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UNDYING MORTIFS OF SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM IN AFRICAN LITERARY CRITICISM

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Abstract

The social tremor in communist Russia in the late 80s and the eventual collapse of communism in 1991 evoked doubts on further relevance of scientific socialism as a critical tradition generally and as a literary criterion for African literature particularly. Even before the crisis in the Soviet Union, antagonists of scientific socialism had written it off as a failed theory because, according to them, its social prognosis on the eventual overthrow of capitalism had failed to come true. This paper argues that it is patently fallacious for the antagonists of socialism to hold that the collapse of Socialism in Soviet Union is tantamount to failure of Socialism. It is argued that Soviet Socialism or Communism is a practice while Marxism or Socialism is a theory. Deviation in practice does not make a theory impotent or irrelevant. It is submitted that scientific socialism is a theory of social development and as such has pioneered the study of objective social conditions as the basic criteria for understanding of human society. It is further argued that the enlightenment thus purveyed by socialism has made it to be ever relevant and a veritable tool in the hands of radical African writers who employ it not only to critique the dependency and underdevelopment brought on the continent by capitalism, but also to point the way to African liberation and development. This paper makes the conclusion that philosophy and literature are in a symbiotic relationship and that such relationship has continued to contribute to the much needed community-building in our troubled age. The philosophical methods of analysis and logical argumentation will be employed in this paper to achieve its research goals adumbrated above.

Keywords: Undying, Mortifs, Scientific, Socialism, Literary, Critic.

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INTRODUCTION

Given the strong emotions which a mention of socialism still evokes despite its so-called 'official collapse' and given also that it has through its long and venerable history acquired an elastic medley of meanings, it is necessary to play safe amidst such a thicket of meanings and usages by stating at this very beginning the meaning to be attached to it in this discourse. The second underpinning concept of this discourse, literary criticism, is neither evocative nor a much-loaded term but also merits elucidation to further the intelligibility of this essay.

Scientific Socialism

The word 'scientific' is used to describe 'socialism' according to Karl Marx to distinguish it from those of Fourier, Proudhon, and Saint-Simon who, like Marx, were equally concerned with improving the social order. Marx's life-long friend and collaborator, Frederick Engels, will be our guide in making this distinction. Engels described these other strands of socialism as 'utopian socialism' because these philosophies are based on metaphysical conceptions of 'a natural' order of liberty that exists irrespective of civilization's material, technological and

productive capabilities. 'Natural' here means that these metaphysical conceptions are static and absolute moral values. On the other hand, Marxist socialism is termed 'scientific' because it is based on the ideas of dialectical materialism and historical materialism. Thus, scientific socialism is in most books and other writings described simply as Marxist socialism or even simply as socialism. The same style of description will be adopted in this essay. Meanwhile, it would be inappropriate to take the reader through the misty recesses of the metaphysics of dialectical and historical materialism or the abstruse cogitations on alienation, class struggle, consciousness and ideology which stem from them and present a rounded picture of scientific socialism. An intellectual anatomy of Marxism is not intended here. The intention here is to bring out the message of Marxism and see what role it plays or ought to play in African literary criticism. It is in this constricted perspective that scientific socialism is construed as "a socio-economic philosophy which holds that social existence or economic condition of a people is the sole determinant of man's life, ideals, beliefs and value judgment." (Akpuru-Aja, 1997) In other words, Marx asserts that man must first eat, clothe and shelter himself before he forms his opinion about politics, culture and ideology.

Socialist writers put this point in a technical jargon by saying that human history is ultimately determined and explained by methods and relations of material production. Engels gave such technical rendering in a speech at the graveside of Marx thus:

“... the production of the immediate material means of subsistence and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch form the institution upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, art and even the ideas on religion of the people concerned have been evolved and in the light of which they must therefore, be explained instead of vice versa.” (Engels, 1975).

Scientific socialism, therefore, seeks to enlighten and mobilize the working class to the end that capitalism is the very source of their woes, poverty and penury and the hope for change rests with the unity of the working class. Scientific socialism predicted the overthrow of capitalism by the concert of the working class and the establishment of socialist state as a transition stage in the ineluctable historic march to communism, a classless society which Marx held to be the endpoint of History, a sort of secular paradise. The active and loud insistence and emphasis on the concert of the working class by Marx and socialist writers unmistakably demonstrate their methodological conviction that oppressive capitalist order cannot be brought down by anything less than practical action. Thus, scientific socialism transcends bare philosophy or theory. It is also a method and hence an instrument of social analysis and social revolution. This is borne out in Marx’s memorable critique of bourgeois philosophy in the words: “the philosophers have only interpreted the world differently: the point is, however, to change it” which are engraved on his tombstone at the High Gate Cemetery in London.

As Professor Stumpf has rightly observed, “for at least one-third of world’s population in the second half of the twentieth century, Marxism provides the official philosophical point of view, or the systematic articulation of beliefs about the world and man’s destiny in it”. (1976). Indisputably, scientific socialism is expansive both in theory and practice and can bear the following characterization: an intricate philosophic system that rivals religion; a political doctrine that constituted (and may still constitute) nightmares to rulers; a social movement; an instrument of social criticism and activism embraced especially by academics, students and labor unionists; and not the least, a method of inquiry in the various disciplines. Thus, in this latter sense, one can talk of Socialist education, socialist sociology, socialist law, socialist economics and socialist literature.

Literary criticism

This is the study, evaluation, and interpretation of literature. Modern literary criticism is often informed by literary theory, which is the philosophical discussion of its methods and goals. Though the two activities are closely related, literary critics are not always, and have not always been, theorists. Whether or not literary criticism should be considered a separate field of inquiry from literary theory or conversely from book reviewing, is a matter of some controversy.

For example, the Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism draws no distinction between literary theory and literary criticism, and almost always uses the terms together to describe the same concept (Hopkins, 2005). Some critics consider literary criticism a practical application of literary theory, because criticism always deals directly with particular literary works, while theory may be more general or abstract. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that literary criticism is inevitably value-laden. This is a point brilliantly argued by Northrop Frye in his influential book, *Anatomy of Criticism*. Frye argued that critics tend to embrace an ideology and judge literary pieces on the basis of their adherence to such ideology. This has been a highly influential viewpoint among modern conservative thinkers. Michael Jones, for example, argues in his *Degenerate Moderns* that Stanley Fish was influenced by his adulterous affairs to reject classic literature that condemned adultery (J.E. Michael, 1991). Literary criticism is often published in essay or book form. Literary criticism has probably existed for as long as literature. In the 4th century BC Aristotle wrote the *Poetics*, a typology and description of literary forms with many specific criticisms of contemporary works of art. *Poetics* developed for the first time the concepts of mimesis and catharsis which are still crucial in literary study. Plato’s attacks on poetry as imitative, secondary, and false were formative as well.

Scientific Socialism as an Intellectual Critique of Civilization and a Social Science

Since African literary criticism is supposed to be a catalyst to order and civilization in Africa and since scientific socialism is one of its dominant schools of thought, it is necessary to see how the latter contributed to human civilization generally before discussing its place in the former as proposed in this essay. In its hey days, the critics of scientific socialism were both in awe and cynical apprehension of it. Many of these critics, like Wesson, have wondered at ‘the continuing success of a failed theory’. Wesson attributed ‘the continuing success of socialism’ to what he called its ‘mass appeal’ built upon its humane ideals and values (Wesson, 1976). Wesson and his fellow critics miss the point when they attribute the success of socialism to what they regard as ‘mass appeal built upon humane ideals and values’ which they allege to be emotive and subjective elements. The point is that the success of socialism stemmed from its epistemic and rational characteristics as an intellectual critique of civilization and a social science.

To comprehend scientific socialism as a critique of civilization, it is helpful to point to the difficult life of Karl Marx, the founder of scientific socialism, which stands as a powerful symbol of the capitalist establishment’s venal reaction to it. Marx came from a modest middle class background but lived and worked for the underclass. Such selfless and militant commitment to the economic and political emancipation of the underclass pitted Marx against the Capitalist Establishment. He had a PhD at the age of 23 but was officially barred from getting an academic employment in Prussia. He then turned to become a celebrated editor of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* at the precocious age of 24. Again the authorities proscribed the paper and declared him a *persona non grata*. Marx migrated to France where he helped to organize workers towards their economic emancipation and after the 1849 botched revolution,

the authorities ordered the deportation of Marx. Marx migrated to England where he wrote and worked as a professional revolutionary under abject poverty which contributed to the untimely death of his beautiful and high born wife followed closely by death of his two daughters. He died unsung in March, 1883. Niccolo Machiavelli had in his political classic, *The Prince*, warned against the troubles that await an unarmed Prophet. Marx was an unarmed Prophet. He thought out and postulated scientific socialism as an intellectual battering ram against the new Western industrial capitalism which was then, and still, upsetting the world. He decried the wage system and equated the division of labor with slavery. No one else made a case half so appealing for those who were sick of the crudities, ugliness, inequality, and haughtiness of capitalist-dominated industrial society.

Most pre-Marxist philosophers like Hegel, Saint –Simon, Charles Owen and Proudhon were idealists who held that social consciousness (political, legal, philosophical, religious ideas, values and theories of people) determines social being or material existence. In other words, they held that social changes in human society are brought about by the ideas, values and politics of such society. Marx introduced a contrary viewpoint of social consciousness which is anchored on his twin theories of dialectical materialism and historical materialism. It is not needful to dilate on the philosophical import of these theories. It suffices to state that the former (dialectics of matter) drives, defines and is presupposed by the latter (economic determination of history). In simpler language, it can be said that world history is a history of class struggle thrown up by inequitable social relations of the classes as determined by the economic production relations of the classes. This is what is meant in the technical terminology of scientific socialism that ‘social being determines social consciousness’. This means that new ideas, values and perceptions do not just develop in society out nothing. According to Marx, the very conditioning variable of how people think, feel and behave is economic or material/ (Lenin, 1980:55). He maintained that the laws of history are different from the laws of nature. While laws of nature hold that everything takes place by the Will of God or great persons such as Tsars, Generals, et cetera, Marx’s laws of history hold that everything is determined by human activity.

Thus Marx urged the marginalized masses to take active part in the revolutionary process which would inevitably bring about the overthrow of capitalism by the working class. He argued that the logic of capitalist production which is based on exploitation, expropriation, oppression of the working masses will inexorably lead to its liquidation. In this way, scientific socialism has exacted great impact on human consciousness. It is thought-provoking and excites creativity. Although scientific socialism has been criticized for holding economic variable dogmatic as a variable of social change, there is little or no doubt that economics exercises considerable influence on politics, political decisions and actions. Economics is a means of social goals. Good and stable economic existence is a fundamental social objective. This is the point made by Marx in his thesis that the economic or material infrastructure determines the cultural superstructure. Although critics of Marx are quick to point out that he wrongly absolutized economics, the fact remains that the economic interest is woven into every human action and it is only in insignificant

occasions that it does not also direct it. This is what scientific socialism has analyzed and elaborated for modern civilization with an unsurpassed forthrightness, rigor and consistency. It is by virtue of such inimitable analysis and elaboration of the economic or material substructure that scientific socialism has most remarkably influenced the political economy of Capitalism and so it is correct as some commentators have observed that Marx has, by his trenchant analysis of the political economy of capitalism, unwittingly strengthened capitalism which he sought most desperately to destroy. It is held in this light that his analysis underscored the alienation and marginalization of labor as the root source of socialist revolutionary pressure to overthrow capitalism, but the bourgeoisie, desperate to consolidate capitalism, have over time developed internal and external ways to negotiate the working class into partnership; thus turning Marxist alarm into a weapon of defense of the capitalist order. Instead of the old practice of mindless exploitation of labor, attractive salaries, incentives, allowances, car loans, housing loans and welfare programmes in education, health and transportation are now employed to woo labor into a production concert. Thus, socialist critique of capitalism has mellowed and humanized capitalism tremendously even if it has not succeeded in dismantling capitalism globally as it hoped.

At the trans-national level, socialist critique of capitalism has drawn attention to the creeping dependency and underdevelopment dynamic set in motion and maintained by global capitalism in the new the states of Africa and other parts of the Southern hemisphere. This is seen in the fact that the end of colonialism in most of the Third World did not automatically eliminate foreign control and exploitation of dependent economies. The little industrialization there is in these countries is concentrated on import-substitution industries with low local technological inputs. The result is that the critical engineering and metallurgical industries are virtually non-existent and hence high technological products are imported from the capitalist west. Socialism rightly traces the dependency and underdevelopment to European Imperialism which distorted and disoriented peripheral economies and made them structurally dependent on the developed Capitalist world. In so doing, it became an indispensable methodological tool for explaining the widening gap between rich and poor countries and a buoyant inspiration to a New International Economic Order (Akporu-Aja, 1997). For the developing countries, such New International Economic Order is a desideratum to their achieving greater autonomous capacity in the exploitation and management of their natural, economic, and human resources.

The enlightening and liberating contributions of scientific socialism to modern civilization are also evident in the area of pure scholarship. The philosophy of scientific socialism is rich both in its content and compass as it permeates, analyses and affects almost all facets of life and society with its dialectical methodology interrogating the correlation between the material and ideal aspects of social life; the correlation between the conscious, the objective and subjective in the historical process; the motive force of society’s evolution; the essence of man and his place in the world of production. In much more concrete terms, the dialectical methodology of scientific socialism has greatly influenced intellectualism in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Thus we have socialist tendencies and perspectives in sociology, economics, political science, psychology, philosophy, literature, religion, education, etc. Of particular significance in this respect is the contribution of scientific socialism to development theory as it has provided alternative views to the capitalist modernization theory. According to modernization theory, societies in the Third World occupy the lower ends of the development continuum while Western societies occupy the higher and advanced stages of the development continuum (Ake, 1982). Thus, the societies of the Third World, in order to attain development, must be cast in the image of the western societies. This gave rise to the popular, though dubious, development dictum of 'catching up with the West'. Modernization theory which is an intellectual reaction of western capitalism against Third World struggle against colonialism, imperialism and under-development also posits that the Third World underdevelopment and persistent crisis of development are not logical outcomes of European imperialism and colonialism, but are caused by internal or endogenous variables such as low division of labor and specification, affective and ascriptive orientation, lack of spirit of entrepreneurship, lack of capital or saving capacity, and prevalence of governmental instabilities.

In contrast, scientific socialism rightly interpreted African underdevelopment and dependency as socio-economic consequences of capitalist expansionism which manifested itself in Africa as colonialism. In this way, scientific socialism showed not only a link between capitalism and colonialism, but also how both practices brutally distorted, disarticulated and incorporated the colonized territories (even after their so-called independence) into unequal exchange relations in the world capitalist system and thus replicated the national capitalist class dichotomy at the international level as periphery –centre countries, poor and elite countries. It cannot be gainsaid that these insightful analyses and critique of capitalism in the colonial countries did not only inspire nationalism and political independence in Africa but were the motive force behind decolonization processes in modern African politics, governance, social science, philosophy, literature, art, etc. What is more, the socialist analyses and critiques of capitalism did not only inspire nationalism and precipitated political independence in Africa; they also proffer a scientific understanding of society and, therefore, operate as a social science. This scientific character of scientific socialism is worthy of closer attention.

Indeed, it is the scientific character of Marxian socialism which earned it the sobriquet 'scientific' and in due course it became better known as 'scientific socialism' and it is the success of the latter as a science of society which made it a vibrant alternative to capitalism and, in many places, a vanquisher of capitalism. The scientific character of scientific socialism lies in its recognition and employment of material or objective conditions in its explanation of the development of society in contrast to the utopian socialism of thinkers like Saint Simon and Robert Owens which labored in vain to understand and interpret the development of society from some idealist standpoints. It is the recognition of such material or objective conditions which inspired Marx, the founder of scientific socialism, to declare in the Preface to *Capital* that in the study of society 'neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use.

The force of abstraction must replace both'. Even the liberal ideologue, Karl Popper, who became famous for espousing the logic and method of science, recognizes this for he says: 'In the social sciences....we cannot see and observe our objects before we have thought about them. For most of the objects of social science, if not all of them, are abstract objects' (Popper, 1960). Marx's investigation of society led him to conclude that a society is nevertheless in important respects not much like biological organism. The individuals who make up society are human organisms; so, naturally, the relations they enter into as human organisms and through which they obtain their means of life by social production are of an entirely different kind from those the cells of a living organism enter into as cells of that organism. His views about society were arrived at by investigating the relations individuals enter into on forming a society, and not deduced from some abstract comparison of societies with organisms. In the course of this investigation, Marx asked the key question, what is the condition for social life of any kind to take place? His answer was obvious: The condition for any kind of social life is that people should associate together to produce their means of life. He based his science of society on this proposition. And having arrived at this proposition, he proceeded to formulate the fundamental concepts in terms of which the social mode of production may be defined. These are the concepts of forces of production and relations of production.

In order socially to produce their means of subsistence men must fashion tools and implements and acquire the skill and knowledge for their use—and these are their forces of production. And in using those forces of production they must enter into social relations of production. This is why Marx wrote in *Wage-Labor and Capital* that "Men produce only by co-operating in a certain way and mutually exchanging their activities" (Conforth, 1977). The methodology by which Marx arrived at his theory of social development is exactly the same as that employed by Darwin in establishing the theory of evolution of species by natural selection. Engels in fact remarked on this in his speech at Marx's funeral, when he said: 'Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history'. It is remarkable that Marx and Darwin both published their laws within a few years of each other; each having worked independently in applying the same scientific methodology in their respective spheres of inquiry.

His analysis of the social process, that is, the relations individuals enter into in order to obtain the means of life and the consequences of their entering into those relations, led him to the conclusion that, to 'change society', the key thing to do is to change the relations of production in adaptation to productive forces. He concluded then that 'with the change of the economic foundation the whole immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed'. This discovery of the fundamental law of social development, that is, the economic determination of history and cultures is what has been termed technically as Historical Materialism

It is on account of the above social discovery that Lenin, in *What the Friends of the People Are*, stated that:

'Marx was the first to put sociology on a scientific basis by establishing the concept of the economic

formation of society as the sum-total of relations of production and by establishing the fact that the development of such formations is a process of natural history' (quoted in Cornforth, 1977)

Marx's discovery and espousal of objective social conditions as the basic criteria for the study of human society which made him a pioneer of social science as Lenin rightly pointed out laid the foundation for the postulation and use of objective social institutions like social classes, social relations, forces of production, the state, etc as opposed to psychologism (psychology of human individuals) as subjects of social science. It is in this light that social science is generally conceived to abstract its operative concepts from individuals and deals with social institutions. It is not on this footing concerned with individual but aggregate humanity-with the consequences of the interactions of large numbers, and not with the individual peculiarities of this and that person. The laws which it formulates, therefore, to the effect that some relations depend on others, which are laws governing all change in social relations, are laws applying to aggregates of individuals, not to the individuals who make up the aggregates.

Even Marx's virulent critic, Karl Popper who is a leading authority on scientific method praised Marx for eschewing psychologism (the view that the fundamental question for social science is to understand the psychology of human individuals, and that all social phenomena are direct effects of psychological causes) or subjectivity and upholding objective social conditions as the basic criteria for the study of human society, although Popper would not agree with Marx that economic formation is basic amongst such objective conditions. (Popper, 1968). Popper echoes the view that objective social institutions are the subject-matter of social science when he declared that the task of social science 'is the discovery and explanation of less obvious dependencies within the social sphere' (Popper, 1968). And Marx has demonstrated through his inquiry and writings summarized above that these 'less obvious dependencies' are the dependencies of social relations determined and dictated by production relations (forces of production).

In studying these dependencies of social relations (laws of social development) Marx pointed out that once these social dependencies or social laws are understood it becomes possible to project plans of actions and bring the results more and more in a controlled way within the scope of our intentions. This is the goal of social science as an explanatory and predictive discipline.

Motifs of Scientific Socialism in African Literary Criticism

It is proposed here to demonstrate how philosophy and literature interpenetrate and benefit each other. Both are hardly separable in their history. The foremost ancient philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, were also ancient literary personages. In terms of content, both philosophy and literature are catalysts to civilization. Furthermore, no work of literature is adjudged successful or great in its expression of human experience unless it is profound. And to be profound is to be philosophical. On the other hand, philosophy needs literature as a medium. These points accounts for the universal fame and recognition of the thesis that literary politics determines literary

production and literary politics is in turn determined by an author's philosophy. It is against this backdrop that it is proposed to examine the place of philosophy of scientific socialism in African literary production and evaluation in this essay. Socialist criticism is devoted to the fulfillment of Marx's and Engels's prediction of the overthrow of Capitalism by Socialism. Based on the view that literature either reinforces or undermines the effort of the proletariat in the struggle, the socialist critic evaluates literature into two exclusive opposites along class lines, proletariat and bourgeoisie. In this division, proletariat literature is approved as progressive while the so-called bourgeoisie literature is condemned as reactionary. It is in this light that Umukoro argued in his article "Marx Versus Us: an Assessment of the Marxist" that:

The critical approach is thus a vital element in the strategy for the liquidation of capitalism and the establishment of a version of socialism called scientific or doctrinaire socialism (Gugelberger *et al.*, 1984).

This 'critical approach' to literature is reflected in the motifs of scientific socialism in African literary criticism which is proposed to be examined in this essay. In this approach, African Liberation is seen only as a reaction to the existence of capitalism in the society. Consequently, an African work of literature is analyzed and assessed on grounds of whether or not it serves to liquidate the capitalist status quo on which it is based. If it does, the work is progressive; otherwise, it is reactionary. Omafume Onoge, in his article, "the Possibilities of a Radical Sociology of African Literature", characterized the socialist evaluation of African literature in the following words:

Modern African Literature, at least since the 19th century, has been a reactive literature.... And within this reactive literary movement, it is possible to classify by Marxist Sociological criteria, the reactionaries, reformists and revolutionaries. (Gugelberger ed., 1984). Another socialist critic, Atta Britwum, would add the reinforcement that "commitment to a political stance that does not menace the status quo, in our case, the predominantly capitalist, is no-commitment" (Udenta, 1993) According to the socialist criterion, non-committed or reactionary African literature is the writing of authors such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Camara Laye, Chnuva Achebe, J.P. Clark and Wole Soyinka. In other words, mainstream African literature is reactionary or reformist literature, while the bearers of the banner of Marxist or socialist criticism in African literature include: Sombene Ousamane, Omafume Onoge, Ngugi Wa Thiong 'O, Jeyifo, Festus Iyayi, etc.

In tracing the history of socialist criticism in African literature, one has no difficulty agreeing with Umukoro (in his above-mentioned essay) that during the economic depression of the thirties socialist or revolutionary aesthetics spread from Russia to Western Europe and America where some Africans doing their postgraduate studies embraced it and, on their return, took steps in the early seventies to apply it to African literature. However, if the history of socialist or revolutionary aesthetics should be traced to a point of nicety, then one must go backwards from the seventies to 1960 when Sembene Ousamane's *God's Bits of Wood* was published. The novel deals mainly with the resistance of the railway workers on the Dakar-Senegal line.

It is, therefore, about trade unionism and labour and oppressive working conditions. In fact, in the words of Udentia O. Udentia, "Ousmane's 'God's Bits of Wood' is the earliest revolutionary work in Africa". (Udentia, 1993). Udentia nonetheless seemed to concur implicitly with Umukoro that the seventies marked the actual period of emergence of revolutionary aesthetics in African literature, with the major works being Ngugi Wa Thiong O's *Home Coming* (1972), and Omafume Onoge's *Crisis of Consciousness in African Literature* (1974), and *The Possibilities of a Radical Sociology of African Literature* (1978). Udentia, a strong voice among socialist critics, is not alone in identifying the seventies as the actual period of emergence of revolutionary aesthetics in African literature. George Gugelberger, also a socialist critic, argued that socialist criticism did not only come on board the African literary scene with a bang but subsequently attained maturity in the eighties. He wrote:

Since Ngugi Wa Thiong O's *Petals of Blood*, *Writers in Politics* (1983) and *Barrel of a Pen* (1983), since Okot P'Bitek's *African's Cultural Revolution*, since Peter Nazareth's *Literature and Society in Modern Africa*, and since the Transition Debate, radical criticism in Africa has matured tremendously. With Onoge, Jeyifo, Hunt, Darah, Kamenju, Vanghen and others we can for the first time, speak of a coherent alternative and radical tradition, a road through action (Gugelberger ed., 1984).

Gugelberger's characterization of socialist criticism or revolutionary aesthetics in African literature as 'a road through action' can hardly be bettered. This is because the socialist literary critic presents himself as a radical who, correctly understanding and interpreting African socio-economic development, has come to the conclusion that only a revolutionary alternative in all spheres, including literature, would draw us out of what he sees as a dead alley of both colonial and neo-colonial rape and plunder. The socialist critic, therefore, believes that the emergence and development of revolutionary aesthetics in Africa is an inevitable historical process resulting from oppressive production relations, which relations must be reconciled in favour of the mass of the people, if need be, through violence.

Are the issues so uncontroverted and straight forward as the socialists have made it appear above? There is Babel of voices to the contrary. Most liberals or reformists and anti-socialists view continued discourse on scientific socialism after the collapse of Soviet Union as either anachronistic or totally irrelevant. This viewpoint has spawned active skepticism or outright cynicism which has precipitated the simmering debate on the relevance of scientific socialism in this post-Cold War period where socialist economies are disengaging from state-dominated economy and embracing free market economy. This debate will illuminate our inquiry.

The Debate on the Relevance of Scientific Socialism in African Literary Criticism. The tremor in communist Russia in the late 80s and the eventual collapse of communism in 1991 evoked doubts on further relevance of scientific socialism as a critical tradition generally and as a literary criterion for African literature particularly. Even before the rupture in the Soviet Union, antagonists of Marxism had written it off as a failed theory because, according to them, its social prognosis had

failed. One of such put-downs came from the American critic, Robert G. Wesson in his book with an abrasive and trenchant title, *Why Marxism?: The Continuing Success of a Failed Theory*. In the words of Wesson, "It may be concluded that Marxism is more revelation than theory, a surrogate faith for an age losing its religion". (Wesson, 1976). What the these antagonists of Marxism has not explained is why a theory like Marxism which is written off as effete had kept the European establishment apprehensive, why such a theory was adopted as the official philosophical point of view in one-third of world's population in the second half of the twentieth century (Stumpf, 1977), and why opposition to such theory also led to the dreaded Cold War and the abatement of the latter induced its opponents into mirth-making? Such gloating is not only ill-founded but also a product of vile prejudice and paranoiac propaganda. It is patently fallacious for the antagonists of socialism to hold that the collapse of Socialism in Soviet Union is tantamount to failure of Socialism, thus inferring and relying on a dubious hypothetical syllogism that if Soviet Socialism is dead then Socialism is dead. It is only prejudice or what Marx called 'false consciousness' that could inspire such egregious fallacy. The obvious point is that Soviet Socialism or Communism is a practice while Marxism or Socialism is a theory. Deviation in practice does not make a theory impotent or irrelevant. This point will be argued in detail shortly, but it is first of all necessary to advert our immediate attention to the fact that it is the dichotomy between theory and practice which inspired the position of some African scholars like Arthur Nwankwo who hold that Marxism is still relevant to African literary experience. Specifically, Arthur Nwankwo, in his book, *Perestroika and Glasnost: Their Implications for Africa* argued that due to the rampage of Western financial forces to re-possess or re-colonize Africa, the logic of scientific socialism remains Africa's weapon against oppression and marginalization within Africa (1992).

Despite the virulence of Nwankwo and his fellows in continuing to hold the banners of socialist aesthetics high in African literary criticism, there are quite a number of literary scholars who had always thought that socialism is repugnant and now that it is dead in Russia its ghost should be exorcised from African literature. These critics include Berth Lindfors, Chidi Amuta, Joseph Okpaku, Lewis Nkosi and Simon Umukoro. These antagonists of Marxist literary criticism are united in their rejection of it on the grounds of what they termed 'pitfalls of Marxism', namely, that it is a failed theory, foreign cultural criterion, and one-sidedly polar exclusive, militant and quixotic. These will be examined in turn. The first and frequently heard criticism against the use of scientific socialism by African writers to advocate for social change is that it is a failed theory because, according to the critics, its assumptions are false and its predictions did not come true. Another attack on socialist literary criticism is that it is a foreign critical criterion. In fact, it is argued that the approach is at the center of the controversy over foreign critical approaches to African literature. Although the attack here concedes that it is not necessary to eliminate all foreign elements from the aesthetics of African literature, it maintains that primary elements of the aesthetics should not be alien. For instance, these critics maintain that scientific socialism is based on linear philosophies and is therefore antagonistic to cyclical philosophies of Africa which is naturally reflected in African

literary works. Standing on socialist linear philosophies, the socialist critic therefore condemns African works which reflect cyclical philosophies, including metaphysical idealism and revolutionary humanism. It is on such ground that the socialist critic, Yakubu Nsidi, claims that “Soyinka’s main fault as a writer is a tendency to be too metaphysical”. This fault, according to Yakubu, leads in a *Dance of the Forest* to quite negative ideas and a message which is highly pessimistic. (Gugelberger ed., 1984).

Socialist literary criticism has also been faulted on the ground of being one-sidedly polar exclusive, that is, that it is class-based and so prescribes class conflict as a subject for the writer or places the writer and his work into stereotype classes – the proletariat or the bourgeoisie. It is thus argued that analysis and interpretation based on class differentiation is not and should not be the only analysis and interpretation possible. Besides, it is further argued that the socio-economic and political context of African literature is different from that of the West; while classes exist in Africa, the way they are conceived, and the values attaching to each class are different from that of the West. It is in this context Soyinka points out that “attempts at direct correlations with classic European models with their specific history have been regularly controverted” (Udenta, 1993). This criticism against socialism is concretized in the evaluation of Achebe’s *A Man of the People* where the Nigerian society as depicted by the novel had no single redeeming figure who had the right to lead. All have failed and forfeited their right to lead. This may partly explain why Achebe uses a military coup to close the novel. Thus, the antagonists of socialism strongly conclude that the problems examined in African literary criticism are larger than class antagonism because all the classes are guilty of the problems. The problems are human greed, manifested through fraud and all-pervading corruption.

A further criticism against socialist literary criticism in African literature holds that it is quixotic. On this, it is alleged that scientific socialism is still awaiting the test of praxis even though it claims that its methodology is valid and ‘omnipotent’. It is in this light that it is argued that, even though scientific socialism contains a body of powerful ideas which could be used to improve the condition of man, it has not come to terms with practice. For example, the critics argued that Marx propounded his theory for Western Europe but since it was propounded no country in Western Europe has become socialist. Marxists, it is argued, recognize this fact but they insist that the system has worked for other countries, such as Russia and China. In any case, the critics further maintain that the putative experiments especially in the former U.S.S.R, China, North Korea and Vietnam originated as indigenous revolutions and whatever influence Marxism had on them came later. For example, it is argued that Russian revolution was underway before Lenin introduced the Marxist element and the same is true of the Chinese revolution: it originated independently of Marxism. (Akpuru-Aja, 1997).

Finally, it is argued against Marxism that it is a militant ideology which seeks to bring about revolution, if need be, through bloody battle and such criterion cannot be resorted to in a world increasingly organized on the basis of census-building and inter-active dependencies. These strictures will not go unanswered.

Starting with the criticism of being a failed theory, it is held against socialist aesthetics that Marxism is largely a failed theory and hence a poor criterion for a mature evaluation of literature. The fallacious nature of this criticism has been made clear above where it has been argued that by reason of the independence of theory and practice, the abuse and distortion of scientific socialism in Soviet Union and therefore the collapse of its practice in the early nineties cannot be a logical ground for holding that scientific socialism is a failed theory. Deviation in practice does not make a theory impotent or irrelevant. An analogous argument would be to hold that Christianity as a theory of man’s origination and salvation should be dismissed as impotent and irrelevant because man has failed to live in accordance with it. But that is not the case. Theory is only a guide. Its influence can be whole or partial. In either case, theory remains a body of knowledge in the realm of a road map, a compass or guide or even at the realm of scholarship.

Philosophically speaking, revolutionary aesthetics is indestructible. As a philosophy of protest, scientific socialism will remain potent as long as the moral evils against which it protests are found among men. And what is more, nothing has really changed in Africa, and in the world: The statement made by Marx, the founder of scientific socialism, in 1948 about exploitation and oppression is still valid today. The so-called reforms of Capitalism, it will be agreed, are not a change in thought, but one in its manner of expression. There is still cruel economic inequality in the world today which President Obama of United States proclaimed in a speech last December as the primary moral and political challenge of our age (The Nation on Sunday, December 22, 2013, p.11). That Capitalism has remained the vampire despite appearances to the contrary is further buttressed by Pope Francis in his first Papal exhortation last November, the *Evangelii Gaudium*. Pope Francis aptly described the current global economy as one of exclusion. He said ‘such an economy kills’. To ensure that no one would think he inadvertently misspoke, Pope Francis criticized the economy for being under the aegis of the ‘laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed on the powerless’ (The Nation on Sunday, December, 8, 2013, p.12).

Against the charge that their model of criticism is foreign and therefore inappropriate for African socio-cultural experience, the socialists return two shots: firstly, that the models advocated and practiced by their opponents are equally foreign. There is nothing African, the socialists tell us, in their opponents’ content – form, impressionistic analysis which espouses Eurocentric literary and cultural scholarship as conveyed in structuralism, post-structuralism, semiotics, post-semiotics, deconstructionism, post-deconstructionism etc. Secondly and, rather a genuine reply, the socialists point out that socialism is not any foreign social philosophy to Africa. They remind us of African traditional communalism which is philosophically on the same footing with scientific socialism, the latter being only a modern variant due to mechanized production. Another reason why opponents of socialist aesthetics think it should be banished from African literature is that, according to them, it is class-based and one-sidedly polar exclusive. The Marxists shrug this accusation off. They maintain therefore that themes for the African writer should not be based solely on tradition, ethnicity and economics (Udenta, 1993).

Furthermore, as a leading proponent of socialist criticism of African literature, Ngugi Wa Thiong'O opined, literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life. Here, a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect his history. Finally, on the charge that scientific socialism supports militancy; the socialists are quick to reply that literature reflects social forces in contention: the great contest between progress and reaction; between understanding the laws of dialectics and blindly groping along the alleyways of history. Based on this paradigm of conflict, the socialists declare that critical scholarship is a battle front, whether we like it or not, and that the harsh conditions and absolute partisanship noticeable in ideological cum-political and military contests are ever present in it too. The socialists, therefore, shift the buck to their opponents accusing them of inconsistency, that is, that their opponents want social progress without the readiness to engage in the necessary struggle, that they profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation. Thus, the socialists dismiss their opponents as men who want crops without ploughing the ground, rain without thunder and lightning, an ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. (Udenta, 1993)

Conclusion

George Lukacs has rightly observed that whether one chooses evolution or revolution as his method of sociological realism is a matter of value perspective which is of over-riding importance in literature. It determines the course and content of any literary work. It is entirely a valuation issue which perspective an artist chooses in his writing. It is not a "law and order" regimentation. The African writer or critics should therefore exercise and enjoy his philosophical freedom in his work so long as he thereby reflects one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in the society. What he can choose is one or the other side in the battle field: the side of the people, or the side of those social forces and classes that try to keep the people down. A writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics. (Gugelberger ed., 1984)

It is upon this conviction that one will agree with Peter Nazareth that the third world writer or critic has a peculiar identity and duty to attack and liquidate all forms of inhumanity:

"To belong to the third world is therefore to accept an identity, an identity with the wretched of the earth spoken for by Frantz Fanon, to determine to end all exploitation and oppression" (Udenta, 1993). What is needed in the third world's socio-economic and political reality is a liberation literary criticism such as socialist criticism undertakes rather than the liberal referee writer standing on the fence between the men of power and the people.

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