

**THE POLITICAL UNCONSCIOUS IN AFRICAN FICTION: A STUDY OF FESTUS
IYAYI'S *HEROES* AND CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN***

Prof. Ifeyinwa J. Ogbazi

Department of English Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: ji.ogbazi@unizik.edu.ng

&

Emmanuel Ifediata

Department of English Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: Immaspencer7@gmail.com

Abstract

Interventions have been made by scholars to locate African literary production within the social, political and economic contexts in which they occur. While most Marxist interventions in African literary practice engage African literary texts on mechanical Marxist approaches typical of the rigid application of Marxist concepts of class and ideology, there is a lack of engagement of research on a more dialectical approach of Marxist criticism such as the Jamesian political unconscious. Many research works on Marxist criticism of African literature establish the broad concerns of Marxism by demonstrating the extent to which literary works follow or repudiate progressive politics without any engagement with some of Marxism's methodologies. This has resulted in ideological criticism of African literature taking place without an accompaniment of their Marxist linkages and critical enquiries taking place in African universities demonstrate that there is an absence of research on the dialectical approach of Marxist criticism such as Fredric Jameson's ideation of the political unconscious. Using Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* as primary texts of study, this research paper restores a more dialectical approach to Marxist criticism by prioritizing questions of form over questions of content.

Keywords: Marxism, political, unconscious, dialectic

Introduction

According to Alexander Fyfe (2020), literary practice in Africa, "marked by critical reassessment of decolonization and the material continuation of neocolonial exploitation in Africa – appeared to establish important affinities between Marxist analysis and the study of African literatures." Marxist writing on African literature which was at its peak between the 1970s and the 1980s were suitably appropriate for understanding the ideology and schools of thought to which different writers leant on. A number of African writers and scholars have made important Marxist interventions in African literature in the attempt to locate African literary production within the social, political and economic contexts in which they occur.

In his essay, "The Crisis of Consciousness in Modern African Literature: A Survey", Onoge (1974) considers the extent to which the material condition and circumstance of Africa in the postcolonial period gave rise to socialist realism in African literary practice. He also maintains that "Marxist criticism goes beyond a content and form analysis of artistic works, to a consideration of the very institutional processes of art creation and art criticism" (Onoge, 1985). Biodun Jeyifo posits the power and attraction of Marxist materialist perspectives in the study of African literature in the remark that "a rigorous act of materialist literary interpretation is now needed to recover 'real' meaning from the metaphysical fogs and abstracted empirical

details which enshroud the accumulating exegeses on the major dramatic works of Soyinka” (Jeyifo, 1984).

In his seminal work, *Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism* (1989), Chidi Amuta, another important Marxist critic whose above-mentioned work is considered the last most important work in Marxist approaches to African writing, posits that:

African literature and its criticism testify to the historical contradictions that define the African situation. In order to resolve these contradictions in the direction of progressive change, literary criticism must be predicated on a theoretical outlook that couples cultural theory back to social practice. In this respect, literary theory and practice must form part of the anti-imperialist struggle, thus demystifying literary criticism and reintegrating it into the social experience and practice of which literature itself is very much part (Amuta, 1989).

While most Marxist interventions in African literary practice engage African literary texts on mechanical Marxist approaches that are typified by the rigid application of Marxist concepts of class and ideology, there is an absence of research on a more dialectical approach of Marxist criticism. Critical studies taking place in African literary scholarship demonstrate that there is an absence of research on the dialectical approach of Marxist criticism based on Fredric Jameson’s notion of the political unconscious. Biodun Jeyifo, Chidi Amuta and Nicholas Akwanya are among the few who have made mention of the political unconscious and attempted a critique of the concept.

Fredric Jameson is an American literary critic, philosopher and Marxist theorist. His major influences include Hegel, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Claude Levi-Strauss, Theodor Adorno, Northrop Frye and Georgy Lukacs. Fredric Jameson proposed the notion of the political unconscious in his critically acclaimed work, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981). The analysis which Jameson proposes draws on two theories of historicity – personal/private (Lacanian/Freudian) and collective (Marxian/Hegelian) to arrive at the ground that creative works are to be seen as symbolic resolutions to real but unconsciously felt social and cultural conflicts.

In the political unconscious, Jameson argues that every work of art is a socially symbolic act which works as a disguised fulfillment of ‘repressed’ desires or instincts ‘repressed’ in the unconscious which now seek substitutive satisfaction through cultural and historical productions such as the literary text. The notion maintains that for a text to be analysed and interpreted, it must be viewed in a historical context, thereby revealing the underlying political dimension of the text being underplayed at the textual surface that actually caused the writing or production of the text. According to Jameson, the function of the text is to provide aesthetic reconciliation or resolution to real-life conflicts which cannot be resolved in the material-historical level (Jameson, 1981:77).

First, Jameson’s political unconscious scrutinizes and reworks psychoanalysis in a bid to arrive at the notion of the unconscious. The concept of the unconscious was first postulated by Freud who maintains that even when we think we do things from a given motive, much of our actions and thoughts are not freely determined by us but are really driven by unconscious forces which we can hardly decipher. The unconscious has to do with the idea of repression, a mechanism by which the human subject protects himself/herself from threatening thoughts by blocking them out from the conscious mind. The ego of the individual is compelled to insulate itself

against any fresh danger of the repressed instinct by a perpetual investment of energy or libido. Also, the concept of dream analysis is considered essential in Freud as Freud sees dream as “the disguised fulfilment of repressed desires or wish” (Freud in Peter Gay, 1989).

Towards approaching a framework for an interpretation of the political unconscious, Jameson looks into the idea of repression but since Freudian wish-fulfilment or desire remains locked in the problematic of individual subject, Jameson applies repression in the Lacanian/Marxian model, viewing it in a collective nature as a process of suppressing a population or a class of people by establishing dominance over them and creating a condition of having political, social or cultural freedom controlled by force. In this way, Jameson traces the trajectory from Freud to Northrop Frye whose archetypal system is a metaphysical theory of desire capable of transcending the problematic of the individual subject which he reworks into a historically rigorous model for the interpretation of texts.

Jameson’s dialectical rehistoricising and re-reading of Frye’s archetypal system and Hegel’s dialectical system which he adopts as a Marxist method of literary and cultural interpretation involves three concentric levels or ‘semantic horizons’ which begin from a specific understanding of the text at the surface level and its political history, (the political horizon), to a more encompassing and total understanding of the text as an ideologeme or element in terms of its time-bound social formations and class contradictions (social horizon), and finally conceiving the text in relation to a broader historical sequence of modes of production (historical horizon).

In the political horizon, the text is construed as a form of literary art which exists independently on its own as purely an art form (often harped by the New Critics) and can only communicate symbolically, especially through allegory. Jameson finds a suitable model for this interpretation in Levi-Strauss who advances in “The Structural Study of Myth” a structure of analysis of narrative or form as an imaginary resolution of a real social contradiction. At this textual level, the text is perceived as a ‘symbolic act’.

In the social horizon, the same framework of dialectic analysis is retained with a focus on social contradiction, two fundamental aspects of Marxist analysis. In this second stage, Jameson reshapes the text on a binary opposite of ‘ideologemes’ of antagonistic class discourse. The text now re-read in a broader perspective, is understood as a system of ideology or ideologies being part of a process that is leading beyond it to a larger totality of the real otherwise called the ‘absent cause’ in Althusser or history itself. The sign systems, ideologemes or *langues* and *paroles* of classes find structural unity in what could be known as a ‘mode of production’.

In the historical horizon, the text is now reconstructed as a synthesis of the first and second ‘semantic horizons’ to arrive at a more encompassing interpretation of the text in terms of its history, grounded in the concentric framework as an ‘absent cause’ of the text.

Jameson’s ideation of the political unconscious adopts the fundamental features of Hegel’s dialectic in form and content. Just like the Hegelian dialectic which is made up of three stages, namely; thesis, antithesis and synthesis, the notion of the political unconscious has three dialectical stages made up of the political horizon, the social horizon and the historical or the mode of production.

Hegel was the most lucid and significant proponent of what is today known as ‘historicism’ which has to do with the belief that any phenomena whether people, nations, objects or events

can be understood just within their particular historical contexts. Also these contexts within which they are viewed make up an integral aspect or element of the phenomena. Therefore, nothing can be examined or analysed in abstraction from its particular history, causes, effects, etc. The modern literary theory known today as “historicism” began as Hegel’s philosophy of the dialectic. The dialectic is a system of thought based on three broad levels of logic, phenomenology (forms taken by consciousness) and history with assured political implications.

In *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977), Hegel outlines the three phases of the dialectic as a process of subjectivity dealing with the concepts of identity and diversity. The first phase is that of the immediate presence and self-identity. The first phase is symbolic of our first impression about a given idea or something. We view something in the first phase as an independent object existing independently from its contexts and having its identity entrenched in its being as the self (Habib, 2005:582).

The second phase is the level of mediation and externalization. Here, we view the object’s immediate identity as externalized or mediated through its relation with other objects. The object’s identity is no longer viewed within itself but in something, that is, its relations with other factors. Rather than being concerned with the fact of the object’s immediate existence or self-expressed identity, the critic is concerned with the object’s content, its nature, essence, the particular qualities that lie beneath its essence and the universal qualities that transcend it. The third phase is the level of mediated unity or mediated identity. Here, a principle of unity or totality is formulated which unites the two antecedent perspectives of the given object, as in, the object as a particular existent/being and the object as embodying certain universal and essential qualities self (Habib, 2005:582).

Fredric Jameson, the proponent of the ideation of the political unconscious, insists that the political unconscious is not an optional auxiliary to any method of interpretation of literature but the absolute basis for all reading and interpretation or analysis. Although it is a synthesis of psychoanalysis, Frye’s archetypal system, structuralism and a Marxist revision of Hegelian dialectic, Jameson builds his ideation of the political unconscious on Marxism because of what he calls its high “yield” and “density”. He construes Marxism as an “untranscendable horizon” of reading, subsuming other approaches to the study of literature under the Marxist framework (Jameson, 1981).

Karl Heinrich Marx (1818 – 1883), the proponent of Marxism, was a German political, economic and philosophical theorist and revolutionist. Marxism extensively embraces sociology, philosophy, economics, and cultural theory. It has elicited “a rich tradition of literary and cultural criticism” (Habib, 2005). Other literary theories such as historicism, feminism, deconstruction, postcolonial and cultural criticism are supplementary auxiliaries of Marxism because they are hinged on – and heavily influenced by – Marxist thought. This is because Marxism is “not only a political, economic and social theory but also a form of practice in all of these domains” (Habib, 2005:527). That is to say, Marxism not only incorporates other theories of reading but also goes beyond them at the same time.

Marx encountered the work of W. E. G. Hegel whose dialectic shaped the form of his thought. Marx’s collaboration and encounter with Friedrich Engels also leads them to come up with a critique of capitalist society based on a materialistic conception of history. Marx seeks the structural causes behind what he found to be a capitalist exploitation and degradation. Marx’s

main objection to capitalism stemmed from one particular class owning the means of production. He maintains that: “the bourgeoisie... has centralized means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands” (Marx and Engels, 1973). Marx argues that this ultimately leads to the oppression and exploitation of the working classes.

In proportion as the bourgeoisie... capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed; a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity (Marx and Engels, 1973: 11-12).

Marxism adapts the Hegelian concept of the dialectic by adapting basic features of the form of Hegel’s dialectic, although with slight variations. In the first place, there is need to negate or abolish or contradict a given stance or object, phenomenon or state of affairs “by articulating the full rationality of that object’s relations with a particular social and historical context, showing how these relations constitute the object” (Habib, 2005). It is noted, for instance, that when the bourgeoisie was the revolting class, the Hegelian dialectic was perceived and understood as a negative philosophy, a philosophy that negates. Marx construes the dialectic of negativity as the moving principle of history.

In the same vein, Marx adapts the second central feature of the form of Hegelian dialectic which has to do with a tendency to view a phenomenon or something as unstable and inherently in a state of flux/transition, as part of a more comprehensive process leading beyond it. The third aspect has to do with the notion of sublation “which refers to the dual process of negating and transcending a given position or state of affairs while retaining certain features of what is negated” (Habib, 2005). For Marx, this is the reason a change in the “economic foundation” ultimately gives rise to struggle in the realm of ideology (Marx, 1976). Before the predominance of one ideology or social structure above another takes place, this change is usually preceded by struggle and conflict.

These three features or levels of Hegel’s dialectical system, adapted by Marx and Engels, are the organic whole which constitute an attack on the notion of simple identity or that of immediate presence. It is from this principle that the Jamesian ideation of the political unconscious borrows its form of dialectical thought, as the three dimensions of the political unconscious constitute an attack on the notion of simple identity.

In Marxism, however, there are two basic premises or principles upon which we must do any Marxist criticism. The first principle of Marxism is that literary art just like religion, philosophy or language is a form of consciousness and all forms of consciousness have no autonomous history but arise from the material activities of men. In specific terms, Eagleton points out that material production is the ultimate determining factor of social existence. Furthermore, class struggle is the central dynamic or moving principle of historical development.

The second principle of Marxism is the view that the class which constitute the ruling material force is also the ruling intellectual force. In *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*, Terry Eagleton (1981) states that the two premises of Marxism help to further or promote the fundamental task of Marxist criticism, “to actively participate in and help direct the cultural emancipation of the masses”.

Marxists insist that a literary work is neither divinely inspired nor does it come as a result of pure imaginative endeavour. It rather comes into existence as a result of the economic and ideological circumstances surrounding its creation. According to Marxists, works of literature often reflect the artist's place in the society, and they interpret most texts in relation to their relevance regarding issues of class struggle as depicted in a work of fiction. Furthermore, Marxist theory provides a framework for most writers who address issues of racial inequality, social injustice, class oppression, political and economic instability. Marxism obviously suits African literature as it addresses salient issues prevalent in the African society. Since the era of post-colonialism, most African writers have come to embrace Marxist theory because of the historical experiences of Africa and the influence of internationalist perspectives of world literature on African literature.

Adetuyi (2018) states that “the influence of Marxist criticism on African literary studies was felt during colonialism when most writers were condemning the evils of colonialism and its oppressive tendencies.” However, the trend continued to post-independent Africa in the era of postcolonial disillusionment when corruption took centre stage in Africa, dashing the hopes of Africans who had thought that independence would mean that all would be well. Despite the influence of Marxism on African literary production, most contemporary criticisms of African literature taking place in African universities are not attending to any robust engagement of Marxist methodologies. Critical enquiry on Marxist critiques taking place in many African literature journals today are merely carrying out the same mechanical approach to Marxist criticism by deploying a rigid application of class conflict which prioritizes issues of content over issues of form.

For instance, in a research paper titled “Popularity of Marxist School of Thought in African Literature: A Critique”, Adetuyi et al. (2018) write that “Marxist criticism should aim at changing some of the outdated social convictions that we practice in most societies...The role of literature should be to awaken the people to demand changes where change is necessary...” This kind of criticism only emphasizes on the sociological content of the work without any robust engagement with the form of Marxist criticism, as Marxist criticism necessarily imbricates a content and form analysis. Marxist modes of reading, with their ingenuity to meditate on the politics of the literary in dialectical relation to the material circumstances in which it is produced, (the relationship between literature and capital) were said to be predominantly suited to unraveling the ideological leanings of African writers.

Materialist perspectives of Marxist criticism have always been a major characteristic of African literary studies. In an attempt to locate African literary texts within the social, political and economic contexts in which they occur, contemporary critics use terms which suggest the attraction and influence of Marxist criticism to the study of African literary production. Yet, Marxist criticisms done by African scholars on African literary production today are not usually accompanied by any strong commitment with Marxist theories and methodologies, even though they deploy terms that recall Marxist discourses (Fyfe, 2020).

Asika (2014) notes that:

Marxist theory tends to focus on the representation of class conflicts as well as the enforcement of class distinction through literature. It is a philosophy that stresses that in production, there is exploitation of the lower class by the privileged class. It encourages a revolt by the exploited class against the exploiters.

This rigid application of Marxist concepts of class and ideology evidenced in the excerpt above is nothing more or less than mechanical approach to Marxist criticism which has continued to impoverish the critical idiom of African literary scholarship, as it is difficult not to assume that an elaborate understanding of Marxist methodologies would have helped to redirect Marxist criticism in a proper approach.

Marxist literary criticism in African scholarship has been marked by the lack of engagement with some of Marxism's large body of works (Fyfe, 2020). In many research works written on Marxist criticism of African literature, the broad concerns of Marxism are present but the theoretical entailments are usually absent. In this way, ideological criticism of African literature have often taken place without an accompaniment of their Marxist linkages. Olaniyan (2016) buttresses this further when he writes that "the effectiveness of the use of ideological awareness or critique today does not depend on knowing much about its conceptual subtleties in Marxist criticism whether generally or in African literary criticism in particular."

In the same vein, the contributions of Biodun Jeyifo in Marxist criticism of African literature cannot be overlooked as he gave vital insights into questions of methodology in Marxist criticism. Notable for his dialectical criticism, Jeyifo (1990) deploys a notion of hypostasis adopted from Marx and combined with Althusser's insights into the functioning of ideology in order to examine the speculations and preconceptions that punctuate African literary scholarship. In locating the relevance of Marxist criticism to the study of African literature, Chidi Amuta also stresses the socio-historical predication of literature. He states that "in being a product of social experience, literature is in turn an active producer of meanings, values and aesthetic effects which have great implications for the historical development of society" (Amuta, 1989: 79).

Outside Jeyifo, Soyinka and Amuta, many scholars do not critically engage in a dialectical approach. But major Marxist critiques of African literature always examine the extent to which literary works follow or do not follow progressive politics, and then make issues of content a priority over questions of form. There is an absence of research on the more dialectical approach of Marxist criticism known as the political unconscious. Contemporary scholarship in Africa have not made any substantive application of the notion of the political unconscious in the reading of any literary production. Only the formalist critic, Nicholas Akwanya throws insight into the Jamesian notion of the political unconscious in his critically acclaimed work, *Language and Habits of Thought* (1999).

Although he did not publish any full exegesis on the dialectical approach of Marxist criticism, Nicholas Akwanya renders a significant insight into the Jamesian notion of the political unconscious. According to Akwanya (1999), in the political unconscious, "all literary texts are underlain by a single reality which he (Jameson) calls history".

This, [history] the text attempts to disguise by means of special defamiliarizing techniques comprising the formal aspects of literariness, which are employed in specific ways in the individual work. The result is the vertical repression of history, bringing the formal aspects to the foreground, as though they were the *content* of the work. History, of course, is not itself the text, nor is it a narrative. It is rather an *absent cause*, and as such, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form (Akwanya, 1999: 242).

The point being purveyed in the excerpt above supports the notion that the literary work of art works by disguise, as the intention behind the literary work of art may be hidden and concealed beneath the language and formal aspects of literariness which it employs. By so doing, history is then vertically 'repressed' and we have a situation where the formal aspects of literariness employed in the literary text are foregrounded and brought to the surface. The result of this activity is that the literary text then appeals to the reader as though the foregrounded aspects of formal literariness are the content of the work whereas the reality of the work remains buried and undeciphered, concealed and hidden from mere surface structure of the text.

In the case of the literary work, the textual surface is a system of 'resistances' to cut through in order to gain access to the 'unconscious' of the text, where the historical reality is lodged. The text is fully explained when the history it represses and conceals is laid bare and analysed (Akwanya, 1999).

However, the body of research on Marxism in African universities which have very little or nothing in common with the more dialectical approach of Marxist criticism such as the notion of the political unconscious indicates the prevalence of mechanical Marxist approaches in the study of African literary production. What these mechanical Marxist approach which prioritize content over form do is to merely reflect the oppressive tendencies within the text with the aim of exposing the oppressive class and its medium of oppression.

Perhaps the absence of research on the more dialectical approach of Marxist criticism such as the political unconscious could be traced to the decline of Marxist approaches in African scholarship throughout the 1980s (Hughes, 1992). The decline of Marxist and socialist regimes in Africa during the 1980s must have contributed to the conspicuous absence of research on Marxist methodologies and dialectical approaches.

Analysis

Heroes is set in the defunct mid-western region of Nigeria during the third year of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war which took place for thirty odd months. The space and time of the story as well as traces of recognizable political and military leaders of the time all evoke the social realism of the novel's perspective and historical dimension. Physical settings in the text are recognizable geographical locations such as Benin city, Onitsha, Oganza, Nkesio, River Niger and Asaba. The text makes usual reference to Nigeria, Lagos and Biafra. Also, names mentioned in the text like Gowon and Ojukwu are names of political and military leaders in the historical past who played major roles in the war which lasted for thirty months from 1967 to 1970. Moreover, *Heroes* is a novel written on the pretext of that war as events in the story are quite relatable to the actual historical facts that happened at a point in time.

In the political horizon, contradiction in the novel is deeply rooted in situational irony. Situational irony occurs in a literary work when there is an incongruity between expectations of something to happen and what actually happens. That is, the expected outcome of something does not happen, rather, the opposite happens instead.

Osime hopes that the Federal troops will be the true liberators of the city. He also hopes that his landlord, "who had so little faith in the decency of the federal troops" would see them for the true liberators they are. He thinks that the federal troops are humane. He also hopes "it doesn't rain" (3) and later changes his mind that it rains but that the wind remains gentle. The contradiction that happens is such that in negation to his expectations that the corns he had put so much labour, faith and emotion in planting (with hope that it survives the wind) are thrashed down by the wind which had blown down a few days before the advent of the federal troops

who take over the city. He laments that it is cruel for one part of nature to treat another part of it in that way.

It is cruel and hard. Wind to corn. Rain to corn, yes hard. The wind acted a s a butcher, butchered my corn, my everything (Heroes 6).

Osime enters into a different level of contradiction when he articulates himself in opposition to the war and the reason for it. He is against the secession by the Biafrans but so also is he against the mass killings of the Biafrans by the federal troops (*Heroes* 13).

Contradiction in the text is such that the text is set in the postcolonial era, seven years after it transcended the colonial era. But with time, bourgeois democracy which was enthroned during independence is toppled by dictatorship. But this dictatorship suffers from the same menace for which it contradicts and transcends the democratic system. What both modes have in common is corruption which heralds postcolonial disillusionment.

Osime's dramatic monologue echoes the third level of the Hegelian dialectic – the synthesis – which is the point at which the contradictions in the preceding levels are resolved. Osime's thought assumes a revolutionary bearing which will contradict the armies on both the Nigerian side and the Biafran side and also contradict their modes of production – bourgeois democracy, first, and then military dictatorship. Osime imagines that what is needed to provide a resolution for these contradictions is “a third army”.

What is needed, he thought, is a third army. An army to ask questions about the purpose of this war, about the reasons behind this war. The third army will sit among the soldiers, Biafrans and Nigerians alike, and tell them that this is not their war, that they are shooting at the wrong enemies. The real enemies are the politicians who robbed the country blind, who looted the country and prompted the generals to intervene. The third army will turn their guns on the generals, line them up and shoot them one by one, the generals of both armies, and then the soldiers will lay down their arms and go home. Then the dispute about the unity of this country will stop. The third army will clean up all the filth and mess and then we will be in business to make a fresh start... (Heroes 90).

Our second semantic level of uncovering the political unconscious in Iyayi's *Heroes* is that of the social level which involves elements of binary opposition of class discourse. Suffice it to say that this involves taking into cognizance all units of antagonistic collective discourse of social classes or stratification. In the social horizon of analysis, the fundamental form of class is relation is the ruling class and the working class or the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. What happens is that, at any point in time, the class which dominates the other is preponderant and then invents ways to perpetuate their domination. One method they deploy is the formation of ideology and the invention of means to compel or persuade the subordinate class to be interpellated by the dominant ideology.

The social horizon relates the text to its absent cause which is history by establishing the relationship it has with historical materialism. By exploring the social realism of the novel, this level of analysis, due to its semantic density, contributes immensely to the unearthing of the political unconscious in the text based on social ground. At this level, the work of art becomes a symbolic act for it infers to real situations. At the political level, the work pretends to extricate itself from the 'real' but implicates the 'real' nonetheless at the second dialectical level of social horizon. An analysis of *Heroes* at the second level of dialectical materialism which is the social horizon reveals that the text imbricates a formation of class relation; that between the ruling class and the masses. Contradiction in this relation is to the extent that everything exists in a

binary opposite. The text begins with elements of binary opposition in class discourse. These elements of antagonistic social stratification of class relation are comprehended as ideologemes. Ideologemes of class relationship are explored in the diction of the text. At the point when Osime's informants are giving him information about the war, we come to the understanding that 'rumours' could be identified as information from the masses. Information from the masses circulated in markets, parks and other public places cannot be trusted because they are not considered to be coming from a credible source. In the end, they are always false. But the most important thing is that it is information coming from the masses. On the other hand, information gotten from the upper class is called 'inside information'. This 'inside information' can be trusted as a reliable source of information because it is coming from those who call the shots. The opposite of 'rumour' is 'inside information' and both have semantic density in the sense that rumour is associated with the masses.

More startling revelations begin to crawl up about the event of the war. Osime's friend, Ade, is the one who opens Osime's eyes to the truth about the war. Ade remarks that:

"...There are two elephants involved in this war and all round them is the grass. The grass is the one that is taking the beating. The elephants trample on the grass most crudely, most viciously. This is not our war and all talk about the Federal side or the Biafran side is an illusion. Just remember the elephants and the grass. Remember there are many sides to this war and that as the head of state said in last week's broadcast, when two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers" (*Heroes* 14-15).

Here, elephants are symbolic representations of the ruling class on both the Nigerian and Biafran sides whose greed for more money and more power have led them to orchestrate the war sell the war to the people, the masses. But as the war rages on, it is not the elephants that suffer. It is the grass which symbolically represents the poor masses on both the Nigerian and Biafran sides that suffer. At his turning point, Osime begins to unlearn the ideology he has been interpellated to accept. He declares:

"...I cannot afford to be idealistic any more. I must be realistic." (32)

At the instance of class stratification, chief actors in bourgeois democracy and military dictatorship constitute the governing authority and the ruling class (symbolically referred to as the elephants by Ade). One thing that the ruling class in bourgeois democracy and in military dictatorship have in common is greed for more wealth and greed for more power which eventually gives birth to diabolic atrocities semantically reduced to the term 'corruption'.

The war is a contradiction of social phenomenon. While the masses suffer for and from the war, the ruling class benefit from it. At the height of Osime's awakened consciousness, he begins to see the war for what it really is: a struggle for power between two individuals. The two individuals manipulate the masses on both sides of the divide into fighting a war they know nothing about. Osime proposes the need for a third army in being circumspect.

What is needed...is a third army. An army to ask questions about the purpose of this war, about the reasons behind this war. The third army will sit among the soldiers, Biafrans and Nigerians alike, and tell them that this is not their war, that they are shooting at the wrong enemies. The real enemies are the politicians who robbed the country blind, who looted the country and prompted the generals to intervene (Heroes 90).

However, the mode of production in the text of *Heroes* is neocolonial capitalism bludgeoned by dictatorship. Freedom and democracy are repressed in place of subservience or open dictatorship as the dialectical movement of history takes place.

The relevant mode of production which the military adopts is fascism or despotism characterized by a different sort of sadism and brutality.

People want power. Power and property. House. Positions at the top. And there are two ways of achieving these things – the barrel of a gun or money or both. Have a gun and you can seize power from the elected representatives of the people.... Have a gun and be a private in the army and the Chief Superintendent of Police will be afraid to speak the truth.... Have a gun and the sky's the limit (Heroes 40).

In the same vein, bourgeois democracy works hand in hand with military dictatorship as the two constituent elements of the ruling class in the text. What bourgeois democracy and dictatorship seem to have in common is an atrocious mode of production subsumed under the semantic nomenclature of corruption.

In the historical mode of production, one mode of production is superseded by another with the subsequent one subsuming aspects of the antecedent mode of production. For instance, when capitalism supersedes feudalism, it subsumes the master/slave dichotomy for which feudalism was remarkable. With the transcendence of the colonial era comes the postcolonial era and then the neocolonial era characterized by post/neo-colonial disillusionment as a result of the sublation of aspects of the colonial in the post/neo-colonial.

The white colonial masters had the servants...and that was understandable, given their history of trading in slaves. But what happened after they left? Black men built boys' quarters, millions of them, to imprison other blacks as servants, as slaves, at the back of their houses (Heroes 41).

The dominant mode of production in *Heroes* is neo-colonial capitalism. In the text, the ruling class orchestrate a war in order to make profit from it. After thinking about the idea behind the war, Osime Iyere arrives at the conclusion that:

This is not a war. This is an investment in blood and destruction by those at the helm of affairs with the expectation of profit (64).

The war is based on the greed of a few individuals. Greed fuels modern capitalism; that dissatisfaction for what one has and the desire to have more, to have it all to oneself. So, the war is a mode of production occasioned to raise capital. Contradictory forces are then repressed to raise capital. Contradictory forces are then repressed using state apparatuses of force by the few powerful individuals struggling for more power and more money. Out of their greed for the acquisition of more money, the ruling class divides the commoners among themselves using propaganda and creates conflict to tear the masses apart and set them on one another's throats – with the result that the ordinary Nigerians think of the ordinary Biafran as an enemy. While the masses fight among themselves and kill one another, the ruling class is making profit from the conflict.

In conclusion, the historical horizon or the mode of production in *Heroes* suggests a certain sort of reactionary communism which requires collective action to bring it to manifestation. It is the resolution to the conflict, the contradiction which Osime seeks but as the possibility of this proposition appears very doubtful and illusive, the being of the text as a symbolic act for

wish fulfillment is further reinforced, as it only succeeds in providing an imaginary resolution to the real contradiction in the absent cause of the text.

Our study of Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* begins with the political horizon – the level of the textual horizon – which is a semantic enrichment of the text, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, as a symbolic act which provides an imaginary resolution to contradictions in real life. This level of interpretation takes into account various political and historical events regarding struggles, changes, rise and fall of empires which enrich the work of art semantically. History informs the text at this level, as subtext, and dominates as the absent cause of the text.

Half of a Yellow Sun is a symbolic representation of a subtextual ideological form of nationalism or nationalist commitment and social vision. The novel re-historicizes the political event of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war by articulating a Biafran position on the civil war – thus making out the text as “a socially symbolic act involved in ...polemic and strategic ideological confrontations” (Jameson, 1981:19). A political analysis/textual analysis of the text exhume the repressed and buried political contradictions which influence the text's thematic preoccupation.

Historically, by the year 1960, the Igbo ethnic group dominated the civil service, customs and commerce in Nigeria. They were in control of the economy and this generated a lot of tension and unease among other ethnic groups. The minorities of the South even feared Igbo political domination. Adichie, consequently, foregrounds this dominance of the Igbo in post-independence Nigeria by creating characters who are at the core of the text as events of the story revolve around them, and these characters are of higher social standing than characters who are from minority ethnic groups. Minor fictional characters in the text are given peripheral and pedestrian representation as peasants or pauperized individuals (Adichie, 2006: 39-42) or as domestic servants or menial jobbers (32, 67, 72) and, finally, as saboteurs (290, 314, 320). This is one way through which Adichie also foregrounds the ideology of the Self and the Other in the text.

One aspect of ‘formal’ contradiction in the text is that the text is a result of the closing of the gap between fiction and reality, and “fiction thought of as reality thinly veiled” (Akwanya 233). Elements of composite contradiction and metonymic contradiction dominate the work intrinsically and are sustained with efficient causality till the very end. While *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) could be understood as a fictionalized account of the Nigeria Biafra civil war, in the formal aesthetic sense of appropriation, it is a linguistic event coming into existence by means of language as the material cause of it. Hence, its validity to the claim of autonomy from history. But going by authorial intention, psychologism and relevant historical contexts of the work, it will be difficult and implausible not to ascribe the text to its historical conditions which form part and parcel of the entailment of the work's efficient, structural and absent causality. The text moves beyond a mere recount of historical events for the purpose of providing direction and social vision. The narrative not only takes particular interest in the lives of middle class Nigerians who experience various degrees of changes as the story progresses but also vacillates through relationships within the elite, the academia, men and women of varying social and educational standing and also peasants.

In “The Role of Literature in Modern Africa”, Adichie posits that:

African countries need to change and change occurs through ideas. Literature is an essential repository of ideas. Literature can lead to change, not by espousing crude propaganda but by creating a collective sense of who a people are (3).

By this, the pertinent reason for which Adichie writes is to bring about change in Africa. As literature leads to thought and thought leads to action, Adichie’s narrative is a symbolic cultural memory for the propagation of ideas. One interesting way of appropriating this analysis is by character study. At the inception of the story, Adichie introduces us to very idealistic characters who all had a vision to attain something great. They are confident in their idealism and not usually realistic. These characters are also perceptive enough to absorb change. The events surrounding the changes which these characters pass through shape them and define them by creating and giving them a sense of collective identity.

In deconstructing the text, we find that the text is an allegory in which certain characters and incidents represent an ideology or something. Major characters in the text are symbolic of one ideology or the other. At the inception of the story, we are introduced to characters, most of whom are of the Igbo ethnic group, bristling with life, hope, ambition, dreams and visionary projections. They are very confident of their success and they do all they can to bring their wishes to fulfillment. Ugwu is a village boy who expresses hope and optimism in becoming like “Master” someday.

To an extent, Odenigbo is a symbol of the functional idealism of Biafra. Through him, Adichie expresses her authorial intention and perhaps, the sentiments of most middle class Igbo. He affirms that he is Nigerian because “the white man created Nigeria and gave (him) me that identity. But (he) I was black before the white man came” (*Half of a Yellow Sun* 25). Through this symbolic character, the text evokes the consciousness of the Igbo middle class Nigerians and elite as people cynical of the idea of Nigeria’s unity and very opposed to the idea of white superiority and dominance.

Almost all of the major characters in the novel who are Igbo by identity and ethnic origin have dreams which they all aspire to. As the title *Half of a Yellow Sun* suggests, these characters’ dreams are still in pursuit. They have not become reality. The pursuers are almost there but not yet there. But they are quite confident of making these dreams a reality. Professor Okeoma always says that “if the sun refuses to rise, we will make it rise” (219). The dreams of these characters can be a symbol of the Biafran cause, the Biafran dream.

Soon, the Igbo and their dreams begin to face not only contradiction but also repression. Northern officers stage a counter-coup and begin to kill Igbo officers in the north. The northern officers and their civilian population kill the Igbo in the north. As a result, many Igbo people like Olanna have to repress their identity as Igbo in order to save their lives. Olanna denies her Igbo identity two times in order to save her life. She wears a hijab in Kaduna in order to flee from there and not be attacked by the rampaging Hausa muslim mob (184).

People are interpellated to believe false ideology about the Igbo so as to recruit them into hating the Igbo. Susan, a white woman, tells Richard, her white boyfriend:

“...I remember somebody telling me when I first came to be careful about hiring an Igbo houseboy because, before I knew it, he would own my house and the land it was built on...” (194).

In the Igbo spirit of determination and confidence, Biafra gradually begins to come into existence when Ojukwu announces the sovereignty of the Igbo from Nigeria. His rhetoric motivates and incites the Igbo for a war. He tells them that while the elephants, “Even the grass will fight for Biafra” (215). They express so much hope and confidence in the coming of the Biafran dream. But the contradictory, repressive force of Nigeria soon comes to truncate this hope.

Social conditions in Biafra move from good to bad as the war progresses. With the blockade and starvation, social conditions of living in Biafra deteriorate drastically. It reduces Olanna to a refugee begging food at the relief camp. People become desperate to survive. The war makes a beast of men, revealing their unconscious true character. It makes Eberechi a prostitute for high-ranking military officers, and Ugwu, first, an emergency teacher, and then a conscripted soldier. Biafran authorities push out propaganda to the masses instead of the truth just to keep them fighting.

The state represses accurate information and propagates deceptive propaganda so as to condition the minds of Biafrans and control them. Children are conscripted to fight for Biafra at the fronts where they fight with no arms and food against well-armed Nigerian soldiers. Many children begin to die from kwashiorkor as starvation goes on the increase. Refugee camps are filled to the brim with sick people who die every day. But Ojukwu and his men sustain the war on propaganda and people, somehow, still believe that Biafra will win the war. These historical events, as they occur in contradiction to one another reflect the dynamism of the Hegelian dialectic which is an existential principle of all life and modes of consciousness. The history of every society is the history of class struggle, as Marx says, hence, struggle is to either bring change or repress it. Struggle leads to conflict and the conflict is inevitable because of the greed to control resources, have more money and more power. Therefore, these conflicts happen and most of the time, the conflicts are irresolvable in their own right. Societies invent imaginary ways to escape from their repression and wish for a resolution of the conflict which has kept them repressed. The narrative is one such cultural production that unravels the unconscious aspect of the work which makes it a social symbol either for cultural memory or for social vision.

The self and the other are ideologemes of social class in Biafra. Biafran refugees are the other. They are not considered important and are often overlooked. When a foreign journalist visits Biafra, at a refugee camp, he declares, after seeing the refugees, “I want to see the real Biafrans” (464). Therefore, the poor refugees do not matter. They are the unreal Biafrans. The real Biafrans are the self, the people who live well, eat well and drive cars, sleep with two women at a time while there’s a war going on, a war of starvation and suicide missions by poorly trained child soldiers.

A text must be emphatic, either in reflecting the social system which produced it, or in refracting it. From all indications, there is no gainsaying the fact that the incipient mode of production in which Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* is enmeshed is neo-colonial capitalism. The text is centered on the lived experiences of middle class Igbo characters who are symbolic of the capitalist economic system. It is important to remark that the text is a fictionalized account of the events of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, hence a fusion of fact and fiction. Igbo culture, however, is predominantly a materialist system and this is reflected heavily in the text. The Igbo are largely independent-minded, hence their republican system of government;

individualistic, ambitious and aspire greatly to private ownership of wealth and property. Therefore, capitalism favours the Igbo who struggle and work so hard, motivated by profit. In addition, capitalism seems to have an upper hand in every political, economic and social relation in the text. Through Kainene, we learn that Ojukwu has big plans, after the war, for the oil. Kainene has been advised to donate some foreign exchange to the war cabinet so that when the war ends, she will get any contract she bids for (226).

The implication is that without that capital, that money to donate to the war cabinet, Kainene cannot win favours among the ruling class as she would not be given contracts she bids for. Analysis of the text based on the political unconscious reveals that the text is possessed of an archetype of alienation whereby the author writes from an exilic or alienated position. This is because, since the end of the Biafran war, the Igbo became pariahs, second class citizens in Nigeria. Most ethnic Igbo writers wrote from exilic or diasporic positions as they lived outside Nigeria mostly in the United States. The archetype of the lost Biafran dream just as in the character of Ojukwu who fled from Biafra into exile on the brink of defeat. This exilic archetype is also reflected in the character of Kainene who goes missing after embarking on 'afia attack' from which she never returns. Many post-civil war ethnic Igbo writers unconsciously write from this exilic, alienated position as cultural outsiders. Their literature reflects a contradiction of the Nigerian position and a revolt against the Nigerian perspective. We tend to see some of these literatures as the "return of the repressed". The text is a principle of unity for the contest between freedom and power as the Igbo negate the Nigerian position from the position of the marginalized other.

Conclusion

We have been able to establish through a dialectical reading of both texts based on the idealist approach and the materialist approach of Marxism that any encompassing Marxist analysis must not just demonstrate the extent to which works subscribe to the broad concerns of Marxism such as class and ideology but must also embrace the methodical form of its dialectical approach. The paper employs critical analysis of the texts using a dialectical, historical framework based on the Marxist form of Jamesian criticism known as the political unconscious. We have been able to demonstrate in the analysis of both primary texts of study that a literary work attempts to disguise history by means of special defamiliarizing techniques which comprise formal aspects of literariness employed in the texts as allegory, metaphor or symbols with the result that these formal aspects of literariness employed in the work appear as though they are the content of the work. Jameson's first level of the political unconscious which is the political horizon makes it evidently clear that these formal aspects of literariness make up the textual surface that become a system of resistances to cut through in order to gain access to the "unconscious" of the text where the historical reality is lodged. As such, we have been able to fully interpret the text given that the history which the text represses and hides has been laid bare through our political analysis of both texts.

However, this study makes significant contribution to scholarship by robustly engaging a more dialectical Marxist approach in the critical reading of African literary texts, prioritizing questions of form over questions of content by establishing the linkages between the broad concerns of Marxism and its formal, methodological entailment. This is a significant contribution to scholarship as most Marxist criticisms of African literature have a tendency to favour the mechanical approach to Marxist readings which prioritize sociological content such as class struggle, capitalist exploitation and ideology.

The research paper finds that there is need to reassess previous Marxist critiques of African literary texts which might have echoed terms that relate to Marxist discourse conventions without any robust engagement with some of Marxism's body of works that deepen interest in dialectical form of criticism such as the Jamesian political unconscious.

References

- Adichie, C.N. (2006). *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Lagos: Farafina.
- Fyfe, Alexander. (2020) "Marxism and African Literary Studies Today". *African Identities*, 18 (1-17) [Google Scholar].
- Althusser, Louis (1970). "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses".
- Akwanya, A. N (1999). *Language and Habits of Thought*. Enugu: New Generation Books.
- Amuta, Chidi (1989). *Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism*. London: Zed Books.
- Asika, I., and Ifechelobi, Jane. (2015) "A Psychoanalytical Reading of Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail*." *IISTE*, 5 (5), 199-208.
- Eagleton, Terry (1981). *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*. London: New Left Books.
- Gay, Peter, ed. (1989). *The Freud Reader*. New York and London: W.W. Norton.
- Habib, M.A.R. (2005). *A History of Modern Literary Criticism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Hegel, W.E.G. (1977). *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Hughes, A. (1992). "The Appeal of Marxism to Africans. *Journal of Communist Studies*, 8, Vol. 2, (4-20). [Google Scholar].
- Iyayi, Festus (1986). *Heroes*. Essex: Longman Group UK Limited.
- Jameson, Fredric (1981). *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell UP.
- Jeyifo, B. (1991). "The Problem of Realism in Things Fall Apart: A Marxist Exegesis. In B. Lindfors (Ed.) *Approaches to teaching Achebe's Things Fall Apart* (112-117). The Modern Language Association of America. [Google Scholar].
- Levi-Strauss, Claude (1968). *Structural Anthropology*. Allen Lane: The Penguin Press.
- Marx, Karl (1977). *Capital*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, Karl. (1977). *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 127-144.
- Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich (1970). *The German Ideology*, ed. C.J. Arthur. New York: International Publishers Co.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels (1973). *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 11-16.
- Ojebode, A.O. (2016). *Marxism and Literature: an Interpretation of Osofisan's Morountodun, Rotimi's Hopes for the Living Dead and Soyinka's The Beatification of Area Boy*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of English, Redeemers' University, Ede.
- Onoge, O. F. (1978). "The Possibilities of a Radical Sociology of African Literature: Tentative Notes." In D. Nwoga (Ed.), *Literature and Modern West African Culture* (90-96). Ethiopie Publishing Corporation. [Google Scholar].