

Marxism and Sam Aihimegbe's *Blood in the Creek*

Oluwagbemiro Isaiah Adesina^{[a],*}

^[a]Department of English, University of Ibadan, Oyo, Nigeria.
*Corresponding author.

Received 18 July 2017; accepted 7 September 2017
Published online 26 October 2017

Abstract

Marxist theory or Marxist criticism, one of the theories used in literary criticism, is based on the ideologies of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who argue that all societies (with the exception of primitive hunter/gatherers) are divided along class lines and are characterised by class struggle. This paper examines Sam Aihimegbe's *Blood in the Creek* as a reflection of Marx's explanation regarding the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat resulting from economic, political and social imbalances. Marxism here is used as a lens to unveil how the capitalists: Government, their friends and oil companies explore the oil resources of Odi and other parts of the Niger Delta only for their financial benefits without consideration of the proletariat, the working class. In the face of uneven distribution of resources among the strata of the society, the masses revolt and this revolution is met with stiff resistance from the oil benefactors. This paper argues that studying *Blood in the Creek* from a Marxist perspective assists to reveal layers of crisis between the capitalist and the working class. It uses literature to x-ray oil issues raised in the narrative, and seeks to proffer solution to the crisis between the bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Key words: Marxist criticism; Class struggle; Uneven distribution of resources; *Blood in the Creek*

Adesina, O. I. (2017). Marxism and Sam Aihimegbe's *Blood in the Creek*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 15(4), 1-10. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/9921>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/9921>

INTRODUCTION

As noted by Habib (2005), the tradition of Marxist thought has provided the most powerful critique of capitalist institutions and ethics ever conducted. Its founder, Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883), was a German political, economic, philosophical theorist and revolutionist. The influence of Marx's ideas on modern world history has been vast. Until the collapse of the communist systems of the USSR and Eastern Europe in 1991, one-third of the world's population had been living under political administrations claiming descent from Marx's ideas. His impact on the world of thought has been equally extensive, embracing sociology, philosophy, economics, and cultural theory (Habib, 2005). Marxism has also generated a rich tradition of literary and cultural criticism. Many branches of modern criticism—including historicism, feminism, deconstruction, postcolonial and cultural criticism—are indebted to the insights of Marxism, which often originated in the philosophy of Hegel. What distinguishes Marxism is that it is not only a political, economic, and social theory but also a form of practice in all of these domains (Ibid.).

Marxist theory or Marxist criticism, one of the theories that are used in literary criticism, is based on the ideologies of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895). Karl Marx lived during a period when the overwhelming majority of people in industrial societies were poor. This was the early period of industrialisation in countries like England, Germany and the United States. Those who owned and controlled the factories and other means of production exploited the masses that worked for them. He believes that ownership of the means of production in any society determines the distribution of wealth, power, and even ideas in that society. The power of wealth is derived not just from their control of the economy but from their control of the political, educational, and religious

institution as well. In *The German Ideology* (1845), Marx argues that the means of production controls a society's institutions and beliefs, contended that history is progressing toward the eventual triumph of communism, and introduced the concept of dialectical materialism, the theory that history develops as a struggle between contradictions that are eventually synthesized (Dobie, 2012).

According to Dobie (2012), when Marx met the political economist Friedrich Engels in Paris in 1844 and they discovered that they had arrived at similar views independent of one another, they decided to collaborate to explain the principles of communism (which they later called Marxism) and to organise an international movement. These ideas were expounded in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), in which they identified class struggle as the driving force behind history. They argue that "the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle". Thus, history evolves through the interaction between the mode of production and the relations of production. The mode of production constantly evolves toward a realisation of its fullest productive capacity, but this evolution creates antagonisms between the classes of people defined by the relations of production, that is, owners and workers.

As class struggle is the engine room of history, to understand the course of history, one must analyse the class relations that typify different historical epochs, the antagonisms and forms of class struggle embodied in such class relations (Dobie, 2012). This involves the development of class consciousness and follows the revolutionary movements that challenge the dominant classes. It extends to rate the success of these revolutions in developing new modes of production and forms of social organisation. They anticipated that this struggle would lead to a revolution in which workers would overturn capitalists, take control of economic production, and abolish private property by turning it over to the government to be distributed fairly (Dobie, 2012).

In the three-volume work, *Das Kapital* (1867), Marx writes that "the mode of production of material life determines altogether the social, political, and intellectual life process. It is not the consciousness of men that determine their being, but on the contrary their social being that determines their consciousness". He argues that history is determined by economic conditions, thereby calling for an end to private ownership of public utilities, transportation, and the means of production. Thus, according to Marxism, economic issues are dominant in any society and it has been responsible for all major changes in history.

Marx has tried to suggest that all society passes through evolution, every society progresses stage by stage and every society has marched ahead. According to, Delahoyde (2011),

The supposedly "natural" political evolution involved (and would in the future involve) "feudalism" leading to "bourgeois capitalism" leading to "socialism" and finally to "utopian communism." In bourgeois capitalism, the privileged bourgeoisie relies on the proletariat—the labor force responsible for survival. Marx theorized that when profits are not reinvested in the workers but in creating more factories, the workers will grow poorer and poorer until no short-term patching is possible or successful. At a crisis point, revolt will lead to a restructuring of the system.

Marx sees history as progressive and inevitable. Private ownership, he said, began with slavery, then evolved into feudalism, which was largely replaced by capitalism by the late eighteenth century. Evident in small ways as early as the sixteenth century, capitalism became a fully developed system with the growing power of the bourgeoisie in the mid-nineteenth century. At every stage, it had negative consequences, because it was a flawed system that involved maintaining the power of a few of the repression of many.

In essence, the means of production structure the society. Capitalism, for example, has a two-part structure consisting of the bourgeoisie, who own property and thereby controls the means of production, and the proletariat, the workers controlled by the bourgeoisie and whose labour produces their wealth. Capitalism is a mode of production based on private ownership of the means of production. Capitalists produce commodities for the exchange market and to stay competitive must extract as much labour from the workers as possible at the lowest possible cost (Delahoyde, 2011). The economic interest of the capitalist is to pay the worker as little as possible, in fact just enough to keep him alive and productive. The workers, in turn, come to understand that their economic interest lies in preventing the capitalist from exploiting them in this way. As this example shows, the social relations of production are inherently antagonistic; giving rise to a class struggle that Marx believes will lead to the overthrow of capitalism by the proletariat. The proletariat will replace the capitalist mode of production with a mode of production based on the collective ownership of the means of production, which is called Communism. The central Marxist position is that the economic base of a society determines the nature and structure of the ideology, institutions and practices, including literature that forms the superstructure of that society (Ibid.).

1. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MARXISM

Suvin (2009) divides Marxism into three spatiotemporal phases:

- Early Marxism, approximately from 1878 to 1917: Its site is Europe; the main force or leading institution is the German Social Democratic Party; the main events are the depression from

1873 to 1896, the rise of imperialism and party bureaucracy, World War I.

- Middle Marxism, from 1917 to 1956 or 1968: site: The whole world; main force or leading institution: Leninism and the Communist Party of the USSR; main events: the October Revolution and the inception of the USSR, the Great Depression of 1929, the rise of Stalinist counter-revolution and fascism, World War II, the Chinese Revolution, the rise of the US empire.
- Late Marxism, approximately from 1956 or 1968 to 1991: site: the whole world; main force: lacking; main events: The Cold War, the degeneration of the ruling communist parties, dissident attempts to reform it, the return of an utterly shameless form of capitalism and imperialism.

Many different versions of Marxism emerged after the deaths of Marx and Engels. While the first generation of Marxist theorists and activists tended to focus on the economy and politics, later generations of Western Marxists appeared in Europe after the Russian revolution and developed Marxian theories of culture, the state, social institutions, psychology, and other thematic not systematically engaged by the first generation of Marxism and attempted to update the Marxian theory to account for developments in the contemporary era (Kellner, 2005). Many 20th century Marxian theorists ranging from Georg Lukacs, Karl Korsch, Antonio Gramsci, Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, to JeanPaul Sartre, Herbert Marcuse, Louis Althusser, Fredric Jameson, and Slavoj Zizek employed the Marxian theory to analyse past and present cultural, political, economic, and social forms in relation to their production, their imbrications with the economy and history, and their impact and functions within social life (Kellner, 2005).

2. TENETS OF MARXISM

The main tenets of Marxism are dialectical materialism, materialistic interpretation of history, class war, labour theory of value and inevitability of revolution.

2.1 Dialectical Materialism

According to the dialectical approach, reality is characterised by three key features: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. All reality is in a state of flux, and nothing is static; all reality contains and is driven forward by internal contradictions; and all reality is interconnected: nothing exists in isolation. Engels described dialectics as the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought and formulated three main laws of dialectics: a) the transformation of quantity into quality, by which is meant gradual quantities changes at a certain point cause sudden and revolutionary

qualitative change; b) the unity of opposites, by which is meant that all reality contains opposites or contradictions bound together as unities; and c) the negation of the negation, by which is meant that when opposites clash, one negates the other and is then itself negated and superseded by another opposite but with previous negations all in some sense preserved. Engels's emphasis on dialectics as universal scientific laws led to a rigid, dogmatic interpretation that became known as dialectical materialism (Johnson, Walker, & Gray, 2014).

2.2 Materialistic Interpretation of History/ Historical Materialism

Historical materialism is an attempt to explain the origin and development of the society from a materialistic perspective. It deals with the most general laws of social development, where it identifies material forces playing crucial roles in the formation and evolution of human societies (Nellickappilly, 2014). The most important aspect of social reality is the economic structure of a particular society; the ways in which different groups of people are related to economic resources of the society and their respective production relationships. Marx posits that human societies develop in accordance with certain laws, which are independent of the wishes and desires of people. He argues that the development of society can be seen as a process of social production, and every society progresses stage by stage. He highlighted the stages as:

Primitive Communism → Slavery → Feudalism → Capitalism → Socialism → Communism

Historians recorded history in the manner it is found. But Marx had a vision for the future, how is history taking man through time. Each stage sows the seed of its own destruction. One will go and others will come. Such precision and succession will continue till the ultimate, that is, communism is reached.

2.3 Class War

Marxists, more than any other perspective, embrace the concept of social class. Marxism states that humanity's history is related to class struggle, the struggle between social classes, and these struggles have changed throughout time. Karl Marx says all societies (with the exception of primitive hunter/gatherers) are divided along class lines. Rather than defining class by occupation, Marx adopts an economic definition based on people's relationship to the means of production. According to Marx, there are always just two classes (Giddens, 1975). The dominant class own the means of production (factories, mines, mills etc.) whereas the subordinate class owns nothing except its labour power. This is known as a dichotomous or two-part view of society. These two classes are interdependent but their interests never coincide and are in conflict with each other: The dominant class benefits from society remaining as it is, the subordinate class benefits from the change so that it is

no longer oppressed. In capitalism, these two classes are the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Because the dominant bourgeoisie class exploits the proletariat, class conflict inevitably exists, although this is not always recognised; resulting in a state of false consciousness.

2.4 Labour Theory of Value

According to King and Ripstein (1987), the central claim of the labour theory of value is that products exchange in proportion to the amount of labour time required for their replacement. This claim has two components. The first is the claim that exchange is regulated by the resources needed to replace various goods. The second is the claim that labour-power is the fundamental commodity that regulates the exchange of all others. Marx believes that capitalist society created three forms of alienation (Pogreba, 2015). First, the worker is alienated from what he produces. Second, the worker is alienated from himself; only when he is not working does he feel truly himself. Finally, in capitalist society people are alienated from each other; that is, in a competitive society people are set against other people. Marx believes that the solution was communism, which would allow the development of our full "potentialities as a human".

2.5 Inevitability of Revolution

Marx predicts that capitalism would be overthrown as the workers revolt against their masters and create a class free society (Boyer, 1998). He thought this would happen in his own lifetime, or shortly after his death. This has clearly not happened, and certainly not in Britain or Germany where Marx thought the revolution against capitalism would begin. To, Marx, capitalism contains contradictions, forces and processes which cannot help but increase its internal difficulties to the point where it is inevitably overthrown (Trainer, 2017). Through the deteriorating alignment between the forces and relations of production contradictions become more glaring, there is polarisation into capitalists and proletarian classes, the class consciousness of the proletariat increases and in time a revolutionary change of system occurs. Bourgeois revolutions overthrew feudal society in which landed aristocrats rules, e.g., the French Revolution. Marxists insist that dominant classes will not voluntarily give up power, wealth and privilege. Their control has to be taken away from them, and this might have to involve violence (Trainer, 2017).

3. EARLY INFLUENCES ON MARXISM

There were various influences on early Marxist thinking in addition to that of the political experiences of its founders, including the work of the eighteenth-century German philosopher Hegel (especially his idea of the dialectic, whereby opposing forces or ideas bring about new situations or ideas) (Barry, 2002). Marxism also built

upon the socialist thinking which was produced in France at the time of the French Revolution, and it inverted some of the ideas of early economic theory, especially the view that the pursuit of individual economic self-interest would bring economic and social benefits to the whole of society (the belief which was and is the underlying rationale of capitalism).

4. MARXIST LITERARY CRITICISM

Though, Marx and Engels themselves did not put forward any comprehensive theory of literature, all the same, Marxist literary criticism maintains that a writer's social class, and its prevailing "ideology" (outlook, values, tacit assumptions, half-realised allegiances, etc.) have a major bearing on what is written by a member of that class (Barry, 2002). The Marxists posit that literature reflects those social institutions out of which it emerges and is itself a social institution with a particular ideological function (Delahoyde, 2011). For Marxist critics, works of literature often mirror the creator's own place in society, and they interpret most texts in relation to their relevance regarding issues of class struggle as depicted in a work of fiction. To Marxism, literature belongs to the superstructure which is a product of the base realities. The Marxist approach, thus, relates literary text to the society, to the history and cultural and political systems in which it is created. It does not consider a literary text, devoid of its writer and the influences on the writer. A writer is a product of his own age which is itself a product of many ages (Panda, 2015). Accordingly, literature reflects class struggle and materialism.

Thus, to Marxism, literature can only be properly understood within a larger framework of social reality. Marxism views a literary text as the product of an ideology particular to a specific historical period, not the product of an individual consciousness (Strickland, 2012). The text, for Marxist critics, is judged on the basis of its portrayal of social actions. They insist that literature must be understood in relation to historical and social reality. In essence, Marxists believe that a work of literature is not a result of divine inspiration or pure artistic endeavour, but that it arises out of the economic and ideological circumstances surrounding its creation (Witalec, 2003).

According to Panda (2015), in a Marxist approach to literature, the following factors are considered:

- There is a class history and class struggle in a literary text.
- Struggle is there means there is a domination and oppression. And in that, someone has to win and someone has to defeat. It belongs to a particular society and culture.
- There are influential factors like political motives behind the production of a text. (the text is for whom? and why?)

Leon Trosky, a Russian Marxist revolutionary theorist, summarises the questions which are to be asked in a Marxist approach to literature as follows:

To which order of feelings does a given artistic work correspond in all its peculiarities? What are the social conditions of these thoughts and feelings? What place do they occupy in the historic development of a society and of a class? And, further, what literary heritage has entered into the elaboration of the new form? Under the influence of what historic impulse have the new complexes of feelings and thoughts broken through the shell which divides them from the sphere of poetic consciousness? (Trotsky, 1923)

Dobie (2012, p.93) also notes that:

The good Marxist critic is careful to avoid the kind of approach that concerns itself with form and craft at the expense of examining social realities. Instead, the Marxist critic will search out the depiction of inequities in social classes, an imbalance of goods and power among people, or manipulation of the worker by the bourgeoisie and will then point out the injustice of that society. If a text presents a society in which class conflict has been resolved, all people share equally in power and wealth, and the proletariat has risen to its rightful place, then the critic can point to a text in which social justice has taken place, citing it as a model of social action.

5. APPLICATION

According to Eagleton (1976, p.553),

Marxist criticism is not merely a “sociology of literature”, concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Its aim is to explain the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings. But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the products of a particular history.

Marx’s theory of historical materialism posits that a society’s organization and development are fundamentally shaped by the material conditions of that society’s mode of production. Thus, to understand transformations in society, Marx’s historical materialism examines the means by which human workers labour. It also considers the relationships between different social classes and the ideologies (ways of thinking) of those social classes.

Twentieth century novelists have engaged Marx’s theory of historical materialism by portraying how human relations are, in essence, a conflict for control over the means of production. For example, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, which narrates the story of British men who travel into the heart of Africa along the Congo River to hunt for ivory to export, portrays the brutal acts of inhumanity that the colonists are willing to commit in order to control the labour and the goods of the indigenous people. Other examples of postcolonial novels that present human conflict as, in essence, a struggle to control the means of production include Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Gabriel

Garcia Marquez’ *100 Years of Solitude*, and Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rainforest*.

6. MARXIST CRITICS

According to Pogreba (2015), Marxist critics include:

Georg Lukács (1885-1971)

- Believed that a detailed analysis of symbols. Images and other literary devices (formalism) would expose class conflict and expose the relationship between the superstructure and the base.
- Reflection Theory: Belief that texts directly reveal a society’s consciousness.
- Approach is largely didactic, emphasising the negativity of capitalism, seen in alienation.

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937)

- Developed theory of cultural hegemony, to explain why the “inevitable” revolution of the proletariat predicted by orthodox Marxism had not occurred by the early 20th century. According to Gramsci, capitalism maintained control not just through violence and political and economic coercion, but also ideologically, through a hegemonic culture in which the values of the bourgeoisie became the “common sense” values of all.
- Thus a consensus culture developed in which people in the working class identified their own good with the good of the bourgeoisie, and helped to maintain the status quo rather than revolting.
- The working class needed to develop a “counter-hegemonic” culture, said Gramsci, firstly to overthrow the notion that bourgeois values represented “natural” or “normal” values for society, and ultimately to succeed in overthrowing capitalism.
- In effect, for Gramsci, literature is a tool of the privileged class, and cannot be used to further Marxist revolutions.
- Critics using Gramsci’s perspective look for the signs of hegemonic thinking embedded in literary works.

Louis Althusser (1918-1990)

- Rejected a basic assumption of most Marxist critics before him—that the superstructure directly reflects the base. His answer, known as production theory, asserts that literature cannot be merely considered a part of the superstructure at all.
- Art can inspire revolution.
- Althusser argued that the dominant hegemony, or prevailing ideology forms the attitudes of people through a process called interpellation, or “hailing the subject.”

- The worldview of the people is carefully crafted through a complex series of messages sent through the elements of the superstructure, including the arts.
- The dominant class uses this Ideological State Apparatus, rather than political or military repression.
- However, Althusser believed that counter-hegemonies can emerge, if the people write their own literature (poems, novels, and dramas), create their own music, and create their own art.

According to Dobie (2012), currently two of the best-known Marxist critics are Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton. Jameson is known for the use of Freudian ideas in his practice of Marxist criticism. Whereas Freud discussed the notion of the repressed unconscious of the individual Jameson talks about the political unconscious, the exploitation and oppression buried in a work. The critic, according to Jameson, seeks to uncover those buried forces and bring them to light. Eagleton, a British critic, is difficult to pin down, as he continues to develop his thinking. Of special interest to critics is his examination of the interrelations between ideology and literary form. The constant in his criticism is that he sets himself against the dominance of the privileged class; both Jameson and Eagleton have responded to the influence of post-structuralism, and in the case of the latter, it resulted in a radical shift of direction in the late 1970s.

7. ARGUMENT AGAINST MARXISM

One of the major critics of Marxist theory is Karl Popper, who has argued that both the concept of Marx's historical method as well as its application is falsifiable, and thus it cannot be proven true or false. According to him,

The Marxist theory of history, in spite of the serious efforts of some of its founders and followers, ultimately adopted this soothsaying practice. In some of its earlier formulations (for example in Marx's analysis of the character of the "coming social revolution") their predictions were testable, and in fact falsified. Yet instead of accepting the refutations the followers of Marx re-interpreted both the theory and the evidence in order to make them agree. In this way they rescued the theory from refutation; but they did so at the price of adopting a device which made it irrefutable. They thus gave a "conventionalist twist" to the theory; and by this stratagem they destroyed its much advertised claim to scientific status. (Popper, 2002, p.49)

The Marxist view of class has also been criticised for its overemphasis upon its relational 'class consciousness' to the means of production. Others have portrayed Marx's two-part (dichotomous) view of society as simplistic and for ignoring the fact that reality is much more complex. The development of capitalism has not confirmed this picture of polarisation and dichotomisation, but rather within the twenty-first century the sub-division and splitting up of classes (fragmentation and diversification)

that Max Weber predicted. Postmodernists go even further, talking about the death of class altogether as a meaningful concept.

Marxism is an economic and socio-political worldview. It is a method of socioeconomic enquiry into a materialistic interpretation of historical development, a dialectical view of social change. Marxism is an analysis of class-relations within society and their application in the analysis and critique of the development of capitalism (Delahoyde, 2011). The tradition of Marxist thought has provided the most powerful critique of capitalist institutions and ethics ever conducted. Marxist theory has continued to appeal to different scholars of literary criticism.

8. APPLICATION OF MARXIST THEORY TO AIHIMEGBE'S *BLOOD IN THE CREEK*

Aihimegbe's *Blood in the Creek* could be said to be a true story of the Odi massacre of the Niger Delta area of Nigeria in 1999. According to Nwajah (1999), on November 20, 1999, the Nigerian military attacked the Ijaw town of Odi in Bayelsa where it was stated that over three thousand people were killed. The attack which is alleged to have been ordered by former President Olusegun Obasanjo is referred to as Odi massacre. The attack was as a result of conflict in the Niger Delta over indigenous rights to oil resources and environmental protection. Leading to the attack, it was alleged that twelve policemen were abducted and killed by Odi's militant group. Reacting, the Federal Government drafted soldiers in the town to revenge the killing of the policemen.

Another report reveals that soldiers drafted to the town were ambushed by the militants who first attacked the soldiers. Attacking back with superior fire arms, the soldiers killed a large number of members of the community. The military later defended the killing of the people of the town by saying that they had to unleash terror on Odi because the people of the town laid ambush for them (Nwajah, 1999). As a result of the massacre and property destroyed by the soldiers, in February 2013, Justice Lambi Akanbi of the Federal High Court ruled that the Federal Government should pay N37.6 billion compensation to the people of Odi. The judge condemned the brazen violation of the fundamental human rights of the victims to movement, life and to own property and live peacefully in their ancestral home. The Federal Government of the day did not pay the compensation but the successive government headed by former President Ebele Goodluck Jonathan paid N15 billion (Ibid.).

As established above that the narrative could be a real story of the people of the Niger Delta, to put credence to the above assertion that the narrative in the text is a real event that happened in Odi, most of the characters

are real notable individuals from the region. They have fought and are still fighting for the restructuring of the nation's economic in such a way that the management of their natural resources, most importantly, crude oil will be controlled by them. Some of the real names in the story are Isaac Boro, who formed a militant group known as the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, NDVF, Ken Saro Wiwa, and Timi Alaibe.

The writer, Aihimegbe is a lawyer, pastor, politician, creative writer and peace activist from the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria, where indigenes feel cheated of their oil resources. The writer is perceived to identify with both the plight of the area and the sufferings of the people. The setting of the narrative is Odi, Bayelsa State in tNiger Delta, Nigeria. Also, it might not be incontrovertible to conclude that the writer is interested in issues relating to the region as well as using the text to channel a Marxist course. Besides, the narrative starts with the oppressed people concluding arrangements to confront their oppressors, the government and the oil companies that are making huge money from the business of the abundant crude oil that is domicile in the community without them being allowed to benefit from it in any way. They want to fight to have control of the crude oil because they feel that without violence, they cannot get what belong to them. Considering all these variables, it will not be out of place to argue that the narrative is Marxist oriented. Besides, it needs to be pointed out that though, at the beginning of the story, Ozi is claimed to be the affected community, but towards the end of the story, the town is referred to as Odi and being interchangeably used with Ozi; hence, the adoption of Odi for this paper.

Usually, it is a common knowledge that resources acquired from the oil producing areas are not plough back to develop it and the people of the areas suffer. According to Akinbi (2012), the people of Niger Delta suffer neglect from the government and oil companies. They experience deprivation, oil spillage, the burden of devastated ecology, lack of basic socio-economic infrastructures, and government's commitment towards the welfare of the people. All these have resulted into incessant collusion with government and oil companies and continual demand for things like resource control. Corroborating this, Doyle in the text says,

Boro told us to fight for our freedom. We dreamed of the Niger Delta Republic and determined to break the cycle of slavery and marginalisation. We decided to tackle our powerlessness... we launched the struggle for political reasons.... We built the struggle with our blood...We taught how to be true Patriots and defended our lands, pride and people...We're tired of an evil system that only oils gang of thieves and recycles poor leadership. That is why we loathe our present subjection...This is the time to resist silence, inaction, and fear. (p.1, 3)

As a result of the socio-economic and political exploitation in Odi, the deprivation of the landowners of their rights and entitlements spurs them to decide to fight

for what belong to them and get it at any cost. They are the oppressed/proletariats while the government and the oil companies that own the means of production and carrying out economic activities on government/private partnership basis are the bourgeoisies/oppressors. Therefore, the leaders of the community form a militant group called Egbesu to fight their perceived oppressors. The group also has the youth and women wings. While the youth is very violent, the women's wing is passive and only protested once when four leaders were arrested and killed in police custody. Setting the rules for the struggle, the Egbesu militant group agreed to fight only their oppressor and not to unleash terror on their fellow oppressed people:

...Timi told us details of our first militant mission and the Egbesu rules that govern it. The first was the rule against rape, kidnapping, looting, robbery or any war crime. As Egbesu liberators, we were barred from committing the same atrocities the occupying army committed in many Ijaw towns and villages. We were to fight a justifiable war against the army and achieve our freedom on a platter of moral values. (pp.6-7)

To succeed in the fight against the capitalists, the Egbesu Militant group fortifies themselves spiritually and with arms and ammunitions. The first and the main spiritual fortification is carried out in form of immersion in River Nun, where a mermaid lives. Other fortifications were done individually. However, as they are preparing to fight, the capitalists are not folding their arms as they equally attempt not only to fight back but to also frustrate their plans to hijack the economic structure of the area. The government launches its attack by using police to arrest four Egbesu elders that were eventually killed in the police custody. The attitude of the government to demand of the perceived oppressed people is demonstrated in the view of a policeman who says:

I hate the noise talk about self-determination, and resource control they're making... Your father will dearly pay for opposing the government.... Your dad will pay with his life. How can Odi elders stop Shell from selling her crude oil? Where will government get money to pay salaries? Your dad says he wants full compensation for more than 50 years of oil spillage. How will government feed our poor families if they pay such mighty compensation? (pp.43-44)

Apart from brutality, the police use other means to subdue the agitators. The police attempts to infiltrate their camp by getting some of the Egbesu members to its side through some bait. For instance, the police offer "the son" a job as a police informant. The job entails the boy leaking the secret of the group as well as helping them to arrest members. He was told that he will be handsomely rewarded for the job. He turns down the offer. His other members like Alaibe accept the police offer and work with them by giving information about the hideouts of the militants. This strategy helps the security operatives to crack down on the group.

The struggle takes another dimension when the women's wing stages a peaceful protest upon hearing that

the arrested elders of the community have been killed. The youth also launch violent attack on the security operatives by abducting three policemen and killing them. The government responded by drafting soldiers to the area. The soldiers carry out genocide mission in the land. They also committed other war crimes like raping women, violating people's human rights.

Marxist theory believes that in a society, economics determines all social institutions and social class. Alluding to this, Wright (2003) is of the opinion that classes are social categories sharing subjectively-salient attributes used by people to rank those categories within a system of economic stratification. It is argued that it is impossible to cross from one social class to the other; more importantly, from working class to bourgeoisie. This is another major characteristic of the *Blood in the Creek*. The first noticeable class observed in the narration is the proletariat class. But there are classes among the so called proletariats. For instance, the character identified as "dad" is portrayed as a proletariat but he is more comfortable than the others. He lives in a comfortable environment and has access to good food. As a result, he maintains a leadership position alongside other characters of his status. He organises the low level strata of proletariats as the war front individuals in the struggle against the bourgeoisie. He equally succeeds in making his child one of the leaders of the youth wing of the militant group.

Another social class is the government and the oil companies. They do not relate with the proletariats as they either keep them as labour or eliminate them when they feel they pose threat. All that the bourgeoisie does is to take the wealth of the land and, "left us empty, poor, disheartened and anxious. Government added salt to injury by crushing truthful descent.... Government is more interested in our oil and gas resources than our well being and other challenges in our community" (p.22, 25).

The writer unequivocally demonstrates how people's value is based on labour exerted. Majority of the people in the society believe that as long as they can get a job to do and they are paid, the society is fine. Though, they know that the salaries their employers pay them do not commensurate with the service rendered, they are not bothered as long as they can feed with the salaries. The narration reveals that the middle working class will do everything possible to stop the revolutionary group from making any demands from the bourgeoisie because of the threat that it will affect the little income coming to them. The DPO credence to this point when he points out to the boy that he identifies with the struggle against the government but he cannot participate so that his means of livelihood will not stop. He points out that he has two wives and ten children to take care of and he is using the salary he is getting as a government official to do this, hence, he will prefer the maintenances of status quo. According to him:

I was at the Kaiama declaration, as a spy. I regretted it afterwards: Because, in a sense, the boys are fighting our cause. So, to spy on. Those helping us to defeat slavery, poverty and stagnation, was painful. But I'm also working for government. I ought to mind my business as a Police officer and not ruin my daily bread because of the pains of my People. How does one leave a passionate job like mine? (p.63)

The policeman practically explains the principle of alienation which Sawan (2003) summed up as four distinct "breaks" or "separations": from work (activity), products (material), each other (between persons) and the "species". The police officer admits that he is an Ijaw man but he prefers to be alienated from his kinsmen because he wants to survive. He also prefers to be alienated from his family, wives and children because he wants to survive and be able to cater for them. He says, "I'm not a materialist, I'm however a survivalist. I believe in hard work. I have ten children from two fruitful wives" (p.63).

As espoused by the Marxist, the ultimate is that the working class will seize power and create a classless society. Coby (1986) notes that Marx promises the establishment of a classless society with respect to the opportunity for creative, self-satisfying labour. According to him, classlessness, therefore, is a direct consequence of an economy of abundance: Once provided with material abundance, the individual is able to break the chains of physical necessity and enter into spiritual communion with his fellow citizens, who seem to him as comrades, no longer as competitors. This ideology is described as a utopian dream by some critics. Coby dismisses this ideology when he notes that certainly it is unrealistic to suppose, as does Marx, that a whole population can live amidst plenty without acquisition, possession, and consumption becoming the centre of their existence. He added that no society can be so productive that the competition for goods will cease.

This is the love of honour. Material abundance can do nothing to allay this passion, because honour is by definition a scarce commodity; it diminishes in value the more others claim to possess it. Honour does tie people together, for some must give in order that others may receive; but mostly honour divides. (Coby, 1986, p.26)

In line with the conclusion of Coby that Marx idea is utopian, the violent struggle by the proletariats attempting to seize power is vehemently resisted by the government through its security operatives especially soldiers and police. Failure to release the three policemen abducted and eventually killed led to genocide in the town and over three thousand people were claimed to have been killed by the soldiers. Not that alone, many women were raped, many people maimed, and assorted assaults were carried on some people while lots of people were turned to refugees in the creek and other towns.

Intervention of another character, Tomolina brings a new dimension to the whole scenario. Though Tomolina believes in agitation for ones right, he equally

believes that such agitation should not be violent but rather psychologically staged by ways of engaging the bourgeoisie in roundtable negotiation. He also feels that even if all is not achieved, at least some level of success will be achieved.

Tomilina told “the son” (the story teller and the main character in the book):

I told your dad about the dangers, destruction, and miseries that armed struggle often brings, but he did not listen... His death reinstated my belief in non-violence, as the only viable option. It taught me that if we go the way of non-violence, we will defeat our enemies. Government is a violent institution. Government does not respect anyone. But government respects peaceful means. No government persuades violent people not to be violent. They threaten them with superior violence. They wait for any opportunity to overwhelm them with violence. That is what is going on in Ozi. It is called *boa tactic*. Government believes in the abuse of power. They think they have a monopoly of violence. Some civilized governments, oil companies like Shell, Agip and Chevron adopt violent methods too. Their discriminatory practices are violent. Our youth must embrace peace. (p.24)

Tomolina, however, is able to get something for the oppressed people from the government. He established non-violence academy where youths will be de-radicalised and possibly get the government to sponsor whosoever that want to school abroad, and organise vocational training for others that want to learn handiworks. He urges the youth to embrace amnesty because it is the only way out. They were ready to publicly denounce Egbesu militant group and enjoy the government’s kind gesture.

To assert that the government has won the battle against the proletariat, the youth surrendered their arms and ammunitions, and the governor granted amnesty to them. The international community especially Red Cross, ICC, UN and UNSAID come in to get utopian justice. It plans to press criminal charges on the security personnel and government officials that planned and executed the genocide in the town which is stated to have claimed about 3,400 as reported by the media, though the government claims that the people killed are not more than 530.

One critical aspect of the text that proves the utopianism of Marxism is the fact that the initiators of Egbesu group, the elders only pretends to be fighting for the common people but are actually fighting for their pockets. They are capitalists personified. Towards the end of the text, “the son” says:

They said, the immaculate pere gave in to greed. Our leaders are easily swept off their feet by trifling, puny bribes. They bribe them to betray us. They said, the immaculate pere gave in to greed. Our leaders are easily swept off their feet by trifling, puny bribes. They bribe him to betray us.... Belief that the struggle was near its end, filled our hearts with grief. We came to realize that the likes of dad, Alaibe and Kode, were behind the conflicts in the Niger Delta. They were meddling middlemen that persuaded Ijaw youths to fight government and prospecting

oil companies, in return for their insatiable greed of political power and oil money. The second category, was the self-styled community leader, and so-called leader of thoughts, that were arm-chair resource activist and paper-tigers’ that deceived Ijaw youths that they were toeing the line of Major Isaac Boro with flamboyant pro-Ijaw and Niger Delta propaganda. They talk big on the pages of newspapers, on radio, and television, only to ditch their people, when government brings worthless, trifling monetary gains, that they corner for their own self-enrichment. Their strategy is simple. They push Ijaw youths to the trenches, by asking them to form rag-tagged, criminally-minded militias, in the guise of re-enacting the struggle. (pp.110-111)

As argued by critics that Marxism, which is expected to lead to the overthrow of capitalism by the proletariat, is a utopian dream, it is equally sufficiently portrayed in the *Blood in the Creek* that Marxism is an ideology that is not achievable. It woefully failed in the text. I also strongly believe that it is a dream that will stay as a dream.

REFERENCES

- Aihimegbe, S. (n.d.). *Blood in the creek*. Abuja: Masrose Media Limited.
- Akinbi, J. O. (2012). The Niger delta environmental crisis in Nigeria: A perspective analysis. *African Review Journal*, 6(3), 150-164.
- Barry, P. (2002). *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Boyer, G. R. (1998). The historical background of the communist manifesto. Retrieved 2017, July 5 from <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1527&context=articles>
- Coby, P. (1986). *The utopian vision of Karl Marx*. Retrieved 2017, July 7 from http://www.mmisi.org/ma/30_01/coby.pdf
- Delahoyde, M. (2011). *Marxism*. Retrieved 2017, July 5 from <http://public.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/marxist.crit.html>
- Eagleton, T. (1976). *Marxism and literary criticism*. California: University of California Press.
- Giddens, A. (1975). *The class structure of the advanced societies*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Habib, M. A. R. (2005). *A history of literary criticism from plato to the present*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Johnson, E., Walker, D., & Gray, D. (2014). *Historical dictionary of Marxism*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Keller, D. (2005). *Cultural Marxism and cultural studies*. Retrieved 2017, July 5 from <http://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/culturalmarxism.pdf>
- Kellner, D. (2005). Western Marxism. In A. Harrington (Ed.), *Modern social theory: An introduction*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- King, P., & Ripstein, A. (1987). *Did Marx hold a labor theory of value?* Retrieved 2017, July 5 from <http://individual.utoronto.ca/pking/unpublished/LTV.pdf>
- Nellickappilly, S. (2014). *Aspects of western philosophy*. Retrieved 2017, July 5 from https://www.academia.edu/12185411/Aspects_of_Western_Philosophy

- Nwajah, O. (1999). *A tale of military massacres: From Ogoniland to Odi town*. Retrieved 2017, July 7 from http://www.waado.org/environment/fedgovt_nigerdelta/bayelsainvasion/FederalGovernInvadesBayelsa/MilitaryInOdi/MilitaryMassacres.html
- Panda, A. K. (2015). Marxist approach to literature: An introduction. *Journal of Teaching and Research in English Literature*, 6(3).
- Pogreba, H. H. (2015). *Literary criticism: Marxism*. Retrieved 2017, July 5 from <http://englishwithmaurno.pbworks.com/f/marxliterit-1%5B1%5D.pdf>
- Popper, K. (2002). *Conjectures and refutations: The growth of scientific knowledge*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Sawan, J. E. (2003). Recovering Marx's theory of alienation: Theoretical considerations from a case study with community activists in Scarborough, Ontario. *Just Labour: A Canadian Journal of Work and Society*, (17&18), 139-154.
- Strickland, R. (2012). The western Marxist concept of ideology critique. *VNU Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 28(5E), 47-56.
- Suvin, D. (2009). *Phases and characteristics of Marxism*. Retrieved 2017, July 5 from <http://www.themontrealreview.com/2009/Phases-of-Marxism.php>
- Trainer, T. (2017). *Marxist theory: An outline*. Retrieved July 5 from <http://thesimplerway.info/Marx.htm>
- Trotsky, L. (2005). *Literature and revolution*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Witalec, J. (2017). *Marxist criticism: Introduction*. Retrieved July 5 from <http://www.enotes.com/topics/marxist-criticism>
- Wolff, J. (2017). Karl Marx. *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. Retrieved 2017, July 5 from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/marx/>
- Wright, E. O. (2003). *Social class*. Retrieved 2017, July 7 from <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/Social%20Class%20-%20Sage.pdf>