

Dialectical Nigerianism: A Practical Literary Criticism of Ethnic Militancy and Sectarian Insurgency as Antithesis of the Ruling Class Ideology

Ile, Onyebuchi James (Ph.D Münster, Germany)

Head, Department of English Language and Literature,

Nigerian Turkish Nile University

E-mail: j.ile@ntnu.ed.ng

Abstract

Years of training in humanistic education, especially, years of training in literary education exposes the person undergoing the training to both macro and micro information types of culture, politics, history, religion, sociology, human psychology and philosophy. The person that has undergone this type of training, essentially, transforms these information types to knowledge. He or she even goes further to transform the knowledge into judgment and action – that is, he or she uses knowledge in a concrete and practical way. The objective of this paper is to study the flaws of dialectical materialism and see how these flaws could be recycled in order to produce a new concept, the concept of dialectical Nigerianism, which stipulates that societies as Nigeria does not have those indicators to make dialectical materialism applicable. Moreover, dialectical Nigerianism argues that since the perfect mode of production anticipated through dialectical materialist knowledge application was utopia, dialectical materialism is, therefore, metaphysical. Therefore dialectic Nigerianism hopes to integrate empiricism and idealism in the quest to create a new order for Nigeria.

Keywords: Dialectic Materialism, Dialectic Nigerianism, Utopia, Empiricism, Information types, Humanistic Education

Introduction

Apropos using knowledge in a concrete and practical way: It is common knowledge to students of Marxist Ideology that human society is divided into classes and that this division gave rise to contradictions or conflicts in idealist and materialist world views as well as metaphysical and dialectical ones (see Ngugi, 1997: 67; see also Engel, 1996: 13, 14). Dialectics is an ancient field of study that dates as far back as the days of Socrates. In dialectics, logic and reason, not emotion, are required in identifying truth. The truth of an argument is always determined by how the contradictions of the enquiry are resolved through their clarification –that is, building a synthesis from thesis and antithesis of an argument.

Therefore, the idealist's world is a world in which realities are mental constructs or mentally constructed –that is, there are no realities in the sense of these realities being independent of the mind. For the idealist, therefore, human ideas, identifiable in values and beliefs, shape society. For the materialist, however, the world as matter is an independent observable reality, which is at his or her disposal to mold, change to suit his or her whims and caprices in accordance with his or her capacity to understand its laws and utilize them. Not only is the world as matter an observable reality to the materialist, man and his way of thinking, society and nature are all observable realities. While a materialist deals with matter as material, as something observable and therefore changeable, the Metaphysician deals with existence and its nature in a non-empirical way –that is, he or she uses the mind's capacity to enquire into things not observable (see again Engel, 1996: 17-26).

Therefore, dialectical materialism as proposed by Marxism would mean a logical, empirical method of enquiring into nature, human society, nature of existence in society, etc., with a view to turning to advantage the knowledge acquired from assiduously studying these realities to the benefit of the working class, who constitute the mass of the oppressed and exploited in society. If we understand dialectical materialism to be this, then dialectical Nigerianism would mean both logical, empirical and metaphysical method of looking at Nigeria as an observable reality –that is, its social structures, human and material conditions, etc., as well as the turning to advantage the knowledge gained from carefully studying its realities and contradictions to the advantage of the Nigerian people, who are suffering under the oppression and exploitation of the deeply corrupt “working” and ruling class.

On the metaphysical level, the writer had already speculated that dialectical materialism is metaphysical in the sense that the perfect state it desired, which is communism, is utopia; even when it was achieved, it still failed. Therefore, dialectical Nigerianism incorporates metaphysics in its understanding of existence in the Nigerian context. Apropos existence: quite unlike dialectical materialism, which tended to reject the Godhead, seeing it as part of metaphysics, that is not verifiable, dialectical Nigerianism integrates the Godhead in its quest to interpret Nigeria. It does so because it believes that man's quest for perfection explains the fact that there is a perfect condition, which even dialectical materialism tried to create with communism. Dialectical Nigerianism sees that perfect state as representative of “Godness”, hence the magnetic pull it has on a conscious man, who aspires to perfection and who naturally ennobles and improves his or her humanity in that quest.

Dialectical Nigerianism understands this desire for perfection as inherently characteristics of man; therefore it identifies that in man's socialization. Socialization creates virtues and vices as well. Man identifies the vices as those things in man's society in the process of socialization that work against both man and society. Man, having identified that in the process of socialization, sees overcoming them as the healing for his or her society. Therefore, the desire to heal his or her society forms part of man's mission in the process of understanding himself/herself and attaining perfection. And the whole of this

process justifies the existence of a transcendental reality and even predestination; predestination in the sense that there has been from the beginning of time a road that leads to perfection and damnation as well, which man discovers in the process of socialization.

Therefore, the conscious knowledge of the existence a transcendental reality and the need to strive towards perfection is the inherent characteristic of Nigeria as the will of the whole of Nigerians and as such must form part of its mission in its development. Such will also be the state of Nigeria when the poor, the jobless, the oppressed and the exploited will have overthrown the leadership of the ruling and working classes.

Thesis

Observing Nigeria as a reality, one sees that it is a nation of nations. This is one of its realities. Another Nigerian reality is manifest in its social structure. The social structure consists of different classes:

- (a) the upper class, which comprises the political class and the business moguls, who are in partnership with each other;
- (b) the working class, which comprises the senior public servants in government establishments, banks, universities, parastatals, government agencies and research institutes.
- (c) There are also the working class people in the lower cadre of establishments and then the Marxist's working class, the proletariat, who work in privately owned industries and multinational companies in manufacturing and oil businesses. They are indeed the proletariat, who are poor;
- (d) however, there is also another class within the poor working class people, who are indeed the poorest of the poor, because they are jobless –beggars, poor widows, the Almajiris: all these people belong to the lowest class in the social structure.

The ruling classes do not necessarily own the means of production, because they are bereft of the business acumen to own and manage means of production. They, however, have access to the coffers of the nation or at least own oil blocks, which spin money like money spinning machines through underhand deals in oil subsidy¹ or are in partnership with businessmen, the real owners of the means of production or they are using the instruments of state power to personally aggrandize themselves.

The nature of existence of Nigeria is traceable to the condition of its state of evolution. Before the coming of the Europeans to the place known as Nigeria today, Nigerian peoples lived as nations (See Omotosho, 1996: 41). They interacted through trade and commerce. Therefore, their different states of existence or values might have predetermined their goals, needs and interests (see Buzuev & Gorodnov, 1987: 85). Furthermore, the Amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates, which in reality was the merging of the "tribes", engendered cultural pluralism. In other words, there was going to be a clash of incompatible values and institutions. And if one has to follow arguments proffered to justify colonization, colonialism ought then to be a modernizing process, hence the amalgamation (see Horowitz, 1985: 97-105).

¹ The Farouk Lawal and Otedola Saga are case studies of underhand deals among the ruling class and the bourgeoisie.

The colonial officers might have intended through this to bring about a contact situation among the “tribes” and enhance thereby economic competition: such contact situation might have been expected to trigger the modernization process (see Horowitz). What this means, in effect, is that Nigeria, ontologically, is *primitive or traditional, modern and post-modern*. These contradictions make dialectical materialism as propounded by Marx and Engel rather metaphysical: while dialectic materialism proposes that human life in primitive societies would consist essentially in the struggle to survive, by appropriating what nature itself provided, the mode of thinking in a communist state, which is supposedly in its highest form of development, would be characterized by the unity of thought and action –that is, by the unity of theory and practice (see Engel. 1996: 17-25). Nevertheless, the primitive state immanent in a modern and post-modern Nigeria does not, however, show any form of incapacity for abstract thinking – that is, in the ability to unify theory and practice in the mind’s capacity to articulate, analyze and understand phenomena. It does also not overtly demonstrate the ontological propensity to survive entirely by instinct by solely appropriating from nature. Even the pre-colonial Nigeria portrayed in Chinua Achebe’s ***Things Fall Apart*** (1958) did not fit into the picture of the primitive society described by dialectic materialists: by implication, therefore, the primitive or traditional society existent in the modern and post-modern Nigeria today has emerged from the primitive condition of even pre-colonial era. However, the ignorance, prejudice and narrow- mindedness associated with primordial conditions are still existent.

Indeed, although dialectical materialism might have been justified in proposing that the capitalist mode of production would carry the separation of manual or unskilled and mental or skilled labor to the extreme and even attain its highest level of development through state monopoly capitalism and eventual multinational monopolies with attendant dictatorship of the monopolies (see Engel 1996), yet its alternative –that is, communism, which is, according to Marxists, the most perfect state of modes of production, has not been successful because it did not bring the heaven it promised the working class. The dictatorship of the working class it ushered in became indeed the dictatorship of a few powerful working class people, who have succeeded in being what George Orwell described in his epic fable, ***Animal Farm*** (1945), as all animals being equal, but of some being more equal than the others. He also showed how this few powerful working class people, who have become more equal than others, operated in his masterpiece, ***1984***(1949), where the state became a big brother that watched everybody through its secret security apparatuses.

The contradictions of class relations in the Nigerian state make dialectical materialist method highly impracticable: dialectic materialist method talks of bourgeois ideology and the Bourgeoisie are the new owners of the means of production during the age of enlightenment who desired only wealth maximization and the surplus value derivable from labor force. There might still be some owners of means of production in Nigeria, who might fit into dialectic materialist picture of bourgeoisie; however, owners of means of production in Nigeria are to be found among government officials –that is, civil servants, the political class, who are actually the ruling class and business moguls. When members of the working class are also owners of properties and means of production, then another dialectical method of enquiry becomes necessary in the Nigerian situation to really understand Nigeria’s evolutionary trends and its realities that should be observed.

Wole Soyinka described in his ***Season of Anomy*** (1973) the synergy in the relationship that exists between the ruling and working classes in Nigeria as a sodality that transcends regional boundaries. It is these classes that actually exploit and oppress the poor in Nigeria. The exploitation and oppression have nothing to do with the political economy of their relationship –no, there cannot be any form of political economy here because there is no labor to necessitate the exploitation of labor force: there is instead the embezzlement of funds required to uplift the living standard of the people, which includes of course the working and ruling classes.

Dialectical Nigerianism would, therefore, mean understanding clearly the contradictions of the Nigerian society and knowing what to do with the knowledge derived from such empirical study. Dialectical Nigerianism does not speculate that the dictatorship occasioned by the monopoly of state capitalism and that of the multinationals will be overthrown by the dictatorship of the working class through the highest and most perfect mode of production – communism –no: dialectical Nigerianism speculates that the oppressed and exploited poor, upon enlightenment through humanistic education will orchestrate a revolt akin to the terrorism of ethnic militants and Boko Haram insurgents. Years of training in humanistic education mean being exposed to information –macro information on cultural types, political, religious, historical, sociological, philosophical and human psychological types. It has been argued on previous essays that on the individual level, culture as a macro-information type has micro-information types, for example, values, morals, belief systems, ethics; that politics as a macro-information type has micro-information types, too, for example, power dynamics, power relations, political players and politicking; that the micro-information types of religion are the denominational issues, the Moslem/Christian issues, the supernatural issues, etc; that the micro-information types of history will be all about origins, evolutionary trends, hindsight and foresight, etc, while the micro-information types of sociology will orientate the individual on human relation, its motives, interests and needs, gender problems, etc. The philosophical micro-information types will be on life, its essence, its future, how it is spent, etc; and finally the human psychological micro-information types are always about human behavior and psychology. All this information turned into knowledge will be at the disposal of the oppressed and exploited class.

As can be seen, this future form of organized terrorism of the oppressed and exploited will not carry any dent of ignorance or prejudice as it does in the rascality of today's terrorism, because their actions will be informed by knowledge. If the state structure is overthrown, then not necessarily because this class of people want to take over the state structure and initiate a dictatorship of the poor and exploited over the rich and influential –no; it will be because they want to instill discipline into governance and make the ruling and “working” class people, who have initiated already a dictatorship not, however, driven by state capitalism, but by some form of sodality that transcends regionalism, hesitate in fear at the trap of corruption. In the perfect state envisioned by the theory of dialectical Nigerianism, capitalism, though driven by the desire for profit, will truly serve the needs of Nigerians in the sense that no surplus value will be expected from labor force in the sense of exploiting it without adequately remunerating it, because the fear of the ever ready oppressed and exploited, who have released themselves from the shackles of oppression and exploitation by the rich ruling and working class people, will always hang around like a bad conscience in the psyche of every Nigerian. This fear of them will be so real that no political delegate will take the risk of abusing the trust giving to him by his or her people, who constitute the majority of those who were once oppressed and exploited.

In this perfect state, the structure of government will be such that will accommodate the nature of the ethnic make-up of the Nigerian state. In other words, the so-called village assembly of the South-eastern people of Nigeria, driven by their republican nature, the so called monarchical structure peculiar to the North and Western part of Nigeria, will be assiduously studied and tapped into to get a structure of government to serve the interest of all Nigerian to the extent that the structure will never be alien to them and the democratic structure immanent in it will be such that will be peculiar only to Nigeria, but must contain some universal basic principles to demonstrate the fact that we are part of a common humanity.

Dialectical Nigerianism speculates that the revolution has already started among the pure intellectual class, who are neither part of the ruling class nor part of the working class in the sense of having sold their conscience to the devil. They could be seen in organized civil societies, who have consistently acted like watchdogs of society. They are sighted in the book clubs that have arisen in almost all the major capitals of the Nigerian state –their activities range from critiquing books that reflect Nigerian

realities to poetry slams and reading sections. Everyday new crop of Nigerians become members of these literary societies and discourse continually on the state of the nation: they are charged by the dramas that are unfolding in the oil subsidy saga; they are amazed at how corrupt men are exposed by the contradictions of their actions. And yet, yet, the end is still not in sight for the ruling and working classes, who have unleashed the worst form of dictatorship on Nigerians through their sodalities: the revolution awaits another class –the class of the marginalized, the jobless, the poor and the oppressed. Yes the class of educated Almajiris, whose minds have become so expanded by the critical knowledge their education shall put at their disposal. Once this class is ready, a new Nigeria shall emerge and the foundations of the Nigerian structure shall be shaken by the earthquake of its superstructure. Only then shall we attain the Pax Nigeriana of our dreams, where there will no longer be a national cake to be shared by the ruling and working class of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria as explicated by Chinua Achebe in his ***A Man of the People* (1966)**.

References

- Achebe, Chinua. Things Fall Apart. London: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1958
- A Man of the People. London: Heinemann, 1966
- Engel, Stefan. The Struggle over the Mode of Thinking in the Working-Class Movement. Essen: Neuer Weg Verlag und Druck GmbH, 1995
- Horowitz, Donald. Ethnic Groups in Conflict. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985
- Omotosho, Kole. Achebe & Soyinka. New Perspectives on African Literature. London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1996
- Orwell, George. Animal Farm. London: Secker and Warburg, 1945 Nineteen Eighty-Four. London: Secker & Warburg, 1949
- Vladimir, Buzuev & Vladimir, Gorodnov. ABC of Social and Political Knowledge: What is Marxism-Leninism. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987
- Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi. Writers and Politics: A re-engagement with Issues of Literature and Society. Nairobi: Heinemann, 1997
- Wole, Soyinka. Season of Anomy. London: Arena Books, 1973