

Malthusian Population theory and the Nigerian Economy: A Political Economy Approach

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Accepted: August 05, 2012 Published: September 22, 2012

Doi:10.5296/ijhrs.v2i4.2867

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijhrs.v2i4.2867>

Abstract

Malthusian population theory was developed as a result of the rapid population growth rate and diminishing return in agricultural sector. Malthus observed geometric ratio growth in population vis-a-vis arithmetic ratio growth in food production and envisaged world “misery” or “vice” if not checked. Subsequent development in the world however, proved the theory wrong. But this work discovers that the predicted doom of population theory is manifesting in Nigeria - rapid population growth rate, food crises, large scale poverty, ethnic and religious conflict, HIV/AIDS epidemics, etc. Although, the aforementioned are in line with the theory’s predictions, Nigerian government operational modus favors these manifestations over the years. The work therefore, recommended that the judicial arm of government be made more efficient at law-enforcement, education sector be given appropriate budgetary attention to subdue poverty, diseases and health care predicaments. Thus, conclude that although, the theory is looked upon as primitive and wrong, the forecasted melancholies still exist in the 21st century Nigeria.

Keywords: Population, Political Economy, Economic Growth

Introduction

The history of dramatic growth in population began when hunting and gathering was abandoned for farming, animal husbandry, increase in permanent settlement and eventually formation of cities. Factually, over the years and in various parts of the world, epidemics appeared and re-appeared resulting to seesaw of the world population. But triumph over these population fluctuations came during the 20th century as a result of improvement in medical sciences, bringing a tremendous fall in death rates but not immediate in birth rates (Friedman, 2000).

Thomas Malthus (1766 – 1834), a clergy man and a mathematician, was the first to give serious thought to exponential growth in population and its consequences on humanity. People, according to him, unless checked in some way doubled their numbers in every quarter of a century.

Even though, attempts at population census in Nigeria have long history traceable to 19th and 20th centuries, the rapid population growth rate showed its statistical revelation in the census of 1952/53 with total population of 30.4 million with a growth rate of 2.1%. The second population census conducted in 1963 put Nigeria's population at 55.6 million and growth rate at 5.6% per annum. Though, the 1973 census was controversial and the result generally unacceptable, the 1991 census put Nigeria's population and its growth rate at 88.5 million and 2.6% respectively (Andrew, 2002). The last population census conducted in 2006 revealed that Nigeria's population is over 140 million. Today, Nigeria is ranked the most populated country in Africa and 8th in the world (Kunle, 2010).

This trend indicates that Nigeria is one of the fastest growing countries in the world. Her population therefore, is expected to double in less than 25 year with population growth rate of 2 – 3.3% (UN, 2001). This high population growth rate is essentially due to persistent high fertility rate of 5.3 children per woman and decreasing death rate from 27 to 15 per 1000 persons (UN, 2010).

The objective of this study is to briefly review Malthusian population theory, to show the theory's relevance to the contemporary Nigerian economy and try relating it to the political economy of the country. The paper is divided in to four sections. The first part introduced the work, the second part reviews Malthusian population theory, part three considers the relevance of Malthusian theory to the Nigerian economy and part five from the conclusion part of the paper.

Tenets of Malthusian population theory

The theoretical underpinning of this work lies in Malthusian theory of population. Reverend Thomas Malthus observed two things that necessitated his work: the rapid increase in population of Great Britain as at the time of his first publication and the law of diminishing return experienced in the area of agricultural output. Thus, he declared:

“The best lands are taken up first, then the next best, then the inferior, at last the worst; at each stage the amount of food produced is less than before. If existing cultivated land were farmed intensively the same inexorable law will operate and again there will be diminishing return. Consequently, it would be impossible to maintain expansion of food production to keep pace with increasing population” (Hanson, 1977).

The fundamental assumption of Malthus based on his experience of time, is that human beings are like plant and non - rational animals – have the instinct and urge to reproduce. Therefore, without a check, human beings would grow to an ‘incalculable’ number to fill the world in few thousand years (Weeks, 2002). In summary, the theory postulates that, population increases at geometric ratio while food production increases at arithmetic ratio. It goes further that if the situation is left unchecked, at a time, population will grow beyond

food supply.

He therefore, envisaged or predicted two checks to be in control. Of course, Malthus was aware that starvation rarely operates directly to kill people; something else intervenes to kill before starvation, this he referred to as “positive” checks. They include death via war, malnutrition and pestilence. There are also “preventive” checks – limit to birth via infanticide, abortion, contraception etc which he referred to as ‘improper means’ and not economically productive – a position borne out of morality as a clergy man. He further pointed out that positive checks and other forms of preventive checks are “misery” or “vice” that would markedly lower the dignity of human nature (Weeks, 2002).

Malthus argued that, the best form of population control is the moral restraint which meant late marriage, remaining chaste for the meantime – the only option to save people and their communities from ‘rags and squalid poverty’. In other words, poverty was an inevitable result of rapid population growth. Although, he was not unaware of improved farming methods, the opening up of new lands in places like USA, New Zealand, Austria, South Africa, etc; and improvement in transportation which eased international trade as possibilities of large output to the expanding population, he however, argued that these improvements were “merely to postpone the evil day”, (Hanson, 1977).

According to Todaro and Smith 2009, human population has tremendously grown over the years. At the beginning of Christianity, the world population was about 250 million. From 1 A.D. to 1750, it increased to 750 million (three times the number that exists at the beginning of Christianity). And, from 1750 – 1950 - in 200 years, the world population increased by double. But in just four decades thereafter, (i.e. 1950 – 1990) it increased to more than double, bringing the figure to 5.3 billion. The world entered the 21st century with over 6 billion people. By 2011; the world’s population is estimated to be 7 billion (Babare, 2011).

The foregoing discussion presupposes that the growth aspect of the Malthusian theory could be said to be applicable to some degree. Its predictions of doom would however, be said to have lost its earlier prestige as a result of many criticisms which includes the following:

- i. Improvement in technology which has enhanced increased food production at geometric ratio.
- ii. Improvements in contraception that permit sex without necessarily producing children.
- iii. Establishment of peace as a result of improved governments and their security mechanisms which have relatively checked or hindered communal and tribal conflicts.

Malthusian theoretical relevance to Nigerian Economy

The major population policy by Nigerian government towards population control was during Babangida’s administration. The policy goals were to improve standard of living and quality of life of Nigerians, to promote Nigeria’s health and welfare especially via preventing premature death of vulnerable groups – mothers and children and to achieve lower population growth rate (New Nigeria Daily 12th and 13th/01/1989). These goals have a long way to go to be called achieved goals.

The population of Nigeria has not grown geometrically as postulated by Malthus, however

over time growth has been tremendous. For instance, it doubled in about 25 years (table 1). The ‘misery’ or ‘vice’ envisaged by the theorist have manifested in Nigerian economy and continue to do so.

Agriculture which was (citadel of Malthusian theory) the leading sector in the 1960s has declined due to low investment and level of technology. Although, the sector is richly endowed with cultivatable land mass of 71.2 million hectares out of the available 98.3 million hectares (only 47% is cultivated) and employs 70% of the country’s labor force (UN, 2001), but majority of the farmers are still involved in using rudimentary technology of cutlasses and hoes (Ukeji, 2001). In the same vein, harvest technology is so primitive that the annual losses to harvest amount to 25 million metric tons of agricultural products with estimated value put at N500 billion (Exchange rate in table 1) annually (Ango, 2002). Thus, domestic food production continued to lag behind the food needs of the population (Avan and Uza, 2002). These have led Nigeria to become net food importer.

Table 1: Nigeria’s population and some other variables

	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
Population (in millions)	64.7	75.5	86.7	96.8	115.2	133.5	158.8
Poverty (%)	28.3	46.3	42.7	65.6	70.4	54.4	54.0
Total Food import (millions of Naira)	1,437.5	1,199	3,474.5	88,349.9	113,630.5	193,359.1	522,333.10
Percentage of Total Food import	13.0	17.0	7.6	11.7	11.5	6.9	6.58
Average Exchange rate (N = \$1)	0.55	0.89	8.04	21.89	102.11	132.15	150.30

Sources: CBN Major Economic, Financial and Banking indicator 1999, Annual report and statements of accounts 2003, 2004, and 2010, Statistical Bulletins 2011 and 2012 and NPP 2012.

Although, there has not been acute hunger in Nigeria over the years, but records suggest sourcing of food via importation to support the ever growing population. For instance, ‘as at 1985, the report of the study group set-up by government to examine the food situation of the country, showed that there was hardly a single food commodity in which the country can claim to be self sufficient’(GLWI, 2002). This fact remained true up to date in Nigeria. In table 1 above, Nigerian economy perpetually imported food to augment domestic production from 1980 - 2012. In other words, Nigeria’s rapid growing population cannot feed her.

There has been large scale poverty in Nigeria over the years. Over 50% of the population lives below poverty line (in line with the theorist suggestion of moral restrain if not there will be poverty). Majority of Nigerians live with less than \$ 1.00 per day (Ango, 2002) and

Nigeria is in the list of 15 places with worse poverty incidences in the world (El-rufai, 2012). In other words, majority of Nigerians today, live with poverty and deprivation and in the words of Nelson Mandela, 'poverty....ranks with slavery and apartheid as social evils' (UNDP, 2006).

According to Malthus' suggestion on population checks, perceived pestilence as part of positive checks. This is also relevant, when compared to today's Human Immune Deficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) epidemic worldwide. The disease is also biting hard on the rapid growing Nigerian population. For instance, from zero percent prevalence in 1986, Nigeria HIV/AIDS prevalence jumped to 5.8% in 2001, thus making Nigeria the first black nation to shoot up to 5% record (Ogugua & Emerole, 2006). Moreover, Nigeria ranked fourth (about 2.7million) largest number of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWAS) in the world after south Africa's (4.2m) India's (3.7m) and Ethiopia with 3.0 million (UN, 2001). Today, the Nigerian HIV/AIDs burden is 3.5 million people ranking it the third after India and South Africa respectively (NACA, 2012). In the same vein, malaria that has been totally banished in some parts of the world is responsible for as much as two hundred and fifty thousand (250,000) deaths among children annually and 66% of those who visit the clinics having cases of malaria in Nigeria (UNICEF, 2009).

Although, there has been tremendous improvement in population preventive measures, Nigeria is yet to adopt fully these practices. Most Nigerian women still give birth outside the hospitals and do not have access to modern facilities to avoid infant and maternal mortality. Nigeria's maternal mortality is put at 545 deaths per 100,000 and infant mortality of 75 deaths per 1,000 live birth (NDHS, 2008). In addition, there is barbaric practice of giving birth to unwanted babies and discarding them, as a result, motherless baby homes in Nigeria cities. This is also in agreement with the misery predicted by Malthus.

The Nigeria's political Economy

The 'misery' or 'vice' envisaged by the theorist that manifests in contemporary Nigerian would have been adequately addressed with responsible and responsive policy mechanisms. But that has not the case; rather government operational modus that favors large scale corruption (with little or no check) among the stake holder that makes the economy's social indicator fit the forecasted doom of population theory. Nigeria is rich in both human and natural resources – 37th largest economy and 11th largest number of labor force in the world (El-Rufai, 2012). She is blessed with wide expanse of land – 98.321 million hectares, out of which 75.3% is arable, 21 billion barrels of crude oil reserve with 112 trillion cubic feet estimated gas reserve (associated and non associated), tar sand deposit estimated at 31 cubit barrels of oil equivalent (CBN, 2000). Others include iron ore, coal, lime stone, columbine, gold, marble, etc at different locations of the country. Yet, the political economy environment cannot translate these abundant resources to subdue and avert the Malthusian primitive predicted dooms.

Experiences in Nigeria have shown that the governmental system favors large scale corruption and mismanagement of resources. Occupants of the executive and the legislative arms of government mostly come to power through election malpractices as clearly agreed by President late Musa Yar'Adua in his inaugural speech "our elections have short comings"

(maxsiollun.wordpress.com). Therefore, government policies and expenditures are more of self oriented with little or no checks. For instance, several agricultural programs targeted at domestic food sufficiency since 1960s, such as River Basin Development Authorities, Agricultural Development Projects, Green Revolution, etc were undermined due largely to lack of political will, therefore, making Nigeria remain a net food importer.

The existence of government and its security agencies have not deterred religious, ethnic and tribal violence thus, the state of insecurity in the country. Tribal and ethnic conflicts or violence is common claiming lives frequently in Nigeria. For instance about 153 people lost their lives in Zango-kataf crisis of 1992 while over 500,000 people were killed in Tiv/Jukum conflicts (Egwu, 2002). Others include the frequent Jos ethic and religious crisis, the Ife-Modekeke episode, the Kano religions riots, the Urhobo and Itsekiri crisis, the Niger Delta crisis, the recent Boko Haram killings, etc. These and many more have their respective records of loose of lives and properties which conforms with positive checks of Malthusian theory.

The law enforcement agencies are still inadequate in service delivery. Law enforcement agencies like the court and the Police Force do little or nothing to prosecute members of the upper class but only descend on the common man. For instance, former Inspector General of Police Tafa Balogun in 2005 was charged of corruptly enriching himself to the tune of N16 billion (Adunu, 2012) and the indictment of Cecilia Ibru, a bank Director, of the fraud of over ₦ 191billion (Tony and Ademola, 2010) were both incarcerated for only a six month jail terms. These are clear cases of “short arm” of the law to the rich. James Onanefe Ibori, former Governor of Delta State was charged with numerous corruption cases by Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to Nigerian court but acquitted and discharged of all 143-count charges against him, it was the U.K. court that finally jailed Ibori for same offences after he admitted to have embezzled about £157 Million belonging to Delta State government (Adunu, 2012). This sector has also failed to bring the perpetrators of the re-occurring and pervasive political, religious, ethnic and tribal killings to book, etc.

Majority of Nigerian masses on their part do not know their rights as citizens. They do not know how, where or when to protest for their rights. For instance, the culprits of \$1.8 billion Siemen Telecoms bribery saga involving Nigerian top government officials have gone unpunished, but both the company and the culprits who are nationals of USA pleaded guilty to criminal violations (agreed to payback) and were made to face the wrath of the law (Yusuf, 2010). Saminu Turaki, a onetime State Governor accused of embezzling ₦36 billion (Badejo, 2012), Former governor of Plateau State Joshua Dariye was accused to have siphoned N1.3 billion of Plateau State, Former governor of Kwara State Bukola Saraki involved in a wrong deal of N21 million loan (Adunu, 2012) while in office, but all later became a sitting Senators of Federal Republic of Nigeria; both the law and the masses were quite about it. It is also a fact that the same masses receive a token as bribe for their votes.

Almost all Nigerian past administrations realized and accused preceding administrators as corrupt but tend to wear same crown immediately. The Coker committee of the first military administration revealed the corrupt practices of the First Republic’s Federal Representative Ministers of Finance and Aviation (Eddy and Akpan, 2008), Murtala Ramat Mohammed’s Tribunal found 10 out of 12 Governors wanting of corruption (Siollun, 2003), Saraki’s

Committee of Second Republic revealed Obasanjos first government's N2. 8 Billion NNPC scandal, Buhari/ Idigbon's military administration tribunal accused, convicted and for the first time and only time passed prison sentences ranging from 20 to 100 years to the political elites(Siollun, 2003), Abacha's Okigbo Commission reported \$12.2 Billion oil earnings that disappeared between 1990 and 1994 (Rupert, 1998), some of Obasanjo's public expenditures – the N1.3 Trillion used to fix power sector, the \$700 Million used to fix Refineries and N300 Billion into constructions and rehabilitations of roads leaving the sectors with little or no improvement. Other popular scandals associated with the administration were the unaccounted N400 million uncovered in the Defence Ministry by T.y Danjuma, N150 billion in the Nigerian Port Authority, \$302 million unaccounted NNPC oil revenue as reported by Engr. Hamman Tukur and unaccounted N800 million NNPC companies revenue in the first five years of his administration (Dikko,2003).

The most recent mega corruption in the current administration is the case of Farouk Lawan, oil subsidy Ad Hoc Committee Chairman who discovered more than N1 trillion scandals(over 900 % above the actual sum) Hassan and Mohammad, (2012) but was babyishly videotaped taking bribe with a "culprit" to exonerate him (Oboyin, 2012).

All these cases of insincerity attracted either committee of enquiry, brief arrest or media noise – nothing more just like similar thousand and one other cases that are uncovered in this piece of study. These revelations in this study justifies World Bank studies on public expenditure that revealed that as much as 70% of Nigeria's resources were siphoned into individual pockets between 1970 – 1999 leaving the country with one of the worse social indicators (Dulue, 2003) and United Nation's Executive Director's (office of Drugs and Crimes) revelation that past leaders stole away Nigeria's \$400 billion before 1999 (Dikko, 2007). The preceding Obasanjo's administration was not an exception, though championed the cause of fighting corruption, but "report so far, indicated from May 1999–mid 2006, the monies stolen within the period under review, was more than what our past leaders stole put together from independence to before handing over to his democratically elected government"(Dikko, 2007). The favorable atmosphere for large scale corruption is political economy reasons responsible for primitive Malthusian theoretical predictions as they relate to 21st century Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Malthusian population theory was proved to be far from empirical reality, especially in the developed world. But more than two hundred years after his work, indices show that the theory's predictions in some ways apply to Nigeria. Nigeria is currently experiencing rapid population growth, has experienced civil war and its people are yet to adopt modern and advanced technology in the area of agriculture. There is poverty, malnutrition and food crises, Nigeria is a home to a variety of social ills, the likes of ethnic and religious crises, unwanted babies experiences, etc. All these can be summed up as the characteristics that Malthus referred to as "misery" or "vice" that would claim the lives of many. These 'miseries' and 'vices' are actually claiming lives directly and indirectly in Nigeria.

The work therefore, recommend that Nigeria government should be committed to the pledge of the twenty seven per cent (27%) education budgetary allocation standard of the United

Nation Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This would go a long way in improving the standard of living of the people in Nigeria. Thus:

- i. A guide to poverty reduction as a result of freedom from chains of ignorance and illiteracy.
- ii. A guide and improvement in attitude toward Health care via acquisition and application of knowledge to subdue HIV/AIDS, high infant and maternal mortality rates and other diseases.
- iii. Source to training for export of human resources as a source of capital inflow (repatriation) and population reduction (migration).

Judiciary need to be reformed and sensitized about anti developmental effect of sector's corruption and powers of law enforcement agencies to prosecute defaulters from all levels of society. These would make the sector more effective, save the country the colossal waste (embezzlement) to the few opportunists, and duplication of duty and expenditures on institutions like EFCC and the likes.

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