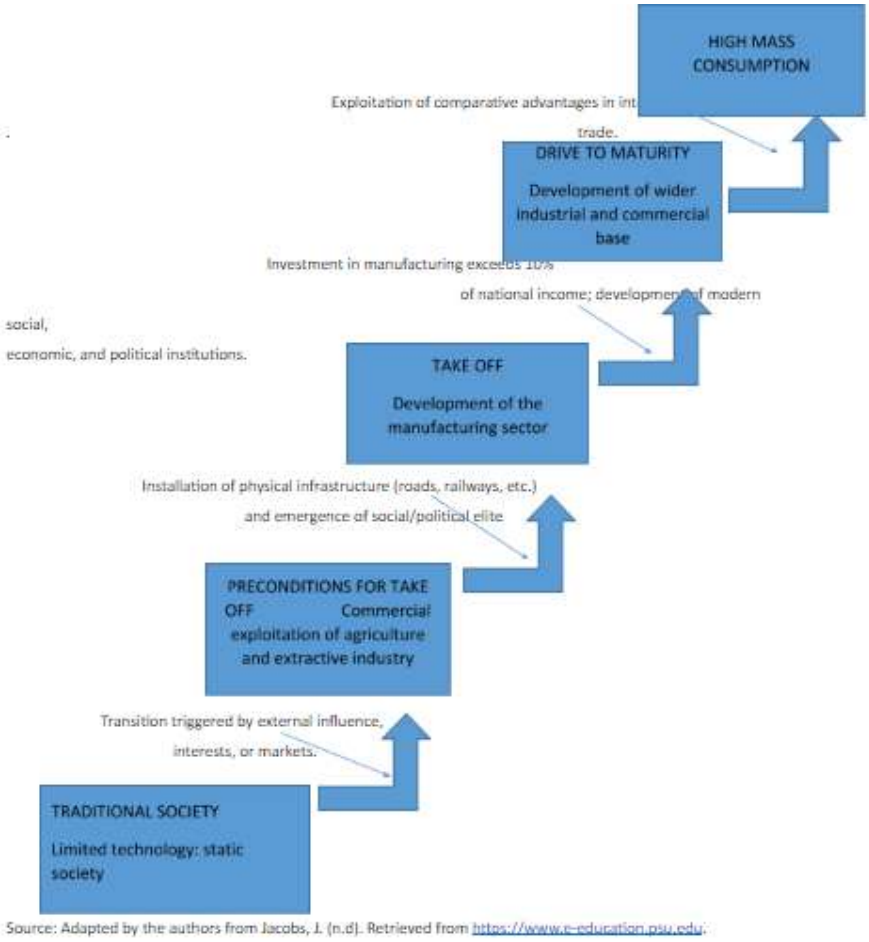
Rostow's third stage which is the stage of Take-off is characterized by rapid self-sustained growth, increase in urbanization, take-off of industrialization and technological breakthroughs, and secondary sectors expansion. For Rostow (1962), there are three main requirements for take-off, and they are: One, The rate of productive investment should rise from approximately 5% to over 10% of national income or net national product. Two, the development of one or more substantial manufacturing sectors, with a high rate of growth; and three, the existence or quick emergence of a political, social and institutional framework which exploits the impulses to expansion in modern sector and potential external economy of the take-off.

The fourth stage is the stage of Drive to maturity. Here, manufacturing shifts from investment-driven capital goods towards domestic consumer goods, diversification of the industrial base with multiple ones expanding and new ones taking root quickly, Rapid transport infrastructural development, and large-scale investment in social infrastructures such as schools, universities, hospital, sports centers, among others.

The last stage is the stage of Mass consumption which is characterized by a movement away from rural to the urban cities, the industrial base dominates the economy and consumers have disposable income above basic needs and widespread consumption of high-value consumer goods such as automobile, air conditioners, among others. The five levels of developments are illustrated according to Rostow are illustrated in the flow chart below:

iJETRM
International Journal of Engineering Technology Research & Management

Figure 1: Rostow's Stages of Economic Growth and Development



Source: Adapted by the authors from Jacobs, J. (n.d). Retrieved from https://www.e-education.psu.edu.

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Rostow (1960), asserts that countries passes through each of the above stages in their developments.

VIII. CRITICISM AGAINST THE MODERN CONVERGENCE THEORY

The use of convergence theory in the study of modernization has been attacked for its alleged assumption of unilinearity and determinism (Portes, 1973). That is, a single path of development that all societies must follow, its western ideological bias (Portes, 1973), it's teleological or historicist character (Goldthorpe, 1971), and for ignoring the structurally dependent position of less developed countries in the world economy (Wallerstein, 1974), while Frank (1967) saw the theory as Euro-centric or North America-centric. According to Portes, modernity is "the ideology of successful westernization." He further states that the problem with modern ideology is not only assumptions about a western way of life as the norm; it is also about the affirmation that "progress" and positive transformation can occur only by adopting western values (Portes, 1973).

iJETRM
International Journal of Engineering Technology Research & Management

Many sociologists, postcolonial scholars, and environmental scientists have also observed that this type of development often only further enriches the already wealthy, and/or creates or expands a middle class while exacerbating the poverty and poor quality of life experienced by the majority of the nation in poor countries. Additionally, it is a form of development that typically relies on the over-use of natural resources, displaces subsistence and small-scale agriculture, and causes widespread pollution and damage to the natural habitat.

IX.SUMMARYANDCONCLUSION

In this paper, the authors explored the earlier and modern thinking in convergence theory. The earlier version of the theory articulated by John Kenneth Galbraith (1967), and Raymond Aron (1967), focuses on the idea that economic, political, and ideological differences between the capitalist and socialist systems are gradually diminishing, leading ultimately to a merger of the two systems. However, the achievement of peaceful coexistence from the idea of convergence was criticized for allegedly being a refined form of apology for capitalism. The critics maintains that although the theory appeared to place itself above capitalism and socialism, it essentially proposes a synthesis of the two systems on a capitalist basis. That is, on the basis of private ownership of the means of production and distribution. Therefore, the critics sees the theory as a bourgeois reformist ideological doctrine. Despite this criticism however, this study argues that the convergence theory of yesterday fulfils quite specific practical function: it advocates attempt to provide the capitalist and socialist countries with ways to establish social peace through welfare-related reforms and programs. Although Nigeria is a capitalist economy for instance, the government must intervene in the areas of job creation, poverty alleviation, fuel subsidy, minimum wage, healthcare, and consumer protection. Therefore, the convergence theory of yesterday is valid in this regard.
In recent years however, particularly from 1960s, the convergence theory was modified in recognition that the whole world was entering an era of complete industrialization. The core notion of todays' convergence theory is that as nations achieve similar levels of economic development, they will become more alike in terms of different aspects of social life. Growing attention to large-scale changes in economic, technological, and cultural relations which were inspired by globalization has renewed interest in the ideas of convergence. The interest in convergence has also been given a boost by various political developments in the 1990s, particularly the collapse of state socialism in Europe, and the progressive weakening of economic and political barriers globally. Also, the continuing movements toward unification associated with the European Union (EU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and other regional bodies are worthy of note of another significant cases of political and economic convergence on regional scale. In Africa, the gradual abolition of restriction on trade and travel among the ECOWAS member countries for instance, the establishment of the ECOWAS passport and the on-going discussion to harmonize a single ECOWAS currency throughout the ECOWAS countries appear also to offer support to the convergence theory of today.

Despite being criticized for advocating a single path of development that all societies must follow for them to modernize; its alleged ideological bias in four of the west, and for ignoring the structurally dependent position of less developed countries in the world economy, it is our humble conclusion that the convergent theory of today has also played a positive roles in political and scientific discussions.

From the political point of view, the emphasis on similarities as opposed to differences has played healthy role in reducing the cold war tension, while from the scientific point of view, its emphasis on the similarities of the rival system is one of the basic elements in contemporary discussion and analysis of comparative economic systems.

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