

# **The Otonti Nduka Mandate: From Tradition to Mordernity**

**By**

**Prof. T. Uzodinma Nwala**

## **1. Preface: Why this Inaugural Lecture?**

### **1.1 *In Respect of Academic Tradition***

It is the tradition within the academe for an academic, -: some point in his career, to let the world know what contribution, if any, he has made to the world of knowledge, nay. to human civilization, especially within his own field of specialization, through what has come to be known as an *Inaugural Lecture*. He is expected to do this when he becomes a Professor, which is the pinnacle of his career as a University teacher or scholar.

### **1.2. *For the sake of Intellectual History***

My understanding is that this tradition is necessary both for the sake of intellectual history and for the sake of the advancement of the course of human knowledge and civilization in general. Unless the younger generation understands the point their predecessors have reached in the construction of the great universal edifice of human knowledge/civilization, they will not know how to proceed meaningfully in placing their own blocks in the process of building that edifice. They will not even know the significance of their own contributions.

### **1.3. *Inaugural Lecture as a Report Card***

In keeping with this tradition, I, Uzodinma Nwala, wish to solemnly render before you and to the entire human race, now and in future, an account of my humble contribution to the world of knowledge and to human civilization, especially within and from the standpoint of my own field of specialization, namely, philosophy, *particularly in the sphere of social and political thought and practice*. Yes, in the sphere, not of social and political thought alone, but also in the dialectical inseparable sphere of social and political practice.

### **1.4. This one as A Testimony of a Social Theorizer and Social Activist.**

In his famous *Thesis on Feuerbach*, Karl Marx reminds us of the dialectical nature of social thought and social practice, when he declared that *philosophers have explained the world, the fact now, however, is to change it*. He, thus, brought to the intellectual consciousness of mankind the obvious fact that our knowledge remains a dangerous pipe dream if it is not anchored in the reality of human practical life. *Throughout all my life, I have been both a social theorizer and social activist*. This is a central point to note about my life as an academe and for me, it is also the most important declaration to be noted in this *Inaugural Lecture*.

### 1.5. *An Inaugural Lecture, long overdue*

As **I said** earlier, by the University tradition, an Inaugural Lecture is to be given when one becomes a Professor. But why am I giving my ***Inaugural Lecture*** almost twenty-three years after the year I was adjudged qualified for promotion to that position? Put in another expression, why did I have to wait for over twenty-two years before giving the Inaugural Lecture when in fact the materials used in assessing me as Professor were largely researched and written while I was an Assistant Lecturer?

Why did I have to wait, when two of the distinctive landmark social and intellectual contributions that I have made were accomplished while I possessed only a first degree? And here I am referring first to my founding of the East Central State Youth Volunteer Services (ECSYVSC) Corps in 1970 and from there, initiate the setting up of the National Youth Services Corps in Nigeria by the Gowon Regime in 1972.

The second is my initiating the teaching of **African Philosophy** as part of the University of Nigeria curriculum in 1972. after which, it was adopted by other institutions in the world. I also assisted some of such institutions in the United States to do so. This was at a time when some of the great philosophers in Africa and beyond were engaged in an international debate as to whether there is anything called African Philosophy. This debate lasted for over a quarter of a century, and in my critical review of it in 1990, I christened it *The Great Debate on African Philosophy*.

Because this *Inaugural Lecture* was long overdue and I am giving it at a time when most of my juniors have given theirs, I almost decided to forget about giving one. I later changed my mind and decided to do this, *not for the sake of tradition alone, but for the sake of clearing whatever doubts there may be concerning my life and activities as an academician*.

I have lived one of the most complex lives in history. I have been a laborer, as the Bible says it, *ifl* the Vineyard of the Lord but unfortunately, one whose labor have often either been ignored or simply been appropriated by others. I have been a builder who builds for others to inhabit and when they do they refuse sheltering me in it even when the rain comes. The fact that my recognition as a Professor was held up for almost two decades, the fact that I could patiently continue doing what I was doing with my life without loosing a sleep, without any hypertension or stroke as was the unfortunate lot of some of my colleagues whose own were held up for less number of years; all these show the greatest gift I have enjoyed as a human being, namely, unlimited patience. Patience is the greatest attribute any scholar as a scientific worker must possess, for as Karl Marx noted,

*"the road to science is strewn with a lot of difficulties, only a patient climber can reach its summit"*

### 1.6. *For the Sake of my Mentor*

What is more, it is my desire to give this ***Inaugural Lecture*** now for the sake of my great mentor, **Professor Otonti Nduka**, who set me on the path of my intellectual Odyssey

when he turned me away from studying Economics with a magisterial injunction on that fateful afternoon in 1964 at Fulton Avenue, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, saying to me, 'No, *You will not study Economics, You are a Philosophy Material* Yes, this *Inaugural Lecture* provides me a moment to tell the world what I have done with the *Nduka Mandate*. Hence, the theme of my *Inaugural Lecture*.

## **The Otonti Nduka Mandate: From Tradition to Modernity**

Inaugural Lecture is indeed like a piece of socio-intellectual history

### **1.7. *For the Sake of My Students and my Intellectual and Social Associates***

As I was thinking of this *Inaugural Lecture*, it dawned on me that there is a group to whom I owe a lot and for whom this moment would mean a lot. They are those who have interacted with me either as my students or my close intellectual and social associates; most of who were in great pains during those years when the official recognition of my Professorship was held up.

### **1.8 *The Symmetry in the life of an Academician and a man in public affairs.***

Let me add and emphasize once more a further reason for my giving this *Inaugural Lecture*. Many are aware that I have been active not only as an academician, but also as a practical man in public affairs. The world deserves to know what symmetry there is between those seemingly two parts of my life. I have alluded to the dialectical nature of social thought and social practice and this has been fully mirrored in my life and activities.

There is yet another reason. Those who are familiar with my chequered intellectual and social history are familiar with my having been one of the most active and dedicated Marxists scholars in this country, and a person that has influenced many young activists in the country. Many, especially those that drank from the heavy dose of the Stalinist version of Marxist thought and politics in the eighties, still wonder what a true Marxist would be doing with the so-called liberal politicians. Some have called me all sorts of names because of my involvement in active liberal politics. This Inaugural Lecture offers me an opportunity to address some of their concerns.

## **2. Peculiar nature of the Inaugural Lecture of a Philosopher.**

### **2-1 *The Inaugural Lecture of a Philosopher, nay, of Intellectual should be a piece of Socio-intellectual History.***

*To understand the works and ideas of any philosopher is to engage in an excursion into the intellectual history of his. However,*

*Intellectual history itself is arid unless it is situated within the context of social history: In the case of an individual philosopher, his ideas would appear arid, unless they are placed within the context of the social circumstances in which he was born and in which he flourished .*

For as Bertrand Russell, the renowned twentieth century British philosopher and mathematician, once *observed*,

*"Philosophers are both effects and causes: effects of their social circumstances and of the politics and institutions of their time; causes (if they are fortunate) of beliefs which mould the politics and institutions of later ages."*

It is, therefore, important that in writing about a philosopher as Russell further noted,

*"...to exhibit him as far as truth permits as an outcome of his milieu, a man in whom were crystallized and concentrated the thoughts and feelings which, in vague and diffused form were common to the community of which he was a part" <sup>2</sup>*

Fredrick Hegel, the 19th Century German philosopher had, before Russell, made the same point when he wrote: -

*"Whatever happens, every individual is a child of his time; so philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thoughts. It is just as absurd to fancy that a philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as it is to fancy that an individual can overleap his own age, jump over Rhodes" <sup>3</sup>*

## **2.2 A Scholar in a Period of Historical Transition**

One of the most significant things about my life is that I have lived at a nodal point in our history, a point between two phases of our socio-cultural and intellectual history, namely, *tradition* and *modernity*. These two socio-cultural phases are, however, to be understood, in the context of the theory of radical interpenetration, as two socio-cultural phases that have no sharp boundary between them. Nearly all men and women of our my time, who attained a significant intellectual and social role in society, have been either first or second generation of pathfinders, standing on the threshold of a society that was shading off the attributes of tradition and increasingly attaining the attributes characteristic of modernity. It has been our lot to help determine the direction of development of our society.

Since history is nothing but a process resulting from the intellectual and social activities of men, it is in understanding the life and activities of these pathfinders that we understand our history. I grew up in the bosom of the profuse intellectual creations of some of the first generation pathfinders in the various fields of study: - the Otonti Ndukas in Philosophy, the Kenneth Dike's progenitors in history (namely, the Adiele Afigbos, C. C. Ifemesias, Samuel Nwabarar, etc); the Ikenna Nzimiros, Onwuejiogwus, Ijeomas and Uchendus in Sociology; the K. O. K. Onyiohas, Ilogus in Religion; the Achebes, Nwogas, Egudus, Echeruos and Obiechinas in Literature, the Animalus and Chike Obis in Mathematics and Science; the Erne Awas, Ofoegbus and Mike Olisas in Political Science, the Mokuwugo Okoyes, Osita Agwunas, Nzimiros, Chike Obis in radical political

thought, the S. Chukwuegus in art and aesthetics, etc, etc

I interacted with them at both personal level and at the level of mastery of their works. They influenced my intellectual habits and ideas. A cursory look at the bibliography of *Igbo Philosophy* shows their imprint on that work.

Our age, no doubt is the age of pathfinders, who have helped to chart the course of our intellectual and social transition from modernity, from agrarian to industrial society. This fact also is obvious when we examine and analyze majority of the Inaugural lectures delivered in recent times in this University. Nearly all of them present an account of the extent to which each individual scholar has contributed laying the foundations and in expanding the horizon of human knowledge in his area of specialization or in enhancing the evolution of his discipline.

### **3.0 The Making of a Future Career.**

#### **3.1 The Impact of my Rural Background on My Career as a Philosopher**

I was born in the rural village of Itu Ezinihitte in Imo State. I grew up as an active village boy, participated actively in rural farming, hunting, fishing, craft-making, collection of apples, fruits and seeds. My late father was a priest of the Earth Goddess, though he died while I was young. But I interacted very much with my maternal grand parents, participated and enjoyed Ahiajoku (New Yam) Festivities and cults, ate fowls and goats sacrificed to the gods. My grand mother was fond of circling balls of fofoo around my head in earnest prayer to the gods for my good health and long life. She would threaten the firewood, if it fails to burn.

I saw vividly the many great shrines and evil forests in our village. I was loved by many of the priests and elders in our village, who always regarded me as a special son. Many of them gave me fowls or goats to rear as symbol of their affection and attachment to me. I missed participating in the rites of passage of my age mates because I was away from the village at the time. I was active in the village wrestling and moon light games.

I baby-sat three babies before going to school. I was meant to be a trader, but I ended up going to the school. *I became a spoilt chap, loved very tremendously* by everyone around me. They said I looked well, behaved well, always very calm and quite strong in wrestling and in farm work. I participated in the itinerant farm labor in Etche during every farming season.

It was as a schoolboy that I became a folk hero because I was endowed with unusual intellect, which continued to manifest all my life. I was so amazed by this gift and the heroism it had won for me that one day, I went into serious brooding. It was that day I said to my God. */ shall return this gift to you by not abusing*

Thus, I grew up socially and religiously a rural village boy. When I went to school, I became an active Christian. I was baptized in the Apostolic Church before my mother. In fact I gave her baptismal name, Elizabeth, a name taken after the queen of England, who was a folk heroine in Nigeria at the time. The white missionary saw in me the image of a future priest and was reluctant to help me go to secondary school in order not to lose me to the ways of the world

Indeed I had sufficient exposure to the culture, religion and philosophy of my traditional society. It would appear that I was prepared early in life to write *Igbo Philosophy*. All I needed to set selling here again is Otonti Nduka's seminal work. *Western Education and the Nigerian Cultural Background*

### **3.2 Early forebodings of a philosophical mind in the making**

#### **3.2.1 The Making of a Contemplative mind.**

Philosophical reflection or inquiry is said to begin with wonder, puzzle and curiosity to understand unusual and unfamiliar occurrences, experiences and problems, encountered by man.

I must confess that a combination of natural and social events set my young mind on the path of serious contemplation about the meaning of certain natural occurrences and the nature of the world in which we live. Among these were: -

##### *The Eclipse of 1947*

The eclipse of 1947 and the religious and metaphysical interpretations of that event was the earliest experience that always consumed my thought. The Church had linked the eclipse with the second coming of Christ and the impending destruction of the world by fire instead of water as was the case in the time of Noah. Consequently, flaming clouds in the sky were regarded as ominous eruptions of fire. On the way to the market, to the river to fetch water, etc. I was always looking skywards and trying to watch it in case the fire started so that I could run to meet dear mother and die in her arms. My mind was always busy trying to understand the meaning of all these and what existence is all about.

#### **3.2.2 The intrinsic and natural spirit of rebellion.**

Originally my mother wanted me to be a trader while my senior brother, Godwin, was to go to school. But brother Godwin threw his school uniform away and took refuge with our grandmother, protesting that it was not he, but his junior brother, Uzodinma, who should go to school. Eventually, our mother's choice, the trader's path, 'owed to my brother's prophesy, the intellectual path.

When I was threatened with possible blindness as a youngster, the diviner insisted that the only way to avert blindness was to take up the priesthood of the Earth Goddess as a successor to my late father. I refused to everyone's consternation. For poor mother, she naturally worried over the inexplicable eye problem. In such difficult moments when my resolve seemed dangerous, all mother would do was to look into my eyes. And once she saw in my eyes (what, I do not know), all she did was to remain num and go along with me in that resolve.

Because I showed so much religious piety early in life, the white missionary, Pastor G. P Selby, did all he could to steer me towards the preacher's path, including discouraging me from going to secondary school.

It was with much consternation that the Pastor learnt about my having gained admission into the university to study, of all possible courses, *philosophy*? The thought of

Bertrand Russell must have crossed his mind on hearing that I had taken to the critical philosophical path and not the preacher's path.

When I look back today at these developments, I can see the hand of destiny directing the course of my life. Indeed, the Otonti Nduka Mandate may be the mandate of destiny. When I also look back at the things destiny has done with me in the course of my life's journey, the bold initiatives of a pathfinder, I begin to understand the historical progression of life as a journey to the unknown. I begin to see the role of the pathfinder as a person in a relay race along an apparently blind course. History itself is, in an important sense, a relay race in which the significant actors are the athletes, who may not be fully conscious of the full impact of their own actions or the things they do on the stage of history.

### **3.3 *A Youngster's Dream and Ambition***

This reminds me of the *Composition* I wrote in my standard six class in 1957 on My Ambition in Life. In that *Composition*, I wrote that I would be a teacher and train as a teacher. I would go to the University. I will teach in the University and after that I would serve God through helping those in need in the society.

What we call the mystery of life is displayed in every life, in the lives of each one of us. Lucky is he whose life is prefigured, and early in life he understands and can feel the pulse of his mission. But still lucky is he if he is able to discover his mission early in life and is able to dedicate himself to the actualization of this mission.

Let no one for any moment imagine that it has been all smooth sailing. The course of a man's life is as contradictory as the rugged face of the Colorado Mountain. Perhaps those agonizing moments we pass through in the course of our life's journey are also necessary moments in the making of a man. At times it may be poverty, or health problem, fierce struggles to right wrongs does to society or to individuals. Even family life itself, especially marriage, as an interlocking of destinies, could be an unfortunate distraction, if it does not interlock positively.

The question that needs to be asked at this point is *why philosophy of all possible disciplines?* Does these character traits in my biography have anything to do with the making of a philosopher or with the Nduka prophetic mandate: - *you are a philosophy material?*

### **3.4 *My Historical Encounter with Otonti Nduka***

First I met him at Qua Iboe E. T. C Azuiyi Oloko when he came to examine us in teaching practice for our final year examination, and he gave us a lecture on the topic Colonial mentality and talked about Africans who imitate the white man to the point of wearing suite and tie in the heat of the sun, while our Principal, Mr Arungwa was sitting by his side wearing a tie in the heat of the sun.

The I met him again in 1963 at the Government T.T. C Uyo as my house master and my teacher in English literature, where he took note of me as the best student in his class. He left us about April that year to join the staff of Philosophy Department, University of Nigeria Nsukka. The following month I abandoned my studies at the

college, the following month.

Then I met him again that faithful afternoon in house at Fulton Street, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He was amazed that I had got six papers in the GCE O Level in the January 1963 Examination., and also that I had secured three papers in the Advanced level the following January, 1964. On hearing that I had secured admission to do Economics, he said to me No You will not Study Economics. You are a philosophy material Without waiting to have my response, and gave two sheets of papers to write Chukwuemeka Ike , the Registrar, a letter asking him o change my course. That I did I left his house that with two books, the first book I had ever touched on the subject of Philosophy, namely. Bertrand Russell's *"The nature of the Physical World*, and another book by Plato.

#### **4.0 Evolution of Philosophy Department and the making of a career as a Philosophy Teacher**

##### **4.1 *The Vision of Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe***

Whatever course destiny may have charted in my life, I could not have taken to philosophy as a career without the historical foresight of the Great Zik of African, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe. the founder of the University of Nigeria, who established Philosophy as one of the core disciplines in the University curriculum. The profound nature, of Zik's vision becomes more obvious, when we relate it to the views of the eighteenth Century German philosopher, F. G. W. Hegel, when he wrote:

*A Nation without its metaphysics, is like a temple richly ornamented in many respects, but without its holy of holies*

*In this statement. Hegel refers to that part of philosophy, namely, metaphysics which is, in fact, the traditional core of philosophy and which, for Hegel, represents the sphere of man's most profound speculative thought and reflections on his origins, his being, his destiny and his place in the entire cosmic system and environment in which he operates. What Hegel called the Spirit of the Nation or in a more general sense, World Spirit, is the highest and most profound expression of this self-reflection.*

A people without philosophy, metaphysics or simply put, a worldview are like people without a soul, without self-consciousness. No real community of people lack philosophy in the above sense.

##### **4.2 *A Young man's Career and the Unseen Hands of Destiny.***

The University of Nigeria was the first University in modem Africa to set up a full-fledged Department of philosophy. It took off in 1963, and in 1964. it admitted its first set of students. Its first and only graduate for its first fourteen years of existence was the author of this Inaugural Lecture.

This achievement was possible because of my courage in rejecting the order to change my course midstream. The Senate of the University therefore had to authorize the hiring of a part-time lecturer for the only student left in the Department when others left for other Departments.



Another event in my life, for which some people may ask, "*how and why could it happen?*", was that fit 1965-66 session, I carried 75 credits which made it possible for me to graduate before the war. Having won a University scholarship as the best student in philosophy Department, my mentor, Otonti Nduka, had advised me on the need for me to be properly grounded in Philosophy. So he said to me

*"Tim, now take your time, since you do not have any financial problem as a student, you must, therefore, go on a four-year programme to be properly grounded in philosophy, even though you are a direct entry student".*

I agreed and so had to carry only 48 credits my first year.

But as soon as Otonti left for his post-graduate work in Britain, the thought of my poor mother took over me. Why not finish earlier, get a job and start helping that poor woman? I decided to rebel against staying four years. What happened next and how I was allowed to carry 75 Credits during the 1965-66 session, beyond the University limit of 57 Credits in a Session, was between me and Professor L. K. Zerby, our Head of Department. Without this move, I could neither have graduated in 1967, nor perhaps been a philosophy graduate at all. Without rebelling against that Otonti Nduka's advice, perhaps the **Otonti Nduka Mandate** could not have been actualized. This is a case of a young man's career and the unforeseen hands of destiny. *But what is Destiny?*

#### **4.3 The beginning of My Life as a Philosophy Scholar**

When the University resumed in 1970 after the civil war, there was no staff to run the Department of Philosophy. I, therefore, had to join the Department of Humanities of the General Studies Division. When the core staff of the General Studies Division was disbanded, I was transferred to the Department of Religion. I rejected the transfer and therefore had to be sent to the Institute of African Studies as Assistant Research Fellow in 1971.

My period in the Institute of African Studies provided me an opportunity to resume my research on the nature of Igbo traditional thought patterns and eventually to write the book on *Igbo Philosophy* and a novel captioned *Justice on Trial* in 1972-7.

It was in 1972-73 academic year that the Department of Philosophy was resuscitated by Professor Kodilinye who, added Classics to make it the Department of Philosophy and Classics. I was transferred to that Department together with late Rev. Dr V. C. Chukwulozie as foundation staff of the Philosophy component. When the National Universities Commission (NUC) rejected the combination and insisted on the University running the Department of Philosophy only, what remained had to be put under the Department of Religion as a Sub-Department of Philosophy.

### **5.0 What is Philosophy and Why Philosophy?**

#### **5.1 Theoretical Postulates/Foundations of the Philosophical Enterprise.**

A professorial Inaugural Lecture is like a scientific edifice. It begins, like all scientific products, with stating the theoretical foundations or assumptions on which the edifice is

constructed, and on the basis of which it is to be understood. For us to understand an edifice, like any building (the archetype of all edifices), we have to see the plan or structure on the basis of which the edifice is *constructed so that we can understand the structure of the edifice*.

## 5.2 The Concept of Philosophy

*In the history of Western philosophy, it is said that philosophy is etymologically derived from two Greek words, namely **Philos** (lover of) and **Sophia** (wisdom). That gives us a definition of philosophy as love of wisdom, or knowledge.*

*According to Theophile Obenga, the African linguist, a more ancient derivation of philosophy is the Egyptian word **sbo**, also meaning love of wisdom. It was the Egyptian sage, Antef, who first provided a definition of a philosopher or wise man. around 2000 years before the birth of the first Greek philosopher. His definition is contained in the famous Inscription of Antef.*

A philosopher is one whose heart is informed about these things which would be otherwise ignored, tile one who is clear-sighted when he is deep into a problem, the one who is moderate in his actions, who penetrates ancient writings, whose advice is (sought) to unravel complications, who is really wise, who instructed his own heart, who stays awake at night as he looks for the right paths, who surpasses what he accomplished yesterday, who is wiser than a sage, who brought himself to wisdom, who seeks for advice....<sup>5</sup>

*Many of the pioneer Greek philosophers including Thales, Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, etc studied philosophy in Egypt. The world's first known philosopher was the Egyptian Ptah-Hotep, the worlds first known social philosopher was **Ipuwer while the world's first known woman mathematician** and philosopher was Hypatia, all were Egyptian However, it was in Greece in the sixth century B. C<sup>s</sup> that there was an explosion of philosophical activities on a mass cultural level and an intellectual movement that could be called philosophical took place. Men began to probe into the origin of all things that exist: - various aspects of nature, existence, life, society, morality, aesthetic values, knowledge, human thought and reasoning. There was no end to what their curious minds could probe into, including the nature of the goods and the validity and origin of custom. A study of man's cultural and intellectual development reveals that philosophical activities have been going on unrecorded due to absence of writing. We know of the Egyptian sages because of the hieroglyphics, their writing system in which their philosophical and scientific views were recorded. Men with great inquisitive minds have existed in human society. It is these men who make available their insights into the nature of things to the rest of society. Progressively such insights covering all aspects of cultural life become systematically embodied in an unwritten system of beliefs called **worldviews (weltanschauung)**. expressing fundamental beliefs, values and laws.*

Many of such sages were found among elders, diviners, seers, even young men with great

intellectual insights. It is these men whose great intellect could follow the dialectical transformations of reality, of society, of life and capture and express these transformation in definite language, and also formulate and reformulate them into a system of beliefs and values. They were responsible for injecting whatever dynamism there was in traditional world views. It is important to note that for the sages there is nothing they could not probe into and express their views. But for the managers of society (rulers) it was convenient for societal harmony and stability to accept certain views as fundamental, not easily challenged. These applied to religious views and views critical for the maintenance of the family and society itself.

Every conscious and organized human society has such world views which are taken for granted by the rest of the society. The Greeks had such world views which we find in the writings of Homer and others Greek writers, until the sixth century B.C. when the new thinkers produced by the Egyptians began to question everything including the existing world views.

Therefore, no definition of philosophy can be complete without taking into account the nature of the more traditional world views, the product of ancient sages and the critical mass reflections on the nature of reality including the nature of world views

What emerged in the sixth century B. C. in Greek can be called Critical philosophy as against philosophy as worldview. What is important is to see the extent to which the definition of the philosopher as given by Antif, the ancient Egyptian sage applies to philosophy as world view and philosophy as critical inquiry.

### *5.3 Basic Assumptions of Philosophy:*

#### **5.3.1** *Philosophy is A Critical Science.*

There is nothing under heaven or earth, which cannot be questioned in philosophy. In philosophy, there are no go areas. Philosophy does not recognize heresy; it stops at the point where heresy begins.

In philosophical discipline, as in Mathematics, we have basic concepts or terms, definitions of those terms and the postulations, which flow from the definitions of those basic terms. Unlike Mathematics, however, philosophy must not only define its basic terms or concepts such as *Being, Existence, Reality, Nature, Universe*, etc, it must defend the definitions of those terms.

Philosophy is self-critical, critical of itself and its own assumption, postulates and conclusions. There is no final or absolute truth in philosophy just as there is no final or absolute truth in nature or life. This is why the Egyptian a sage, Antief, characterizes the philosopher as who surpasses what the accomplished yesterday, and much later Hegel defines philosophy as a dialectical science, the science of self-transcendence, the science of all sciences.

### 5.3.2 Why is Philosophy a Critical science?

The critical nature of philosophy results from the fact that nature itself, which is the subject matter of philosophy, has no final or fixed point, attributes or character. Love and hate, good and bad interpenetrate each other as categories qualifying the activities of men or even of any man.

Philosophy does not postulate the principle of criticism in order to impose order on reality. It is simply asserting that this is the nature of reality itself: reality is always *this* (i.e., a particular assertion or a particular state) and *something more* (i.e., *that which is not asserted and could be equally justifiably asserted of it or a state yet to manifest or unfold itself*). It is the nature of life and the world in which we live. Any one looking for eternal truth or permanent truth in the world is looking for something that does not exist.

*Does this mean that there is nothing we can hold as true in life? Does this imply a state of endless flux in the search for certainty, for truth and for the good?*

The answer is no? At any particular point in time, there is always something we can hold as true for that moment. But that which we hold as true now, we must be prepared to acknowledge its truth as tentative, we must be ready to accept some other truth which goes beyond it when we have additional evidence which supports a different assertion instead of the one we held previously.

### 5.3.3 The Dialectical Nature of Reality

The question we should ask is why is there this perpetual or seemingly endless flux in the nature of reality and therefore endless search for truth? There are two dialectically related answers.

One is that the world in which we live or even any aspect of it has *infinite attributes or many sides*, all of which we can validly assert of it. It is impossible to know all these attributes at any point in time. Therefore, at any point in time, what we assert of reality is a function of the quantum of knowledge available to us at that point. As we get to know more or as we look at the same reality from other points of view, the previous assertion becomes inapplicable. The Relativity Theory of Albert Einstein and other great scientists make the same point. The evening star is also the morning star.

The second point is that *reality is a process*. The totality of all that exist or any aspect of it is always in constant change, motion and development. Nothing is ever in a permanent state. The only permanent principle of reality is the principle of change itself. We all agree that no condition is permanent, but we don't stop to ponder over the implications of this statement for all we do or say.

To me among the greatest discoveries of philosophical science are: -

- i. The law of motion and infinite change or transformation,
- ii. The law of infinite attributes/ many-sidedness.

Therefore, the theories of *infinite change or transformation and infinite attributes and many-sidedness of reality* explain why philosophy, as the supreme science of reality, cannot be content with that which is known at any point in time. It continues to probe from the known to the unknown, always bearing in mind that we can never know it all.

Thus, the critical spirit is the fundamental spirit of philosophy. And here we must

recognize the fact that this critical spirit is the corner stone of the entire academic enterprise. This again explains why man's initial attempt to reason consciously and to intellectually appreciate and understand the world around him and to attempt to rationally solve basic problems facing him was regarded as philosophical activity. Man's conscious pursuit of knowledge and all attempt to understand reality was regarded as philosophizing, hence, initially all knowledge was treated as philosophy.

This is why the University, the organized citadel for the pursuit and advancement of human knowledge, is regarded as *the home of heresy*. Those who try to limit the probing mind and critical spirit of the student or the scholar are enemies of society and human knowledge because they are enemies of progress.

#### *5.3.4 Philosophy is more than a Rational Activity.*

Philosophy, as we have emphasized is a rational and logical activity in which man seeks to know the truth about his world and about our ideas of the world. In formal philosophical education, we refer to these spheres of philosophical activity as Metaphysics, Epistemology and Logic. Philosophy is conscious effort to understand and explain the world around us. Ancient philosophers did this mainly through contemplation, reflection, speculation, guessing, probing, etc. But they also did prescribe values and courses of action in order to solve problems of health, hunger, peace and order.

Philosophy also goes beyond these idealist approaches to knowledge to include investigation, verification, mathematical and empirical validation, etc. *5.3.5 Philosophy as Praxis*

Marx added another dimension to the philosophical comprehension of reality when he pointed out that philosophers and intellectuals often misinterpret man's intellectual life as consisting of theoretical understanding alone. They forget the fact that intellectual life is dialectically linked with practical life. We understand the world so that we can control it, manipulate it, and change it to suit our purpose. In the course of changing the world, we understand it better. We also change ourselves in the process, etc. Therefore there can be no disinterested understanding of reality. We seek understanding of the world so that we can cope with it both emotionally, intellectually, morally, spiritually and also practically.

The doctrine of disinterested intellectual or even apolitical stance is not true to reality. Those who preach the stance of intellectual and moral commitment on the path of both philosophers and non-philosophers are more realistic.

## **6.0 The Theme of the Inaugural Lecture:**

### **The Otonti Nduka Mandate: From Tradition to Modernity**

#### *6.1 What mandate?*

The Otonti Nduka we see in this room is the same Otonti Nduka who is referred to in the theme of this Lecture, yet he is not the same Otonti Nduka. The Otonti Nduka, under reference, is the young first African lecturer in the Department of Philosophy,

University of Nigeria Nsukka in 1964. And the Uzodinma Nwala, the recipient of the mandate, who is obliquely referred to, is not the same Uzodinma Nwala who is delivering an Inaugural Lecture today. Rather, he is the young lad in 1964 in search of a University education,

The Mandate is the path of Uzodinma Nwala's future career as foretold by Otonti Nduka. The prophecy was handed over to him like a command, which was received without questioning because it had the imprint of amoral and spiritual authority. In short, in 1964, Otonti Nduka told Uzodinma Nwala "*Go along this path, it is where your destiny lies.*" Today's event marks a nodal point in the actualization of that destiny.

As I got to know him the more, I began to see the true essence of the injunction, Otonti Nduka has lived his life as a gadfly, in the tradition of the Greek Socrates, committed to, in his words, making reason pre-eminent in the ordering and running of human affairs at both the personal/individual and collective levels. But he needed disciples to do this just like Socrates did and produced Plato and thence Aristotle of the Greek society.

This is what we want to find out, that nodal point. The greatest joy of this moment is that both the father prophet and his son are alive today when the account of the mandate foretold 43 years ago is being given.

## 6.2 From Tradition to Modernity

The concept of **Tradition** is generally contrasted with the concept of **Modernity**. One (tradition) is said to be prior to the other, earlier in the sequence of events as perceived by man. Nothing displays more clearly the dialectical nature of reality than these two temporal concepts. *Tradition* is at once described as primitive, backward, brute-like, illogical, and irrational; the age of innocence, non-sophisticated, simple and non-complex, etc. On the other hand, *Modernity* is said to possess the exact opposite attributes as tradition; - civilized, logical, rational, sophisticated, etc.

Compare the Biblical Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before they ate the forbidden fruit and after they had eaten the fruit. Before they ate the fruit, they were said to be *innocent and God-fearing*. However, the act of eating the forbidden fruit meant that they were also *rebellious* at the same time. After eating the fruit, they were said to be very *daring and self-willed*; but their reaction to God's reproach, showed that they were also very *contrite in heart*. Thus, you can neither describe them as thoroughly saintly before they ate the fruit, nor can you describe them as thoroughly sinfully after they had eaten the fruit.

Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, two British philosophers of tradition and modernity ascribe opposite attributes to these two phases of human socio-cultural development.

What the above implies is the fact that these two concepts (tradition and modernity, which define two supposedly distinct cultural and historical phases, are not easily pigeonholed into either-or components. They are two phases of a continuum. Just like the baby and the man, so also with Tradition and Modernity. *Tradition* manifests attributes, which are equally ascribed to *modernity*- while, *Modernity* manifests attributes that are

also said to be distinctive features *of tradition*.

History is replete with examples of nostalgia for the past, hankering after the good old days. The Renaissance was one such moment when men genuinely sought for a return to the good old days stemming from dissatisfaction with the present.

According to Helen Lauer, "understood in their normal, loose and informal sense, 'tradition' and 'modernity' independently mark off two generally distinguishable (but not mutually exclusive) knowledge traditions or perspectives, or two ways of life rooted in different histories and economies. It would be ridiculous to suggest that there are no substantive differences between these two ways of life. The falsity of this dichotomy emerges when tradition and modernity are used to evoke fixed contrast between two metaphysical, ontological and epistemic poles where none exists"<sup>6</sup>.

### 6.3 *Theory of Radical Interpenetration*<sup>7</sup>

My historical and cultural studies led me to appreciate the dialectics of human and social progress. I therefore found in the Hegelian and Marxian dialectics the most profound method for understanding the nature of reality. The theory of sublation, resulting from the Marxian dialectics, shows that in the course of change, something is lost, something remains the same, while something new emerges. Change or progress does not always imply better.

In order to deepen or show the full import of the dialectical method, I propounded the theory of radical interpenetration

*Radical Interpenetration* is a theory which enables us to see the course and history of human knowledge and civilization as a progressive movement from lower forms of being/existence to higher forms, in which some of the contradictions either in the existential conditions or epistemic notions are increasingly transformed, where there is no radical boundary between one level of existence or and another, where one sheds into the other. The theory of Radical Interpenetration enables us to overcome the traditional intellectual perspective which draws a radical line between such socio-intellectual categories as science and non-science, science and imagination, science and religion, intellectual and practical life, between speculative and critical reasoning, faith and reason, between faith and heresy (for the faith of one is the heresy of the other), tradition and modernity.

Applied to the field of discourse on scientific and cultural realities, radical interpenetration underscores the point that: the higher the movement towards a scientific culture, the more the possibility there is that scientific categories begin to manifest mystical or quasi mystical character. Thus in the history of both science and philosophy, the conception of reality has moved away from the debate on the primacy of either *mind (spirit)* or *matter*, to the conception of neutral stuff, and further to one in which mind and matter are said to possess similar attributes as 'field of energy', which is neither spiritual nor material.... Thus, the conception of matter has been reduced to (i. e.,) is now seen as a state similar to *vital energy*, while *spirit* seen to be loosing its old strict teleological and personalised sense, and is now seen as *sheer dynamism*”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, there is no pure matter, neither is there pure spirit in the old sense. The theory enables us to eliminate the either-or fallacy in human reasoning. It can, therefore, be seen that the theory of Radical Interpenetration is a genetic or historical method.

As we showed above, the Hegelian dialectics also enables us to see why there are no sharp boundaries between one historical phase and the other, between one intellectual concept and another. Reality is a process and has infinite attributes. There is no absolute truth just as there is no final state of reality. Philosophy in its quest to comprehend reality is but a ceaseless quest.

The old puzzle about whether reality is mind or matter, and age-old categorical distinction between idealism and materialism appear dissolved in this methodological theory, just as the present state of our knowledge resulting from the revolution in Information Technology have practically dissolved the same distinction between mind and matter.

The task now is for philosophers not only to recognize this intellectual revolution but also to provide it with detailed a more detailed philosophical summary.

## **7.0 From Western Philosophy to African Philosophy.**

### *7.1 Breaking new Grounds*

During my final year as a philosophy student in 1967, Rev E. J. McMahon, S.J, my part-time lecturer, noticed that I was fond of relating some aspects of our discussions in Western Philosophy to traditional Igbo thought. When I was choosing a topic for my degree project, he drew my attention to the need for an original work on the nature of African thought patterns. He said he believed that my training in the rudiments of Western Philosophy, my interest in African thought, and the fact that I am an African should put me in a favorable position to undertake the task. I accepted his suggestion as a challenge.

Following this encouragement, the topic that I chose for my thesis for the B. A. Honors degree was "The thought patterns of the Igbo". Because of ill-health, I submitted the finished work in handwritten manuscript. Amazingly, it was accepted, marked and graded. The rest of the story is told in the Preface to my book *Igbo Philosophy*, whose manuscript was ready in 1973

*"During the period of the civil war in Nigeria -July 1967 to January 1970, I patiently went on with my research into Igbo belief system, hoping that my findings would crystalline in a book on **Igbo Philosophy***

*By the end of the war, I discovered that I had lost much of the manuscripts that I had compiled earlier. But I was not discouraged. When I joined the staff of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka after the war, I had the opportunity of resuming the research under the auspices of the Institute of African Studies.*

In presenting, as it were, this book to the world in 1973,<sup>1</sup> I did add that,

*It has, indeed, taken me very laborious years to produce what I am offering to the world as *Igbo Philosophy*, believing that it will receive a sympathetic but critical response from all those who are interested in African thought. What I am presenting is another paradigm of African philosophy.*



*I do realize that there is little or no systematic work on African philosophy. What I have done is just to produce the first fruits of a continuing search; with the hope that the response and criticisms of the intellectual world will inspire my inclination and ambition to help lay the foundation for the study and development of African philosophy.*

In elucidating the method I had followed in my research, I wrote:

*I have had to rely on field research involving interviews and attendance at various local festivities (helping to organize and to participate in some of them). I had to study traditional indigenous institutions, particularly the religious and social ones (marriage, mortuary, political, economic) at first hand. I also studied the language and made extensive use and analysis of same, including the Igbo traditional myths and rituals, folklore, proverbs, idioms, et cetera. The fact that I am a part of the culture on whose philosophy I am writing, has been of a crucial advantage since I have lived the life and experiences of an Igbo man. I have also tapped on personal reminiscences of our cultural history.*

*I have equally had to rely on archival and library research, abstracting from works on the Igbo, especially those relating to their religion, sociology/anthropology, economy, politics, general history and the social life of the people.*

Finally, I sounded a note of warning that my work was not in aid of ethnic bigotry;

*What is described here is no attempt at showing that the Igbo is a distinct species of humanity. Rather, the result of the whole investigation shows that they behave basically like their fellow human beings whether they are found in Europe, America, Asia or other parts of Africa. Their attitude to life may be different in its intellectual orientation, in terms of its degree of sophistication and abstraction; it may also be different in terms of its social and economic thrust owing to historical and environmental factors. But basically their culture and philosophy mirror the complexities of life of man in time (history) and space (environment)<sup>9</sup>*

## 7.2 The Emergence of African Philosophy in the Curricula of African Universities<sup>10</sup>

The University of Nigeria Nsukka was globally the first to introduce *African Philosophy* in her curricula in 1971-72. The first two courses, which I formulated for our programme in philosophy, were **African Philosophy 1** (Traditional African Philosophy) and **African Philosophy 11** (Contemporary African Philosophy). **African Philosophy I** was conceived as a descriptive and analytic examination of African traditional world-views, and its major characteristics, its cosmology, ontology, ethics, logic and its fundamental concepts about life, person, death, matter, spirit, nature, destiny, etc, as well as the social organization and institutional embodiments of these philosophical conceptions.

In designing the courses at the time, I was aware that there were few extant works exclusively on African traditional thought and, hence, African traditional philosophy had to be abstracted and systematized from the life, culture, social institution and language of the people". Consequently, there was need for original fieldwork and interpretation of materials available in the fields of religion, anthropology, literature, art, history, etc. From these, African traditional thought can be extracted and systematized. It was also my assumption, based on my background, that the only tools available were "familiar philosophical concepts" in western philosophy. I had received my philosophical education in the methods and history of western philosophy, though from a Nigerian University. These ideas guided my research and the production of my book, *Igbo Philosophy*, whose manuscript was ready by 1973.

The publication of two of these courses aroused international interest. A number of scholars from Britain and the United States wrote the Head of the Department of Philosophy and Classics, Dr L Sturch, seeking help and clarification on the course-content and bibliography for teaching those courses. Those letters were always referred to me. One such letter came from the late Professor Peter Bodunrin who was then teaching at the Grinnell University Iowa., USA, a fact which he acknowledged in 1990 when he wrote

The Philosophy Department of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka has maintained its own and evolved a distinctive character among Philosophy Departments in Nigeria. It can be said with a good deal of justification that what has come to be respected today, namely, African Philosophy, first received emphasis in the curriculum of this University<sup>12</sup>

In my replies to those inquiries from people anxious to introduce the new courses in their respective curriculum, I explained my personal perception of the subject-matter as outlined above. However, I did stress that African traditional Philosophy was indeed a project to be explored, i.e. that it was still mainly in a state of terra-in-cognita, and I, therefore, wrote:

*"It is hoped that with concerted efforts on the part of all those keen on developing the field of 'African philosophy' it may not be long before enough materials could be developed for more specialised studies into the area" "*

In describing African Contemporary Philosophy, I was aware that significant social philosophies had emerged from the works and ideas of Sedar Senghor (*Negritude*), Kwame Nkrumah (*Consciencism*), Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, (*Pan-Africanism*), Julius Nyerere (*African Socialism or Uhuru no. Ujamaa*), etc. I was also aware of the works of Placid Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, W.E. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*, John Mbiti *African Religions and Philosophies*, etc.

The Journal of Philosophy, *Uche*, which I founded at that time, was meant to promote general philosophical discourse.

## **8.0 The Great Debate on African Philosophy**

For two decades, beginning from the early seventies, a major philosophical debate raged among philosophy scholars in and outside Africa concerning the existence, nature

and scope of African Philosophy. I

called it the *Great Debate on African Philosophy* because of the consummate passion, rigor, extensive interest generated and the vast amount of literature that poured out in the process<sup>14</sup>

It should however be pointed out that this debate was part of the twentieth century discourse on African philosophical and cultural identity, a debate provoked by Eurocentric views on Africa borne under conditions of European colonialism<sup>13</sup>.

The Great Debate was in fact part of the discourse on African culture, philosophy and identity which, a process of self-reflection among Africans since the beginning of the twentieth century. It was a process radically influenced by the historical experiences of slavery and colonialism with its accompanying conception of Africa by Europeans as a continent whose people have "contributed little or nothing to human ideas and civilization".

Throughout the period of the Great Debate, I took no active part in it because I was busy writing my book on *Igbo Philosophy* as a paradigm of *African Philosophy*. And secondly, as indicated above, I had already, formulated two courses on African philosophy, which were being taught at the University of Nigeria and beyond.

So to me, at the time, *African Philosophy* was a reality. As a philosopher and a dialectical thinker for that matter, I knew that it is only through an unfettered free reign of the critical spirit that mankind can educate itself on the truth about the world and about his actions.

However, I followed the progression and logic of the debate, noting shifting positions as the debaters gained more illumination on the subject-matter. At the same time I was busy with my research on African Philosophy, developing it as a field of study, working out its content and methodology (See my article on 'The Study of Igbo Philosophy: A Historical and Theoretical Setting' in *Kiabara Journal of the Humanities, University of Port Harcourt vol. 5, no.2 1982*. The article was first presented years earlier as a paper in a Workshop organized by the Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria Nsukka. In addition, I have helped to lay the foundation for the periodization<sup>16</sup> of African philosophy and produced the most elaborate articulation of the various schools of thought in African philosophy<sup>17</sup>

## **9.0 Critique of the Great Debate**

### **9.1 Error due to Ignoratio Elenchi**

There was evidence of lack of acquaintance with the subject-matter through concrete research, and thus inability to understand its actual dynamics including the presence and influence of local sages. This is the most serious point of my critique of the Great Debate and I charged the debaters of being guilty of the logical error called ignoratio elenchi

I summarized the elements of this logical error as consisting in

- i. arguing out of ignorance because the subject-matter was virtually unknown to them,
- ii. arguing beside the mark and answering to the wrong point because their focus was

on *African Traditional Philosophy* as, for example, elaborated in Placid Tempels *Bantu Philosophy*. African philosophy was being equated to this strand of philosophy.

- iii. There was the further version of this error in what is called in logic *Argumentum ad Verecundiam*. This means appeal to a so-called respected authority, in this case the authority of Western Analytic Philosophy. Traditional African philosophy, being the focus of attention was found not meet the standards of Western Analytic Philosophy, and so it was dismissed as non-authentic.
- iv. Equally evident in this debate is another form of ignorance elenchi, simply but as 'No case, abuse the plaintiff's attorney. Thus, Traditional African Philosophy was called 'philosophy in a debased sense, folk philosophy, ethno-philosophy, etc.

## 9.2 *Eurocentric Influence*

The preponderant influence of Eurocentric educational background of the Debaters was obvious. Most of the debaters were schooled in European rationalist and 'analytic philosophy. Some studied classics, which inculcated in them the lessons of the Aryan Version of world intellectual history. This version, credits the Jews and Hebrews for giving mankind religion, the Romans for law and administration, the Greeks for philosophy and science. All previous civilizations before them, including Egyptian and Babylonian civilizations, were treated as primitive stages in the evolution of mankind. Africa was of course called the **Dark Continent**.

## 9.3 *Stolen Legacy*

In his book, *Stolen Legacy: the Greeks were not the Author of Greek Philosophy, but the people of North Africa commonly called the Egyptians*, George G. M James exposed European distortion of mankind's intellectual and social history. He reaffirmed the pioneer role of the Egyptians in the evolution of science, mathematics, philosophy and religion. He showed how Europeans appropriated African contributions to the development of science and philosophy as if they were European creations<sup>18</sup>. The same point was made by Martin Bernal in his seminal work. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization. Vol. I The Fabrication of Ancient Greece*.<sup>19</sup>

The case of Hypatia of Egypt is very interesting. She is the first woman philosopher, astronomer and mathematician, yet the Authoritative Random House Dictionary enters her name as a Greek woman<sup>20</sup>

## 9.4 *The Error in the conception of African Philosophy*

As I have emphasized above the key error in the conception of African philosophy by the debaters arose from a number of factors, key among which is their ignorance and lack of acquaintance with the notion of African philosophy. Consequently, their criticism of African philosophy arose from

- i. Equation of African philosophy with traditional African philosophy.
- ii. Equating African traditional philosophy with African traditional religion
- iii. Contrasting African traditional philosophy : with science
- iv. Making literacy a condition for philosophy

## 9.5 *Confessions of Experts*

To me it was very inspiring watching the great philosophers fall into avoidable intellectual errors. As a young scholar with only a bachelor's degree, I had seen through the path and great future of African philosophy as a field of study. I was moved by their intellectual humility when, more than a decade later, these major African philosophers had, one after the other, begun to take a radically different position on the question of the existence of African philosophy.

Odera Oruka, the late Kenyan philosopher, was one of the earliest to do so. After his field research in Kenya and after the study of Marcel Griaule's *Conversations with Oguotemela*, Oruka came to the conclusion that there were indeed philosophers in African traditional society, whom he called sages. He began to popularize the concept of **sage philosophy**.

After years of denial of the existence of African philosophy. Professor John Sodipo had this to say while commenting on the type of collective body of thought to which the name 'ethno-philosophy' (i.e. traditional philosophy) has been given and which some academic philosophers including himself had refused to accept as genuine philosophy,

*"in a piece of research which Dr. Barry Hallen and I have been conducting in the last few years it is becoming clear that this is only an appearance: that the reality is that there is much that is individualistic and creative in the Babalawo's interpretation of the meanings of Ifa verses, (traditional Yoruba thought) and the lesson to be drawn from them; that acute distinctions are made between knowledge and belief; sensation and perception, wisdom and intelligence, and serious questions are raised and answers offered on the problem of personal responsibility, the nature of conscience, consciousness and personal identity, and so on"*<sup>21</sup>

In the same vein. Prof Wiredu, himself a highly celebrated Philosopher in Africa, made his own confession in owning up the reality and existence of African Philosophy when he wrote,

*The present writer (i.e. Wiredu himself) is also aware of the existence of such sage-philosophers in his own country... The fact, that among the traditional folk of Africa uninfluenced in many cases by modern education, there exist people capable of critical reflection on fundamental issues of human experience and existence shows that the conception of African philosophy as necessarily a communal body of thought is inadequate"*<sup>22</sup>

He went further to repudiate the Euro centric notion of Philosophy as rational and critical thinking,

*'The definition ...which states that philosophy is a certain kind of rational and critical thinking, was a fairly narrow one.'*<sup>23</sup>

## **10.0 Social dialectics And My Political Activism.**

### *10.1 The Nigerian Civil War*

Another event in my life, which exerted a tremendous influence on my intellectual and social orientation, was the Nigerian civil crises of 1966-70.

The crises erupted into a full-scale war on a day I was to receive my degree as a young graduate. However, events leading to the civil war had been building up soon after the country's independence in 1960.

The country had witnessed series of crises resulting from rigged elections, manipulated census figures, and civil unrest in the western parts of Nigeria, the January 15, 1966 coup, which led to massive killings and rioting, especially in the North. Finally, the eruption of civil war in which hundreds of thousands of lives were lost and property worth millions of pounds were destroyed.

The ideological influence of the authors of the coup on the intellectually conscious youth, nay on most of the citizenry, was enormous. The idealism of the youngsters of my time was deeply aroused. Issues of right and wrong, equality and justice, probity and good governance, democracy and freedom, political manipulation and corruption, ethnic or tribal and religious differences, the role of the erstwhile colonial authorities, colonialism and neo-colonialism and, above all, the promise of a better society which was only possible through revolution that would sweep away those responsible for the rot in the society; all these were the dominant themes in the political and ideological discourse at the time.

Since many believed it was not possible to achieve all these in Nigeria because of its multi-ethnic character, many believed it could easily be done in the new State of Biafra. The fact that Biafra was itself a multi-ethnic society was not seriously addressed. The dream of Biafra became the Eldorado we were all looking for.

Under the banner of Freedom, Justice and Revolution, we were all drawn into the war as active participants.

In the midst of all these, I became a war propagandist and publicist. But as the war progressed I began to see beyond the veil of our massive propaganda. The realities of the civil war began to stare starkly on our face. From Nsukka to Enugu, from Uyo to Ikot Ekpene to Aba, Owerri and then to Mbaise, it was all trails of death, hunger and disease, etc. Grandama died of Kwashiorkor, which I did not understand at the time.

In the company of the visiting Scandinavian Journalists, I saw it all. At Aba, the Head of Propaganda, Chief Ifeanyi Ifegwueke and the General in Command of Biafran Army, General Alexander Maude, owned up that the war was all lost. And we saw it: - civilian masses running for safety from one side to the road to another. Husbands dragging their bicycles with house-hold equipments, mats, pillows, boxes, goats tied onto them; mothers carrying babies with baskets on their heads; little ones, mainly girls with their own assorted loads. The boys had gone to the war front.

Along Aba-Asa road, we saw further unimaginable horrors: - There was a mighty gully across the road, the only military check against the advancing Federal troops; soldiers without arms and without uniform and shoes. One barefooted soldier ran out from the bush carrying the only bazooka and the heaviest piece of armor in that front at the time.

Then came the **Ahiara Declaration** as a testament of the Biafra Struggle, spelling out its ideology and stating the vision of the new society to be created after the war. As we were parodying and propagating the tenets of the Ahiara Declaration the Federal forces were steadily and speedily overrunning the Biafra territory.

These developments continued to bother me and I started asking: - is this really a war of physical and social liberation or just a suicide mission? The question continued bugging my mind until finally, the war ended in defeat, rape, looting and humiliation. And I started asking why did Biafra fail?

Just as I was active in the care of Biafra refugees, I also became engrossed in the thought of how to take care of the psychologically traumatized people coming out from the war. As a philosopher, my major concern was over the intellectual and psychological survival of the people. How do we restore hope in their future? How do we get them to live with the rest of Nigerians as common citizens?

## **10.2 The Birth of East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC), the forerunner of the National Youth Services Corps (NYSC).**

### **10.2.1 Ideology of National Integration.**

At the end of the war, we were pre-occupied with post-war survival. All roads led to Enugu. Some of us, the socially conscious young men who were active in the war, went there to take our destiny into our hands. We mobilized ourselves to join in the task of reconstruction and restoration of hope to our traumatized populace. How do we face the realities of common citizenship with those against whom we fought? Now that Biafra was no more, Nigerian citizenship became inevitable. But how do we reintegrate our people, especially the young ones, once more into the Nigerian fold?

Meanwhile, we had agreed to work as volunteers to assist the Government, through the Rehabilitation Commission in the triple tasks of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation. We formed the East Central State Youth Volunteer Services Corps (ECSYVSC) under my leadership. After the Government approved the Memorandum which was largely authored by me, I was appointed the Chairman of the Corps and we had our first orientation programme at the Man O' War Bay at Awgu. After that, it became a massive programme, covering the old East Central State, comprising the present five South-Eastern States. The programme involved salvaging important equipments, documents and other valuables that were buried in the rumblings of war, cleaning of public places, reconstruction of local bridges, markets and other public places, literacy campaign and public enlightenment to assist the rural folks adjust to the post-war condition, giving orientation and civic education to the youth, teaching in schools and colleges as volunteers, etc.

The programme became a success story, attracted international attention. The Ghana Government announced it was adopting it to engage their youths work in the hinterland helping the cocoa farmers harvest and move cocoa pods for processing and shipment.

In appreciation of the success of the programme, General Gowon gave the Government of East Central state a grant of £75, 000.00 (seventy-five thousand pounds)

to assist the programme.

### **10.2.2 Campaign for the Establishment of a National Youth Volunteer Programme as an instrument of national Integration.**

With the experience gained from the ECSYVSC, we embarked on a National Campaign to get the Government to adopt and nationalize the volunteer programme as instrument of national integration. I led a delegation to Lagos and Western Nigerian to sensitize civil society organizations to join in the Campaign for a Youth Volunteer Services Programme in Nigeria.

The delegation comprised Mr. Ukwuije, President of the Students Union, University of Nigeria, Enugu campus, Mr. Abaji, myself as leader of the delegation, with the late Prof. E. N. Ukpabi as Adviser. Another group was led by the Secretary of the Corps, Mr. Tim Ibezim. They toured the North as part of the Campaign. In Lagos, we delivered our Memorandum to Mallam Aminu Kano for onward transmission to the Government. We met with the Nigerian Youth Council and other youth organizations in the country, all of whom promised to join us in the Campaign.

It was in response to our Memorandum that the Government set up a Committee, which eventually recommended the establishment of the National Youth Services Corps. By the time the programme effectively took off, I was away in the United States for my graduate studies.

### **10.3 Further Ideological Fallouts from the Civil War.**

Apart from the influence of philosophy, I had grown up to believe that in the world certain things are right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust. These are attributes, which qualify our actions and our situations. Our religion and social ethics have groomed us to believe in these things and to fight for their enthrone in human affairs. The Nigerian civil war was seen from that light and our belief in Biafra was reinforced by our belief in and acceptance of those values.

Moreover, we were taught to believe by our religion that God is the author of goodness and is always on the side of the weak, the just and all those who believe in him.

We were convinced that Biafra fulfilled all these conditions.

Why then did the Biafran project fail? For me as a philosopher, it was a fundamental question that I had to address. Since the Biafran project and the civil war itself became international issues and the entire world was involved, the answer to the question had to be sought within the international context. It had to do more with the state of the world than with the local dynamics of the conflict.

The search for an answer took me to New York, where I enrolled at the radical Graduate faculty of the New School for Social Research for both my Masters and Ph. D degrees in Social and Political Philosophy. While in New York, I was active within the circle of international students leaders; represented the International Students Movement for the United Nations (ISMUN) as its Chief Representative to the UN; served as



Chairman of the UN Youth Caucus; addressed the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN on behalf of the World Youth, served in a ten-man International Committee set up by Mr. Waltheim, the UN Secretary-General on how to involve the World Youth in the Affairs of the UN. I also observed sessions of the UN, which at the time was involved in the Third World and Socialist Community-inspired campaign for the Reform of the World Economic System under the aegis of the New World Order movement. I was in Mexico City during the First international Women's Conference in 1975. We were also involved in the anti-Apartheid Movement and in the Campaign for the United Nations University.

The search for the political and philosophical explanation of the collapse of the Biafran 'struggle' taking place in the context of the New York, the acclaimed the political and ideological center of the world led me into the warm embrace of Marxism. This reinforced the lingering influence of the Ahiara Declaration and the Marxist-Socialists who authored that document.

The answer soon became obvious. The cold war and the polarization of the world into two hostile ideological camps, namely, the world capitalist system and the world socialist system; these were the dynamics that were shaping the destiny of nations and determined the success or failure of any struggle that had international dimensions. The world capitalist system strove to conserve the existing alignment of forces and the structure of the world as created by European imperialism, whereas the world socialist system sought to alter this alignment. All those who were involved in any struggle against the forces on one side always sought and invariably got the assistance of the forces on the other camp.

At the point in time, Nigeria was a strategic part of the world capitalist market system. No sane imperialist leader would encourage division of its market. To have appealed to the same masters, i.e, the Western leaders to support you to divide their market, in this case Nigeria, into two warring camps with all its attendant dangers to their investment especially their investment in oil, was the height of naivety by the Biafran strategists and leadership. Those who believed they were fighting to save Biafra for the so-called 'free world', meaning the Western capitalist world, when Nigeria belonged to the same family of the 'free-world', and expected Charles De Gaulle of France, Harold Wilson of Great Britain or any other Western leader to supply them with arms to achieve victory, behaved like toddlers in world politics and diplomacy.

The Soviet Union had sought to come to the side of Biafra in keeping with the dialectics of the civil crises and the cold war ideology, but was rebuffed by the Biafran leadership. The logical thing was for Russia to resort to the imperatives of raw diplomacy, devoid of ideological underpinnings. Consequently, the Russians decided to act in accordance with the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of a member of the United Nations, a policy, which at the same time protected their material interest. .

Compare the Biafra case with Mozambique, Angola, South Africa, Namibia, etc., though cases were not exactly the same as the Biafran case, their success was guaranteed by their ability to take advantage of the dialectics of the cold war ideology and politics.

There could be no better answer to the question of why Biafra failed than what is revealed in the above socio-historical analysis.

Finding an answer of why Biafra failed did not logically imply a move to revive the Biafran project. I had to ask myself the next question., namely, how do we prevent Biafra. Biafra no doubt, was a product of intra-class conflict, a conflict in which the ordinary masses, youths and students (like myself then) were used as cannon fodder. These people had no quarrel among themselves, but fought each other under the influence of the those who were ruling and exploiting them.

These thoughts made me more committed to the movement for national integration which was the motif force of the Youth Volunteer programme. I was now committed to class ideology, while trying to downplay the national question implicit in the Biafra secession. This is the genesis of my intense involvement in the socialist movement of the late seventies and eighties, and all my fanatical attachment to students, propagating the class ideology in the bid to make Nigeria better.

### **11.0 My autobiographical Encounter with Marxism.**

It was in New York and at the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research that I had my biographical encounter with Marxist philosophy. I had the benefit of studying the Hegelian philosophy under one of the best Hegelian scholars in America, Prof. Kenley Dove. It was Lenin who wrote that the road to Marxism was through the Hegelian dialectics.

I was particularly attracted to the Hegelian dialectical method and Marx's elaboration of it, the principles of materialism, the theories of the state and social transformation. Of course, Marx's analysis of the capitalist society has been the most profound. Only Max Weber's great sociological works came close to it.

As a result of my active involvement in the activities of various circles of the international student's community in New York, my activities at the United Nations and the intellectual reputation I had acquired at the New School, I became more and more exposed to radical influences. I lived at the International House, New York which was powerful center for the mingling of students of various ideological and cultural backgrounds.

It was indeed, in New York that my ideological and radical maturation took place. I was very close to the African Ambassadors at the United Nations, particularly the then Tanzanian Representative at the United Nations, Ambassador Salim Ahmed Salim, and the OUA Representative, Ambassador Outtara.

I set up an Organisation of Nigerians in New York, called Nigerian Study Group, Professor Gambari, Dr Tony Ntukogu, Late Hon Chia Suma, were active participants in the work of the Study Group. The Study Groups main preoccupation at the time was with the impending Constituent Assembly which was expected to chart a new course for Nigeria's political and ideological future. There were, of course, two alternative courses of action, namely, the Socialist path and the capitalist path. Because of the popular rejection of the capitalist path as sheer neo-colonial path, the pro-capitalists in Nigeria advocated a middle-road approach, which they called *Mixed Economy*, where

Government would be in control of the commanding heights of the economy, while private entrepreneurs would be encouraged to take care of the rest. This was the ruling ideology and the character of Nigeria economic system until the recent privatization programme which has sold the country's wealth to members of the regime and their fiends.

### 11.2 *Marxist ideology and National integration*

When I returned to Nigeria, I found myself in the midst of an active socialist group at the University of Nigeria actively involved in the ideological struggle and was led by Professor Ikenna Nzimiro. We were deeply involved in the ideological struggle. We embarked upon the campaign against the capitalist and mixed economy advocacy. I was dispatched to Lagos to meet pro-socialist elements, including S. G. Ikoku, Chuba Okadigbo and others to urge them to defend the socialist path, 'the one-man one-plot' campaign, etc.

Back in the University, our group exerted a lot of influence on the intellectuals and the students. Soon, I rose to the rank of the second-in-command of the main socialist organisation in the country, became the Deputy General Secretary of the Socialist Working Peoples Party. I found myself criss-crossing the length and breadth of the country to attend meetings along with the veterans of socialism in Nigeria: - Tunji Otegbeye, M. Imoudu, Wahab Goodluck, Aminu Kano, S. G. Ikoku, Comrade Ola Oni, Hassan Sumonu, etc.

I founded a radical magazine, *The Comrade*, as an organ of the Socialist Movement to complement, in a refreshing manner, the old time Socialist magazine in the country, particularly *The New Horizon*

I found myself playing the role of a great motivator of the youth both in and outside the University of Nigeria environment. At one time, I was staff Adviser to about nine such progressive student organizations. Together with some of my friends and comrades we organized weekly ideology classes to teach the students about great social values and ideals of patriotism, justice, democracy ,

### 11.3 *The Birth of Modern ASUU As an Instrument of Change.*

#### 11.3.1 *Overcoming Utopia Ideology*

One of the major philosophical problems which attracted so much attention was the one posed in Plato's *Republic*, namely, the extent to which the Republic as articulated in speech (theoretically) could be actualized in practice. As we engaged in theoretical discourses on the future of Nigeria, and how to achieve a revolutionary transformation, one thing always struck me; our discussions were so inspiring that it appeared once we left the venue of our meetings, the revolution would be instantly achieved.

A number of experiences in the field of practical ideological struggle gave me cause for concern as to what we were doing. Let me mention just two such incidents:

- i. We were very fond of speaking at seminars and symposium during when we electrified the entire academic environment with our fiery speeches and socialist rhetoric. After one such occasion I stopped over at Ikenna Nzimiro's house. He

said to me "*Uzo, We have destroyed the bourgeoisie.*

I said in reply to him "*Ikenna, you know that you are an irrepressible fighter and speaker.*

The next morning, I was with him again in his house. He said to me Uz,o, Maka Chukwu (honestly), I do not have any money in the house now. I want to send my boy to a friend in Port Harcourt, He is a business man and I think I can get N2000.00 from him.

In response, I said to him. *Ikenna is this friend of yours not a member of the bourgeoisie we destroyed last night.*

*You are an idiot,* he said. And both of us started laughing.

- ii. During the students' crisis of 1978, during the famous **Ali Must Go** student demonstrations, the late Comrade Ola Oni organized his usual one man demonstration. He carried a banner in his hands, hung another in front of himself, and yet a third one at his back . On three of them were boldly written the same words proclaiming ***The Revolution is here Now!*** .

How could any one realistically equate students uprising with socialist revolution? To what extent can polemics alone destroy the capitalist class?

These were some of the experiences, which made me wonder about what we were doing in our fanatical struggle to help bring about change in our society. Were we really serious about reinventing our society or were (in our socialist parlance) simply intellectually masturbating?

Worried by this problem, three of us, Dr Edwin Madunagu then of the University of Calabar, Dr Biodun Jeyifo of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and I decided to bond ourselves into what we called *Revolutionary Directorate*. Every fourth night, we were either 'at Calabar, Ife or Nsukka, doing exactly the same thing for which we criticized our previous formations, namely intellectually masturbating about change and revolution.

Then one day, I posed the question to the group. How can we ensure that all the profound schemes we have been devising for the betterment of our society are actualized in practice? How can we ensure that our ideas have practical bearing on events in our society. At the end of our long discussion we agreed to seize or insert ourselves into one of the popular social organizations and turn it into an instrument of struggle. Our analysis showed that the newly recognized Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) was the best candidate for actualizing our scheme. This was how I left Nsukka to take charge of ASUU, provide it with an organizational and popular ideological focus, a programme of action, and turn it into an instrument of struggle.

Before my friends and I arrived at the scene, ASUIT lacked both ideological and programmatic focus. It did not have the capacity or experience to wage protracted struggle; The ASUU Strike Action of 1981, turned out to be the longest in the trade union history in Nigeria as at that time. ^

The ideological "standpoint on which we rested ASUU, as a popular democratic organization in Nigeria can be summarized as follows:

**Education, especially tertiary education, is the most vital instrument for the**

**transformation of society. Therefore, both the conditions of teaching and learning must be made conducive for effective learning and research. Those best suited to protect and advance the cause of education for development are the educational workers. The conditions for their success include an effective and disciplined organization, led by ideologically conscious leadership inspired(not by pettiness) but by high moral and spiritual ideals.**

Nobody will deny that today most of the successive generations of ASUU leadership have maintained a clear and patriotic focus and dedication to the ideals of the organization. We may quarrel with the frequency or overuse of the instrument of strike, but we cannot fault the dedication of the Union to maintain itself as a vital instrument for change, especially within the educational sector.

## **12.0 Reflections on**

**The Crisis in the World Socialist Movement and the Collapse of the Soviet Union and many of the Eastern Socialist States.**

### *12.1 The death of a World Dream*

In 1986, I was in the Soviet Union on Fellowship and as Guest of the USSR Academy of Sciences. My base was the African Institute headed by the son of the famous Soviet Foreign Minister, Alexander Gromyko. Apart from my researches in the Library of the Institute. I had occasion to visit several places and interacted through an interpreter with several people in positions of responsibility including some Soviet scholars.

Within the three months I was there, I felt the pulse of a Society under distress. I knew something had to give way. You could hear it from the artisans and the intellectual workers. *Glasnost* was not enough or was

coming too late to save a disintegrating society. But why were all these happening to a political system that had raised so much hope in the exploited peoples of the earth?

I was very familiar with the Marxian critique of the capitalist society, the necessity for its revolutionary transformation as well as the direction of the changes envisaged in a post-capitalist state. I was also familiar with what Lenin had to say and what he had to do both during and after the revolution in Russia. But alas, came Josef Stalin and the Second World War. And there began a process of distortion of Marxist revolutionary science and praxis.

The progressive deterioration and eventual collapse of the world socialist system was a great trauma for all those who genuinely embraced Marxism as a humanist movement and as an ideal for human progress and happiness. It led to serious reflection on why such a system could collapse. In my search and analysis, it became obvious to me that certain theoretical and practical errors were responsible for the collapse of the system.

### **12.2 Error in the conception of capitalism,**

The theoretical error which led to the collapse of the socialist project in Russia and led to a near collapse of same in China was basically error in the conception of capitalism. Lenin was the only disciple of Marx, apart from Fredrick Engel who correctly understood Marx's concept of Capitalist property

For Marx, Engel and Lenin, *capitalist property is not simply private property, but property, which enables one to exploit another*. This is why immediately following the revolution, Lenin allowed small private proprietors and made socialization of some big capitalist enterprises, a gradual process to enable the workers learn the technique of managing them as a socialist property.

For Stalinist Russia, *capitalist property is every form of private property*. As a result, every form of private property was eliminated. Artisans were not allowed to practice their trade. Families could not run their family property even when they employed no outside hand. The shoe-maker, the tailor, the hair-dresser, the bicycle repairer, the small food seller; for all of them, the state insisted they must go into co-operatives or be simply collectivized. Life under such a state must be very arid and inhuman. *Glasnost* came too late to correct all that.

For Maoist China, capitalist property was best mirrored in big enterprises. Therefore the Chinese preferred and promoted cottage industries and had disdain for big enterprises. They called the Soviets **capitalist roaders** for promoting big enterprises. Thus, when the Chinese woke up to the realities of a world whose engine of development was powered by high technology, they launched their so-called Economic Reform and began to invite the Americans and other Capitalist businessmen, including the food sellers, to come and teach them how to set up and run big time enterprise

### 12.3 *Lack of Political Diversity*

The second major historical error which militated against the survival of socialism was the continuation of the revolutionary party in power after the revolution and making the party the sole managers of the socialist state.

Thus instead political diversity, there **was** politic. regimentation and monotony. In the end, it was not the party that was in control; rather it was the morbid bureaucracy that seized control of the political party apparatus, and thereby took control of the state.

The insistence on leaving the destiny of the society exclusively in the hands of the Communists, a small band of ideologues that did not understand a phrase of Marx or Lenin alienated the larger society as well as the various ideological groups in the society. There is no society and there can be no society that is made up of pure Marxists/communists, nor is there any society made up of pure capitalists.

### 12.4 *The Struggle against Stalinism among the Nigeria left*

On my return from the Soviet Union, I founded a new progressive and radical research organisation called Uhuru Research Center, with a new magazine called *Uhuru Now*. The greatest challenge facing us at the time was how to combat the Stalinist ideology in Nigeria. After series of debate, we produced a position paper in a Monograph captioned *Workers' Party or a Popular Democratic Front:*

*Which Way Forward for the Nigerian Left?*<sup>24</sup>

In it we espoused the ideology of popular democratic front to unite communists, socialists, liberals and all patriots and the masses who desired to work genuinely for the progress of society. We rejected the position of the Stalinists who were insisting on forming an exclusive communist party, called Marxist-Leninist Party.

Our position was presented at the National Workshop organized by the Nigeria Labour Congress under Comrade Pascal Bafyau leadership at Calabar in 1989. We were strongly criticized by our erstwhile Comrades S. G. Ikoku, Edwin Madunagu, Eskor Toyé, Ola Oni, Dipo Fatogun, etc. These were advocates of a political and ideological platform that rejects what they called *class collaboration*, meaning only a party of pure Marxists or communists was legitimate.

As against this exclusive formation we advocated a popular platform comprising Marxist and socialist organizations, progressive intelligentsia, student movements and youth organizations, radical women organizations, NBA, NMA, ASUU, organization of musicians, writers, journalists, clerics, civil rights organizations, etc. We called this a Popular Democratic Front (PDF). For us the PDF should draw its programme -not from any abstract communist testament, but from the daily struggles and demands of the various popular forces in the society.

### 12.5 *The Birth of a Popular Democratic Philosophy.*

In the end, the ideology of Popular Democratic Front (PDF) was adopted by the Labour Party founded by the Nigerian Labour Congress, which later merged with others to form the Social Democratic Party (SDP).

On the other hand, those on the left who did not want to go into electoral politics, and wished to continue with popular struggle adopted the PDF ideology and political programme. Comrade Obayinwana, writing on behalf of the Lagos Comrades, asked us in URC to convene a meeting to discuss the ideological stance advanced by the Uhuru Research Council. Since we did not have the resources to organize the meeting, we asked those in Lagos to do so.

When we met in Lagos, the PDF programme was adopted. Thus, for the first time in our ideological history, it became possible for the Marxists communists, the socialists, the liberals and other patriots to work together on a common platform. Before then, liberals like Tai Solarin, Gani Fawehimi, Beko Ransome Kuti, etc were called petty bourgeoisie. They did not belong to the rank of the Marxist communists who alone were called genuine revolutionaries.

The initial name for the non-electoral organization was Popular Democratic Front (PDF). Later the name was changed to Campaign for Democracy (CD). I was the chief host of the CD meeting at Enugu in 1992.

There is no gainsaying the fact that I am one of the few who have exerted tremendous influence on many activists in the country including the more familiar names in the pro-democracy movement; - the Emma Ezeazus, the late Ubani Chima, Innocent Chukwuma, Olu Oguibes, Adewale Adeoyes, Chidi Jacobs. Omonijos, Andy Nkemnemes, including some big names who are heads of institutions (University, industry and Government), Governors and ministers, etc. Certainly the list includes

successive ASUU leaders from Festus Iyayi to Dipo Fashina, etc.

Having left an indelible imprint on the pro-democracy movement, my attention was next turned to the larger political environment in the country. The opportunity came in 1994 during the National Constitutional Conference convened by Abacha, when I was elected to represent the Mbaise District.

### **13.0 On the Threshold of Liberal Politics**

Events between 1992 to 1993 posed grave dangers to the unity and stability of the country. The Campaign for Democracy (CD) and other pro-democracy organizations had embarked very radical political opposition to the regimes of General Ibrahim Babangida and later that of late General Abacha. The call for a National Conference to renegotiate the future of Nigeria was so much in the air.

The military was seen as protecting the interest of the North since nearly all the military Generals were Northerners. The other major ethnic groups as well as the minority ethnic groups felt alienated and marginalized. The annulment of the Presidential election of June 12, 1993, had heightened the crisis in the system. There were violent reactions in the Western and Lagos up to Kwara State. Things became worse under Abacha with the incarceration of Abiola, the presumed winner of June 12. Presidential Elections

The Igbo nationality to which I belong was having a very rough period in its history. There was democratic expression and dissent was crushed ruthlessly. A near state of fascism was prevalent and the nation was sliding into civil war.

So when Abacha accepted to organize a Constitutional Conference for Nigerian Leaders to meet and chart a new the future of the country, many people decided to boycott the Conference, especially the Pro-democracy groups and the frontline leaders of the South-West of Nigeria.

After discussion with my ideological ands political associates, it was agreed that I should attend the Conference. The Conference was a wonderful opportunity for me because it enabled me to play important leadership roles as Secretary/Coordinator of both the Igbo Delegates Forum and the Forum of the entire Southern Delegates. I was also a member of the number one Committee on the Political Structures and Framework of the Constitution as well as the Constitution Drafting Committee.

I co-authored the Minority Report with Chief Alex Ekwueme. The Report lead to the Consensus Committee which recommended the principle of Rotation of power and laid the basis for the six-geo-political zones in the country. Many critical decisions were at this Conference which have led the basis for what could emerge as Consensus democracy in Nigeria. There is no doubt that the principle of consensus has emerged in Nigeria for the resolution of critical national issues which affect our multi-ethnic society.

The experiences at the national Constitutional conference encouraged me to continue to seek other avenues to help influence the political culture of Nigeria. When the Abacha regime embarked upon the quest to turn into a civilian President, Chief Ekwueme and I, together with other patriots initiated the G-34 opposition against Abacha. When he died the G-34 husbanded the Peoples Democratic Party and I became its pioneer Director of Organization and Strategy, in which capacity I helped to lay the foundation of the Party.



I as forced to leave the party and return back to the University when it was obvious that the party had been hijacked by the same forces against which we fought to prevent from coming in to pollute the Party. In an Effort to protect the Party, I had together with General Idada gone to court to challenge the rigging of the election of the Party Executive in 1999.

I have been criticized for my involvement in what is called bourgeois politics, or even in politics at all. According one school of thought, Marxists should not collaborate with the looters and exploiters, the capitalists and the ruling class. We must maintain the purity of our class organizations. It was in this sense that 'the progressives' in Nigeria boycotted the 1994-5 constitutional Conference.

The inconsistency in this position soon became obvious. After the 'progressives' boycotted the 1994-5 National Constitutional Conference, condemning those of us Who attended, they (our 'progressive' colleagues) go about conducting their affairs and business in accordance with the decisions reached at the Conference. Today the six geo-political zones, one of the products 'of the National Constitutional Conference of 1994-5 organized by General Abacha, have become the basis for conducting our selves, 'progressives' and non-progressives alike as citizens of Nigeria.

The other school of thought on this issue of participation in politics is consist of the average intellectual in Nigeria who grew up from the late seventies to the present, who became socially conscious at the tune the had eliminated the intellectuals and the clergy from politics by lumping them together with the civil servants under what is called 'public servants'. This action was incorporated in the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. For any so-called public officer to go into politics, he has to resign from his job. Unfortunately, the average intellectual in Nigeria has accepted this as normal. They have gone further in imbibing this position ideologically in the philosophy of non-involvement. They now say, it is not right for intellectuals and the clergy to do so. Moreover, politics is dirty.

The field of politics is now left to the traders, contractors and businessmen, unemployed lawyers and those who have money through one dubious means or the other. People forget that Dr Chike Obi, the world-renowned Mathematician was at time,, a Professor of mathematics at the University of Ibadan and also a member of Parliament and leader of the Dynamic Party. The venerable Eni Njoku was a Professor of Botany and a member of the Eastern House of Assembly and Minister in Eyo Ita's Government. Also Kalu Ezera and Professor Samuel Aluko were University teachers and members of the Legislature. The list goes down to those teaching in the Secondary and Primary Schools. What about other country's like Great Britain and the United States.

Right from 1980, I have fought against this anomaly, which has weakened the moral and intellectual basis of politics in Nigeria. I have advocated and personally practiced this position. Thank God that in 2002 ruling the Supreme Court of Nigeria has declared it as unconstitutional and therefore null and void the barring of workers from belonging to political parties and, thus participating in politics.

#### **14.0 Philosophy and its Relevance to Society.**

There is no better way of concluding this lecture on the socio-intellectual history of our time, being rendered by a philosopher, than to reflect on the relevance of philosophy to society.

As we seen from our discussion on the nature of the philosophical enterprise, philosophy implies not only a body of ideas but also an outlook and attitude to life and to issues and problems related to life and the world. It is the body of ideas in various combinations and forms, which every self-conscious being has. But the specific outlook and attitude, namely, the systematically skeptical and:

critical attitude, which makes a person a philosopher, one-does not need a formal philosophical training to acquire this trait, but in general, all who have undergone systematic training in philosophy, and in the philosophic' tools of a reasoning do posses some degree of the trait.

Therefore, philosophers are equipped with the intellectual, resources for the critical examination of things, issues and" problems and, given their general concern with values, goals and ends of human society aid human activity, together with the concern for the appropriateness (both from a purely rational and from an ethical standpoint) of the means for achieving these ends, they are qualified to play an advisory role to society in the determination of societal goals

I say an advisory role because we have passed the age when philosophy pretended that its word? were absolute and eternal, when its view had the states of dogma. With the insurgent appearance of science and with

The internal revolution in the conception of philosophy, especially with the appearance of the historical and dialectical method, we now accept the view that everything is in constant change; including philosophy and its determinations. Hence, the values and ends of society change as the character of society changes.

It is in this regard that we need to ask: Do elders ever stop to seek a philosophical explanation why sooner or later their world, the world in which they grew up and flourished begins to fade away, and the emerging world and its values begin to appear strange; and only their children could understand and explain to them what id going on around them in the new emergent world.

Furthermore, it is now generally acknowledge that the basic of this change does not lie in the ideas nor in the mental characteristics of philosophers but very much lies outside of them, precisely, it lies in the social and material foundations of society. But we can influence societal development and progress depending on our comprehension of the objective natural and historical processes going on in society.

In view of these, philosophical reasoning has to follow wherever the argument leads. The conclusion of any argument and the views we hold out of philosophical reflection, however do not just gush out from a privileged brain of the philosopher. The argument has to follow in accordance with and in the light of objective processes in society rather than the psychological processes in the brain. This new method has meant the destruction of the esoteric and contemplative character of philosophy itself. Herein lies the great merit of Marxist philosophy.

It is out of place and un-philosophical for any philosopher to pretend that he can objectively comprehend the vast forces in society without being part of society without being involved in the daily activities and struggles of the people. Philosophical reflection has become praxis rather than contemplative. It now means a process involving mental and physical moments. It is now activity of the whole man, which is both theoretical and practical.

The mind or human consciousness has the capacity to form pictures and images both of what exists and what does not exist. Our ideas can be objective depending on whether they adequately reflect reality or not. The only check on the irrationality or subjectivity of the human mind is that its ideas must be related to practice. If they are divorced from reality they may falsify reality. Hence the philosopher must be a practical man as well.

We can now appreciate Cicero's preference for a statesman to a star-gazing philosopher or a philosopher removed from the realities of life. He preferred a statesman, who happens to be a philosopher, to one who was not. The choice between the philosopher and the statesman, it must be noted, was made in the context of ideology, namely, in the context of determining the values, goals and end of society.

The contemplative view of philosophy is the view that we can grasp reality and its essence through sheer thought and contemplation. A philosopher, this view maintains, has to be an observer, a contemplator, quite removed from the realities of the world. His contact with the world is viewed negatively as a corrupting influence.

In other words, truth can only appear to him from a detached stance and will elude him if he gets involved.

On the other hand, the method designated as praxis argues differently. According to this view of our perception of the world, our perception could be true or false. This is understandable because there is a difference between appearance and reality. The way the world appears may not be the way it actually is.

Furthermore, the argument continues, our perception influences our attitude to the world. False perception induces false attitude while correct perception leads to correct attitude. But there is no way we can theoretically differentiate between a true perception ; false perception except we subject a given principle between appearance and reality. The difference between them is shown in practice. Thus, the difference between a mirage and pool of water but not from a mirage.

Secondly, the duality of the human mind poses special problem for the contemplative stand-point.

We have pointed out the fact that the human mind has images of what exists and what does not exist. And that the only check on the irrationality of the human mind is that its ideas must be related to practice, thus, the praxis theory provides the standpoint which can overcome its dialectical limitation of the free activities of the mind.

The main question therefore, which is posed for the contemplative attitude is this: can we correctly perceive the world from a purely theoretical or contemplative stance independent of action or practical involvement. Is this process of development? Can we understand th

nature of hunger without the experience of hunger  
ourselves?

### 14.1 The Philosopher And His Environment

Philosophy is the child of its circumstances, so,

-Philosophers emerge from the bosom of their society.

..^h philosophers may transcend their environment ideally (in thought) it is not easy for them to do so in practice. Let us again recall Hegels words quoted above..

Whatever happens, every individual is a child of his time, so philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thoughts. It is just as absurd to fancy that a philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as it is to fancy that an individual can overleap his own age jump over Rliodes. If this theory really goes beyond the world as it is and builds an ideal one as it ought to be that world exist indeed, but only in his opinion, an unsubstantial element where anything **you** please may infancy, be built.

Each society contain within itself what it is and that it ought to be. The goals before it as well as the means for it to achieve these goals are immanent within [he society. Philosophical consciousness can help us to Jiscover the immanent tendencies in the social order.

A philosopher's comprehension of the problems of its society, his views about the values within the society .;nd the practical means he prescribes depend ultimately on

-.;< social existence. His social existence is defined in term f those economic, social, political, religious and other

-orces which influence his ideas, thinking, emotion and his

-iterests. But the most decisive influence is his position in

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the economic order of the society. His practical support for a radical departure from the existing order will depend on this factor.

A philosophical training does not determine or change a man's social existence and his general philosophical and ideological position. It may change a man's views for a while. Until he is in a position to relate the newly acquired philosophical views to actual practice and to his overall social existence, then he cannot be said to have changed. Every Sunday and at confession times, every sinner is a bom - again; after services and confession time; he puts on his former robe, i.e., real self takes over.

Philosophical training provides tools for clear thought, irrespective of the content of thought. Therefore, a criminal can give his crimes a philosophical or even a religious justification. Thus there are philosophers who defend the status quo just as there are those who fight against the status quo.

Thomas Hobbes and F. G. W Hegel were philosophers who defended the status quo. Socrates, Marx and my mentor, Otonti Nduka belong to the rank of philosophers against the status quo, for whom philosophy is an instrument to advance and improve the human

condition, to enthrone rationality and positive ethical values in society.

### *Summary*

I must end this lecture by noting that I am retiring from the services of the University of Nigeria as lecturer by tomorrow. This is only a formality. No philosopher ever retires from his profession, namely, a life of critical search for knowledge and wisdom. The search for wisdom is endless. But as also pointed out in the lecture, the story of life continues. There are a lot more to be done.

Let me thank my beloved wife Lolo Mrs. Nwanneka Nwala, who discovered early in the course of our life that she was living with a man who has high sense of mission, and tuned herself to make the necessary sacrifice. Part of my immediate commitment is to see to the flowering of the immense literary gift she has. . I must thank all my children for they continue to remain a source of cultural and spiritual fulfillment for me.

I shall never thank my mentor enough. At times I begin to wonder what would have been my lot in life if I did not have Madam Elizabeth Nwala as mother and guardian and Otonti Nduka as a great mentor. My father died early in life after he had reproduced me in his image and put me in a state to follow his footsteps as a man of no mean selfless courage, as constant as the Northern star, a hater of evil and a greater defender of the weak.

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