

# TOWARDS AFRICA'S TRANSFORMATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: A DIALECTICAL APPRAISAL OF AUTHENTIC NATIONHOOD

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## Abstract

*The economic, political and socio-cultural realities among African nations reveal a gruesome picture of inauthentic nationhood. That is, nations that lack the capabilities for genuine transformation, creativity and innovativeness. It is against the backdrop of these crises that have bedeviled the African societies that this paper proposes to examine the problem of attaining genuine development in the continent. This paper reveals the need for Africa to liberate itself from the bondage of perpetual exploitation and underdevelopment. It emphasizes the imperative for Africa to re-assert its being and redefine its identity. This paper advocates the adoption of the philosophy of dialectics as a process for occasioning the desired change in Africa. It considers the logic of dialectics as the appropriate philosophical method for appraising the trend of genuine development with a view to creating authentic platform, which would guide the thoughts and activities of African nations in order to have rapidly improving societies. It concludes that Africa must rediscover itself and fashion out a new philosophical ideology from the background of its cultural experience in order to evolve a meaningful development. This is the way towards the objective realization of genuine development and authentic nationhood; it is the path leading to meaningful and sustainable transformation of Africa in the new millennium.*

**Keywords:** Africa; Authentic Nationhood; Development; Logic of Dialectics; Sustainable Transformation

## Introduction

In contrast to the surging growth and development taking place in the advanced world today, is an unquestionable fact that a large proportion of the underdeveloped countries are in unimaginable stagnation and uncertainties. These are vivid manifestations of inauthentic nations. Inauthenticity no doubt impedes growth, progress and development. It is imperative for African nations to begin the process of change. Obviously, change is necessary since mankind develops economically, socially, mentally and politically from time to time. The concept of transformational development demands extensive investigation in order to formulate the strategy and tactics of African's emancipation and create the path leading to the attainment of authentic nationhood.

The idea of dialectical appraisal was informed by the nature of opposing forces or antagonisms in the historical development of African nations, and this is clearly evident in the nature of growth, development and international relations between Africa and the West. The notion of dialectical method in philosophy started among the Greeks in the ancient period with the activities of philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. It was however popularised in the modern period by Hegel as a kind of logic in which a thesis is negated by an antithesis and both the thesis and antithesis are taken up in a synthesis. The synthesis thus reached becomes a new thesis, which in turn is negated, and the process continues *ad-infinitum*. (Hegel, 1953). This is the philosophy of dialectics, in which conflicts, interests, classes and contradictions are synthesised into a new development, a new forward.

The purpose of this study is to explore the possibilities of concretely tackling the problem of underdevelopment in Africa using the dialectical approach. This study also aims at how dialectical reasoning can be applied in the quest for sustainable growth and development Africa. More importantly, it is intended at making a case for the need by African nations to be self-determined and self-reliant.

### **Africa and the Struggle against Oppression**

Scholars have traced the problem of Africa's underdevelopment to both external and internal factors. Those who traced it to external factors made reference to the European colonisation of Africa, while those who traced it to internal factors blame the failure of the African states on African leaders. It should be noted that in this study, we are influenced by the logic of dialectical and historical materialism. No event, no phenomenon, examined in isolation can be fully understood. With this at the back of our mind, we strongly believe that the problems of Africa, and by extension, the Third World underdeveloped countries, can only be fully understood when analyzed from its proper historical perspectives. From, the beginning of the interaction between Africa and Europe, Africa had been subjected to series of oppressive activities and since then, African countries had been struggling to raise their heads among the comity of nations. Indeed, the nature of relationship, which took place between Africa and Europe, could be described as the causative factor of the huge calamities that had befallen Africa since their first contact with Europe.

The problem of underdevelopment of Africa started with “trade in slaves”, the term used to refer to the shipment of captives from Africa to various other parts of the world where they were to live and work as the property of the European. (Rodney, 1972, pp. 9-10). The whole process by which captives were obtained on the African soil was more of “warfare, trickery, banditry and kidnapping”. (p.104). Without going into details of slave trade, the point to underscore here is that slave trade led to sharp reduction in the population of Africa. The massive loss to the African labour force was made more critical because it was composed of able-bodied young men and women. I emphasize population loss here because of its enormous relevance to the question of socio-economic development. Population growth played a major role in European

development in providing labour, market and pressures, which led to further technological advancement. In essence, enslavement caused Africa to lose their battle to tame and harness nature – a battle, which is at the basis of development.

Many factors are responsible for the underdeveloped nature of the African continent.

These same factors are responsible for the current African struggle against oppression. Development means a capacity for self-sustaining growth. It means that an economy must register advances, which in turn will promote further progress. Unfortunately, Africa could not achieve this as millions of youths and young adults who are human agents from whom innovations and inventions spring have been lost to slave trading. Those who remained in areas badly hit by slave capturing were pre-occupied about their freedom rather than improvement in production.

In our modern days, African countries are still losing their young talented and able-bodied men and women to “neocolonialism” and “brain drain”. These African countries are finding it extremely difficult to come to terms with the challenges of modern world and globalization. The Europeans deliberately made Africans underdeveloped. When a society, for whatever reason, finds itself, technologically training behind others, it catches up not so much by independent inventions but by borrowing. In fact, very different people have discovered few of man's major scientific discoveries in different places. Once a principle or a tool is known, it spreads or diffuses to other peoples. Why then did European technology fail to make its way into Africa during the many centuries of contact between the two continents?

The basic reason, according to Walter Rodney, is that the very nature of Afro-European trade was highly unfavourable to the movement of positive ideas and techniques from European capitalist system to the African pre-capitalist system of production. AfroEuropean trade was by nature exploitative (in favour of Europe). It was intended by Europe to stabilize and to continue to exert its domineering influences over Africa. It is such that would make Africa to continue to be dependent on Europe for sustainability. (Rodney, 1972).

The effort of the African people to liberate themselves is even jeopardized by the type of leaders they have. Indiscipline and corruption on the part of African leaders are worsening the situation. Even when we blame the colonialists for their devastating activities, we should not lose sight of the activities of our leaders. Thus, the struggle by the African people is not just against the oppressive activities of our former colonial masters but also against the current activities of our leaders.

The scholars who traced Africa's predicament to internal factors on the other hand insist that the reason for the underdevelopment of African countries is the failure of corrupt and incompetent leaders. African leaders must accept responsibility for the Africa's backwardness in the field of development.

### **The Concept of Dialectics**

The dialectics is a theory, which was popularized by one of the most important political philosophers of modern history, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel developed a theory of history in which change is the central theme. Hegel believed that the world was progressing towards a goal that was predetermined by the Absolute Spirit. He called the goal the “idea”. History, in other words, was the unfolding of God's idea.

Both Marx and Hegel saw the dialectics as a means of achieving historical “progress through struggle”. (Baradat, 1997, p. 117). Hegel believed that history was spiritually motivated. He suggested that the dialectics was a divinely created force by which the idea (history) was caused to unfold. He believed that any reality is two things. It is itself, and it is part of what it is becoming. Thus, the only consistency Hegel saw was change itself. To Hegel, history was simply the process of change brought about by struggle. In this process, no truth was ever lost, since today's reality would become part of a more perfect truth tomorrow.

Perhaps, we can better understand Hegel's theory by considering the following example. Let's call the existing state of affairs by a new idea, which we will call “antithesis”. A conflict between the thesis and antithesis will follow; this is called the dialectical process. The result of this conflict according to Hegel will be a synthesis of all the good parts of the thesis and of the antithesis. Then, the synthesis becomes the new thesis to which another antithesis eventually develops. Struggle between them ensues, and a new synthesis, and eventually a new thesis evolve, and the process begins again.

Hegel believed that the dialectical process always led to something better than what existed previously. (p. 178). He argued that good features were never lost in the dialectic process; rather they became part of a new, more complete goods. Negative aspect of the thesis and antithesis, however, were destroyed in the dialectic process. This Hegel called the “negation of negation”. Hence, Hegel saw history as inevitably progressive, with each new era improved over the last. And he expected the dialectics to continue refining and improving human institutions until the idea was fulfilled. (p. 178).

### **Understanding Dialectics and Historical Materialism**

Dialectical materialism is very vital for an accurate understanding of the role of dialectics in national development. It is called dialectical materialism because its approach to the phenomenon of nature, its methods of studying and apprehending them, is “dialectical”, while its interpretation of the phenomena of nature, its conception of these phenomena, its theory is materialistic.

Historical materialism is the extension of the principles of dialectical materialism to the study of social life, an application of the principles of dialectical materialism to the phenomena of the life of society, to the study of society and its history. In dialectical

materialism as enunciated by Marx, dialectics does not regard nature as an accidental agglomeration of things, of phenomena unconnected with, isolated from, and independent of, each other, but as a connected and integral whole, in which things, phenomena, are organically connected with, dependent on, and determined by, each other. (Stumpf, 1994, p. 330). Again, dialectics holds that nature is not a state of rest and immobility, stagnation and immutability, but a state of continuous movement and change, of continuous renewal and development, where something is always rising and developing, and always disintegrating and dying away.

The dialectical method therefore requires that phenomena should be considered not only from the stand point of their interconnection and interdependence but also from the stand point of their movement, their change, their development, their coming into being and going out of being. Further, dialectics does not regard the process of development as a simple process of growth, where quantitative changes do not lead to qualitative changes, but as a development, which passes from insignificant and imperceptible quantitative changes to open fundamental changes, to qualitative changes; a development in which the qualitative changes occur not gradually, but rapidly and abruptly, taking the form of a leap from one state to another; they occur not accidentally but as the natural result of an accumulation of imperceptible and gradual qualitative changes. (p. 331). The dialectical method therefore holds that the process of development should be understood not as a movement in a circle not as a simple repetition of what has already occurred, but as an onward and upward movement, as a transition from an old qualitative state, as a development from the simple to the complex, from the lower to the higher.

### **Evolving a Philosophy of Change**

Unlike a people with a clearly defined historical orientation principle who, as a result, live very much in history and for history, African people appear to be a drift in an historical void. In fact, it seems African people are incapable of learning adequate lessons from its past history. After many African nations regained their once lost independence, they still have not learnt and unable to formulate and device for themselves some fundamental criteria, which would serve as a measure for judging their overall internal and external activities as a people. Whereas meaningful development should be seen as a considerable increase in nation's capability to regulate both internal and external relationships, and also to adequately cater for the well-being of its citizenry.

If we (Africans) must avoid re-experiencing a situation similar to the past period of historic and cultural assault on our very human dignity by outsiders, we must consciously devise for ourselves an orientation, which would determine and constitute the foundation and characteristic feature of our identity as a people. In other words, Africans need to develop the necessary awareness for national survival. We need to evolve the allimportant attitude of paying attention to details of issues, events and history. There is urgent need for a change. Here enters the philosophy of dialectics. The theory of dialectics regards nothing as isolated. Every event, every phenomenon

must be considered in its relation with other events, other phenomena. This is a holistic view of reality. Thus, African problem must be considered in its relation with other world events. This experience is not static. It is part of the world's history, which is constantly evolving. For example, as part of an overall strategy for a total liberation from the yoke of the Roman Empire, one of the very first steps taken by England as an emerging sovereign state was to evolve a national language, which replaced Latin as a medium of communication, set up a new national church organization to replace the Roman Catholic Church. (Ogundowole, 1991, p. 16). These and other similar concrete measures of initial dissociation from the colonizers enhanced the process of evolving the relevant spirit and attitude necessary for a rapid, effective national growth and progress.

Appadorai also noted that in contrary to the political idea of the middle ages universality, England was the first country to develop a strong feeling of nationalism and to attain the full stature of organized and conscious nationhood. (Appadorai, 1978, p. 235), the same goes for American history. The Americans did not spare even the imperial system of measurement. They altered it and created from it, the American standard measurement. The Americans manipulated the English Language to create their own, thereby, dissociating themselves from their former colonizer. (Ogundowole, 1991, p. 16).

Our socio-cultural and politico-economic life represents special behavioural pattern, which are highly changeable and transformable. The psychic make-up of any group of people expresses itself through culture, depends on cultural, and manifests itself in and is governed by the language spoken by the group. Since psychic make-up is constantly evolving and changing, the historical predicament we (Africans) now find ourselves, as a people, cannot be viewed as unchangeable. As Africans we must begin to devise effective means of liberating ourselves by consciously planning for meaningful economic development. A nation's mode of production at any given time explains its political and indeed its whole cultural condition of that time, and changes in the system of production explains the corresponding changes that occur in its politics and culture. (Sabine & Thorson, 1973, p. 690).

The change we are talking about here is orderly and not accidental. Conscious efforts must be directed towards its realization. The change must begin in a form of leap from small, imperceptible quantitative changes to open fundamental qualitative changes. I strongly oppose the view of some scholars who are calling for a return to Africa's glorious past. The process of Africa's development should not be circuitous, not a simple repetition of what has occurred. It is an onward and upward movement, a development from the old to the new, from the lower to the higher. Therefore, we must put our problems in proper historical perspective, and liberate ourselves from the conditions that have perpetually put us in this quagmire for long. This is a question of self-determination.

### **The Clamour for Genuine Self-determination of Nations**

Self-determination has helped European and many North American countries to achieve the much needed growth and progress. This principle is equally working for some Asian countries now. But then, how can a nation be self-determined. One of the marks of self-determined nations is their aggressive pursuance of scientific discoveries. For African nations to be self-reliant, they must create and develop their own technologies, which will truly reflect their social realities. The extent to which a nation is self-determined is a combined factor of scientific and technological advancement. To be sure, to be scientifically and technologically oriented is not a finished activity. It is an ongoing process. But there must be some measure of achievement in that area.

For African nations to be fully self-determined or self-reliant, we must consciously plan for its achievement. For any development plan to succeed both in the immediate and in ultimate senses, it must as a first step succeed in taking every member of the society along both in the material process of its implementation and in the normative ideal setting. Since self-reliance or self-determination is a natural product of the passion of self-defence in the face of forces that tend to suppress, or try to keep one in perpetual subjugation, African leaders must be competent, dedicated, confident, patriotic, and above all, original and creative. If the leaders are serious about national projects, it is expected that followers will follow suit.

Another point to note is that there is need for total mobilization of all resources among African states as a matter of necessity for economic survival and progress; a vital lever for social change (Ogundowole, p. 103). Education of the citizenry must equally be tailored along development. Scientific education should be promoted. The current level of research in our universities is not vibrant enough; the public and private sector must participate and sponsor research activities to be able to withstand the challenges of the millennium.

Proper economic planning for both short term and long term gains must be embraced. Dialectical mode of reasoning teaches us that growth and decay are continuous and are both in tense unity, or, simply put, are two ends of the same process. The difference between a period of expansion and contraction in economic activities lies in the relative importance of the growth in industrial activities. When a better way of satisfying consumer's needs is devised, consumer demand shifts towards the new product and away from the old. When consumer demand shifts, some segments of the economy are stimulated, others are retarded, and if innovation or adaptation has been pervasive through several important sectors of the economy, the entire economy will be stimulated and the structure of industrial relationship will be significantly changed.

Economic reforms among Africa nations must put great emphasis on home-made goods instead of importation of foreign goods. No nation whose major source of goods and services come through importation can be self-determined. We must encourage local

manufacturers. As developed as the United States of America's economy, it placed embargo on the importation of certain clothing materials from China in recent months. This is done so as to protect the interest of local manufacturers of the same product. African nations must emulate this.

### **The Drive towards Authenticity**

Authenticity derives from the word authentic, which literary translates to originality. Authenticity therefore means the quality of being real or true (Summers, 2001, p. 72). Authentic nationhood can be interpreted as a nation that appreciates the independence of the sovereignty to determine for itself political structures in which possibilities are abundant for a higher form of integration into the mainstream of global recognition. Such a nation realizes the inevitability of its factual givens, and the need to make projections within it, as well as being responsible for the outcome. By this, such a nation distinctively defines itself. This implies a high level of originality, borne out of strong character of maturity, as well as the display of self-reliance.

An authentic nation in this sense is a nation that is self-determined, self-oriented, a nation that does not bring hook-line and sinker foreign policy for the sake of embracing political order, but because such policy is in tune with the reality of its historical projections. "A nation that keeps testing one alien system of government after another in the hope that one of them would provide a permanent solution to its social and economic problems is an inauthentic nation" (Unah, 1996, p. 119). In the words of Jim Unah, such a nation is: A nation without a sound ideological framework of its own to guide social action, a nation that goes about copying every available piece of ideology is vulnerable, and like an edifice without foundation, such a nation easily falls prey to the windstorm of imperialism. Such a nation is not genuine and is therefore lost in the inauthentic "they world" where failure and misfortune are explained away in terms of sabotage. (p.103).

For Martin Heidegger, authenticity consists in not being submerged in the anonymous crowd of the "they world", that is, being free from any outward determination and control. (Heidegger,1962). To this extent, authentic nation is a nation that is not under the influence of external control in the name of any alliance. By this we mean that authentic nation is a nation that does not cripple the possibilities of human existence in its enviroing world for the sake of aligning with international regulations, especially, if such alliance is a distortion of quality life. To be precise, a developing nation that goes about implementing the policies of International Monetary Fund, and World Bank at the detriment of its domestic economy without prudent management of its endowed natural resources is doomed to be lost in the "they world". Such a nation will perpetually fall prey to the antics of the imperialists and will be inauthentic in its outlook and constitution. African nations must strive to attain the level of authentic nationhood to be able to effectively confront the challenges of the global world in the twenty first century.

## **Conclusion**

For a nation to develop, individual members of that nation must as a rule realise the need for a change when necessary. This is the thrust of the doctrine of constant renewal and reordering of society as envisaged by Confucius of Ancient Chinese civilisation. Further, when members of a nation stand up to their true callings, when a teacher performs the role of a teacher, a minister the role of minister, a scientist the role of a scientist, then, there will be order, peace and development in society.

Granted that Africa's colonial experience dealt a devastating blow on us as a nation, what do we have to say about the diversion of money meant for developmental purposes into private purse by our leaders? It is not just enough to put our entire problem on our colonial experience. To do that would amount to inauthenticity. Authentic appraisal of Africa's situation should take into account the role of African leaders since independence. What African nations need at this point is an aggressive pursuance of technological breakthrough. The mode of production says much about a nation's economic development. Economic development, in turn, is an index for the development of other social variables. But we know that technology is the basis of an effective mode of production.

The Europeans were able to colonize Africa and other parts of the world because of their superior technology. Had it been that Africa was technologically advanced before its contact with Europe, perhaps it would not have been colonised. The point I am making here is that technological advancement is the key to sustainable development and transformation. In arriving at this conclusion I assume that members of a nation are conscious of their unity and have a strong sense of national loyalty and identity, and that they are ready to embark on creative and innovative endeavours.

The need to embrace science and technology is even more pronounced in the face of globalisation. It is now that Africa need to be more authentic than ever before, African nations must make funds available for research activities. Enormous capital is required for research and communication. I conclude this work by reiterating the statement that the overall socio-cultural and political-economic development of African nations depend largely on discipline, dedication, patriotism and how well Africa is able to develop in the areas of science and technology.

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