

Edwin Madunagu at 75

– articles from the last year

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Eddie Madunagu has continued his tradition of regular columns in the *The Guardian*, being repeated in other publications. Over the last year he has provided nine columns on a wide variety of topic issues. To facilitate a wider readership we have collected these columns together in this anthology.



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Looking Back: Forty-five Years Ago

BY EDWIN MADUNAGU MAY 14, 2021

The Extraordinary Expedition had profound effects on all the participants.

Forty-five years ago, as I turned 30, I left Lagos for Ibadan. From Ibadan, together with a comrade of the same age, I left for a rural community somewhere between Gbongan and Ile-Ife in present-day Osun State. There we joined others, similarly inspired like us, about ten in number, male and female, excluding two kids whom we took turns to “baby-sit” in order to free the mother to participate fully in revolutionary duties.

We assembled to inaugurate an underground Marxist revolutionary vanguard embedded in the peasantry. While some members were fully in residence, others were semi-resident, but continually in touch with the Headquarters. I was not only fully in residence, but disappeared to the outside world for between 9 and 12 months.

The strategic objective of that Extraordinary Expedition was to inaugurate an armed struggle in a socialist revolution which we recognized had been going on at a certain level in our country, Nigeria. The armed struggle did not happen. But it almost did. And in an attempt to force it to begin, we also almost ended up in self-liquidation.

It was when I was leaving the Headquarters after the collapse of the Expedition that our peasant comrades knew, through my contact address and full name, that not only was I not an Ijesha man, but that I was not even of Yoruba parentage. For I had integrated completely with them and had been one of their conscientisation discussion leaders in the Yoruba language for at least the preceding six months. The scene of separation was so emotional.

The Extraordinary Expedition had profound effects on all the participants. But, as expected, the effects were of different kinds on different comrades, with some differences less significant than others. It was this variation in differences that made it possible for Biodun Jeyifo (BJ) and I, then Bene, to regroup almost immediately after the collapse of the Expedition.

Personally, the effects of that Ode-Omu Extraordinary Expedition were completely transforming. I emerged from the commune a professional revolutionary: where to be a professional revolutionary was not conceived mechanically, for instance, in the way one is a professional teacher or a professional soldier, that is, in terms of training and occupation. It was not even conceived in the sense of making “revolution” the primary interest in one’s life. Rather, to be a professional revolutionary was conceived in the sense of compelling every other interest or commitment – including nationality, sub-nationality, religion, family, friendship and engagements for material sustenance and reproduction to find accommodation and justification in the commitment to revolution.

But that is just one side of a professional revolutionary as conceived by me. The other side is the commitment to what Karl Marx, in his youthful days, called “categorical imperatives,” that is, the “struggle to overcome all circumstances in which the human being is humiliated, enslaved, abandoned and despised.” And later I added the commitment to struggle to extend immediate and unconditional solidarity to the “wretched of the earth” and ameliorate the human condition anywhere a professional revolutionary finds herself or himself. A professional revolutionary is thus a contradiction in the real world: simultaneous toughness and softness.

The requirement sketched above is not a necessary one for every Leftist or even for every revolutionary. But it is a self-imposed requirement for every vanguard in the struggle against capitalism, capitalist social formations and imperialism. Some would say that for a sustainable revolution to take place there must be a substantial number of this category of

revolutionaries. But I would modify this and say that at least the revolution should be capable of rapidly reproducing its own professionals as it proceeds.

My life as a professional revolutionary since the 1977 collapse of the Extraordinary Expedition has therefore been a contradictory one at least in the sense described in the preceding paragraphs. And it has been tough for that person who, in addition to having to share that life as a wife, a comrade and a lover, also has to live her life as an academic, an intellectual, a mother, a social activist, a Leftist-feminist and a revolutionary socialist. If there is any person who, since 1977, has kept me on my feet, stood with me as equal, pointing out what can be done today in anticipation of tomorrow, and correcting my frequent tactical and strategic errors, that person is Comrade Professor Bene Madunagu.

About two weeks ago, on the eve of 2021 May Day, Comrade Bene and I made a re-affirmation and executed a long-standing decision of ours. The former was the re-affirmation of our subscription to Marxism, commitment to socialist revolution in Nigeria and world-wide and to revolutionary internationalism.

And the latter was the decision to transfer our Combined Archives and Libraries, built up since 1973, to the Nigerian Left. Following this definitive step, we established an 8-member Board of Advisers (BOA) to manage the Combined Archives and Libraries on behalf and in the name of the Nigerian Left.

This took effect on May 1, 2021. Any further announcement or action on this subject will be made or taken by the Board.

Let the struggle continue.

Madunagu, mathematician and journalist, writes from Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Further notes to the Nigerian Left

By Edwin Madunagu 25 February 2021

The Nigerian Left has largely neglected, if not deliberately avoided a renewed ideological struggle which has become a strong factor in both the general turbulence and violence enveloping the whole country and the associated power struggle within the ruling class. The neglected or badly engaged ideological struggle may simply be described as “argument over the birth of Nigeria”, that is, argument over how Nigeria came into being and what would have happened if Britain, an imperial colonial power, had not invaded our lands, defeated or deceived our ancestors, gathered them together and imposed itself on them. The argument then proceeds to the desirability or otherwise of returning to the status quo-ante 1900, 1906, 1914, 1935, 1945, 1952, 1960, or 1966, that is, returning to the situation existing before one of the major pre-1966 landmarks of our collective history.

It is to be hoped that my description of what is now happening in the country as associated with (but not reducible to) a power struggle within the ruling class will not, itself, spark off an angry argument. Let me briefly explain myself. Because Nigeria’s ruling class is – for now! – economically, socially, politically and ideologically hegemonic in the country, every serious struggle within it threatens to integrate itself with popular struggle. And I employ the term “popular” in the ordinary Leftist sense of involving working, toiling, poor and de-classed masses and expressing their interests.

The proposition here is that we should not be lost in the forms in which a battle within the ruling class – or even a national battle – is waged, thereby forgetting the origin or essence of that battle. To illustrate: the struggle to become the president or a state governor manifests itself most strongly and most violently among the masses – not only in the distribution of “palliatives”, “logistics” and “stomach infrastructure”, but more dangerously in the interpretation or re-interpretation of history and contemporary reality.

Nigerian Leftists and Leftist activists should therefore not neglect the ideological argument about the origin or creation of Nigeria and the trajectory of its history. We cannot ignore messages being beamed on the masses and which the latter do not always ignore but sometimes believe and act upon. Our ideological and political choice of a united Nigeria under people’s power, popular-democracy and socialism should draw us into the debate on origin and history. In general it is wrong to ignore any issue through which the ruling class exercises or strengthens its hegemony (control) over the masses. That is the main issue in this piece. Our ideological task here is two-fold. One: to truthfully reconstruct the story of Nigeria’s creation and the country’s main historical trajectory; and two: to defend Leftist platform of revolutionary national unity which stands on a rejection of both the call to march back to the past and the silly mantra of “Nigerian unity is not negotiable”.

Taking a long view of humanity and of the Nigerian history, we may begin our own narrative like this: After a long period of violent, enslaving and exploitative incursions into this part of the African continent, a European imperial power, Britain, felt confident enough, on January 1, 1900, to proclaim the establishment of three conquered territorial possessions: the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the Colony of Lagos. The first was ruled from Lokoja; the second from Calabar/Asaba and the third from Lagos. Six years later, in 1906, the second and third possessions were merged to become the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. And eight years later, in 1914, the original three – and later two – possessions were merged (“amalgamated”) to become the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. Between 1900 and 1914, the British, now firmly established in Lokoja, Calabar/Asaba and Lagos as a military power, completed the conquest and “pacification” of all the territories included in Nigeria as we know it today. About 1935, the Southern Protectorate was split into Western and Eastern groups of Provinces. Northern Protectorate also became Northern group of Provinces.

However, despite the 1914 “amalgamation”, colonial Nigeria was still governed like two separate colonies up to 1945, that is, up to the end of the Second World War. The real political and administrative integration that started after that war became part of the process of British de-colonisation of Nigeria. The process ended on October 1, 1960 with the independence of Nigeria. At independence, Nigeria was confirmed as a federation of three constituent regions: North, West and East and a federal capital territory, Lagos.

Although a lot of internal geopolitical and administrative restructuring has taken place in Nigeria since the creation of the country in 1914, its shape and surface area remain almost the same today, 107 years later. Furthermore, although Nigeria now has a total of 36 constituent states (and a federal capital territory) grouped into six geopolitical zones and split into a total of 774 local government areas, Nigeria’s ruling class and its power blocs and political forces have ensured that the 1914 colonial two-part structure (North and South) remains active at some essential levels of politics, governance and power struggle.

This highly condensed narrative may be followed by a series of explanatory and self-clarificatory footnotes, or rather, series of declarations, affirmations and refutations. We may declare, for instance, that although the British created Nigeria according to its wish and will, that is, without consulting the “indigenous peoples”, the “natives”, the entity that emerged in 1914 cannot, today, be truthfully described as a territory of “strange bed-fellows” that could not have been transformed into a nation, even a united revolutionary nation, through a process of revolution and evolution.

The Nigerian Left can however affirm that what emerged in 1914 was a colonial territory of very large number of ethnic groups differing in sizes, cultures, religions, levels and modes of development and types of relationships with their neighbours – some friendly and equal, others unfriendly and unequal. We can also affirm that the most fundamental thing that the British colonial power did in and to Nigeria was that it halted the various modes of development it met in its conquered territories. Thereafter the colonizing power imposed capitalism as the dominant mode of production and organizing framework for further development.

About 15 years ago, an open, extended but unstructured Leftist debate on the ethnic nationality question in Nigeria took place in the country. I call the debate Leftist because the general premise – sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit – was the desirability and possibility of a revolutionary transformation of Nigeria into a modern, anti-capitalist and popular-democratic (or peoples’) republic. Several Leftists and non-Leftists took part in that debate. But, by far, the most prominent participants were two Nigerian academics and Leftist public intellectuals: GG Darah and the late Yusufu Bala Usman.

The central question around which the debate-bitter, even by Leftist standard – was waged was the existence, or otherwise, of the national question in Nigeria. This central question broke itself down or was broken down into concrete specifics: “resource control”, “fiscal or true federalism”, “sovereign national conference” and “geopolitical restructuring”. Since the mainstream newspapers of the time showed more than average interest in the debate, research in the matter will not, today, be difficult for any interested student, political activist or academic.

Several positions and propositions emerged, and several more can be distilled from what we may now refer to as the “GG Darah-Bala Usman debate on the national question in Nigeria”. But two propositions that are of relevance to this piece are as follows: One: that although several separate states, kingdoms, chiefdoms communities and principalities were conquered by Britain before they were merged into a single country, Nigeria, independence was granted on October 1, 1960 not to those entities – but to Nigeria. Two: that side by side with class contradictions, exploitation, domination and oppression, there are ethnic-based contradictions and exploiter-exploited, dominating-dominated relationships in contemporary Nigeria, and that while some of these relationships are new (that is, post-colonial), others are residues of the unequal exploitative and oppressive relationships which British

colonialists met on arrival and either used or weakened and quietened. Some Leftists introduced the term “internal colonialism” to describe some aspects of this phenomenon.

My proposition today does not seek to contradict either of the two propositions stated above. Rather, it seeks to transcend them, that is, absorb and go beyond them. And the proposition is this: Taking a long view of history and based on the short-term and long-term interests of the working, toiling, de-classed and poor masses of Nigeria – from north to south, east to west, northeast to southwest and northwest to southeast – the Nigerian Left stands on a platform of national unity, a platform on which is boldly inscribed: people’s power, popular democracy and socialism. Only that platform, and not the current capitalist political economy, can satisfactorily and finally resolve the violent contradictions now consuming the nation. But realistic compromises can be sought and obtained for the moment.

The question may then be asked: If the Nigerian Left accedes to power or office in Nigeria today, what can it do, what will it do to halt the turbulence in the country and pull it back from the precipice of disaster? First of all, the Nigerian Left will proclaim its identity, credibility and antecedents. It will follow this with a call on all the aggrieved, disaffected and disgruntled of Nigeria to “cease fire” on the grounds that justice will be done henceforth. It will address, in particular, the armed robbers, kidnappers, bandits, hoodlums and armed herders. It will then roll out a series of executive orders that common sense has long dictated should be issued, orders that the present regime ought to have issued long ago. Further steps will depend precariously on the reception of these initial announcements and executive orders.

In conclusion: I propose that to halt this national turbulence and violence, reverse the decline to catastrophe and calm the nation, any serious, sincere, democratic and genuinely patriotic government may not, in the first instance, need to look beyond the current Constitution, the Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and reports of Nigerian state-appointed Commissions of Inquiry and Constitutional Conferences since 1999, that is, since the beginning of the current Fourth Republic.

Facing 2021: Notes to the Nigerian Left

By Edwin Madunagu, The Guardian 21 January 2021

The last paragraph of my last published article for the year 2020, titled “Study notes on state and state failure” (December 22) started with a number of questions to the Nigerian Left.

Please note that our wishes notwithstanding, we do not see or present the Nigerian Left, as of today, as an undifferentiated entity. Rather, we really see it as a movement of various segments and fighting vanguards united by common history of successes and failures as well as commitment, faith, and hope.

The questions were: “So, judging from the multitude of crises partially listed in the opening paragraph of this piece, has the Nigerian state failed? Is it failing? Is the summons: “revolution or state failure” real? In other words, is a fundamental change of agenda called for in the Nigerian Left?” My answer, which I called provisional, deliberately avoided direct contact with the questions because it would have been unhelpful to attempt to answer them directly.

The present piece, the first in the year 2021, begins with the provisional (indirect) answer which I gave to the questions in the December article. It was a proposition: “The situation in Nigeria is serious, very serious. But it calls only for intensification of the current course of popular struggle and organization, not romance with a formula (“revolution or state failure”) that may lead to unhelpful if not dangerous voluntarism or adventurism. The Nigerian Left should simply carry into the year 2021 a renewed revolutionary commitment to both electoral politics and direct popular struggle. And it must never, never again, allow the following objectives – popular democracy propelled by popular power, national unity and socialism – to either separate from each other or shift from the movement’s strategic focus”.

From this provisional answer to the questions on “state failure,” we may distill a summary platform for 2021. This is: collective popular struggle and active collaboration as two sides of organizational development; commitment to electoral politics and direct popular struggle as two sides of engagement in the political struggle; and an integrated Left strategy whose logical moments may be presented as “popular democracy propelled by popular power” (and not as “gifts” from the ruling class); “national unity” (seen as the fighting unity of the working and toiling masses); and “socialism” (defined not as a mere progression of electoral politics, but politically, ideologically, socially and economically as a class shift in the location of “power”).

We may now look at a number of recent or ongoing events on account of their significance, especially the important lessons they embody and teach the Nigerian Left. These events include Nigeria’s EndSARS or youth revolt of October 2020, or rather, its aftermath; the Christmas 2020 message of the Catholic Bishop of the Sokoto Diocese, Reverend Matthew Hassan Kukah; and the violent protest on Wednesday, January 6, 2021, by the supporters of America’s outgoing president, Donald Trump at the country’s federal parliament in Washington.

The last event took place on the day a joint session of that parliament, called Congress, was to formally confirm the election of Joe Biden as Trump’s successor. The inauguration of the new president (yesterday) was then barely two weeks away. This “event” has been described as an “armed insurrection” instigated by the outgoing president – where “insurrection” has an ordinary definition: “an organized opposition to an authority, a mutiny; a rebellion”. We shall concentrate on the three listed events: EndSARS aftermath, Bishop Kukah’s message, and the January “insurrection” in Washington. It would be a measure of its development in the year 2021 if the Nigerian Left, through its various formations, vanguard, and known activists are heard and seen from time to time to intervene, openly,

but seriously and responsibly, in such public controversies. We introduce the three listed events, beginning with END SARS aftermath.

Several functionaries of the Nigerian state, at all levels, have been heard to vow that a movement like the EndSARS (youth) revolt of 2020 will never be allowed to occur again. Whenever I hear this I laugh because EndSARS is not a parliament that adjourned, to reconvene at a later date. No, EndSARS (2020) was a product of contradictions of living social forces together with historical conjunctures in circumstances that are constantly changing. The maximum that the inspirers, organisers, and “foot-soldiers” of 2020 EndSARS can now do is to continue to contribute to the development of the fighting ability of organisations of Nigeria’s working and toiling people (the popular masses), their allies, and – as we used to say in our younger days – “all those that stand by them and fight on their side”. History does not present occurrences like EndSARS more than once in a generation. You will produce a farce if you attempt to reproduce it!

It is the combination of the conduct of Nigeria’s ruling class, changing circumstances, and the permanent commitment of Nigerian Leftists to developing the masses’ fighting ability that may give rise to future spontaneous political ruptures at points, in places, and informs the state has very limited ability to predict. And we may humbly add that the ability of Leftist leaders and activists is also limited in this regard – although it is much, much higher than that of the ruling class and its state. Given this reality, it is of little value for the Nigerian state and its functionaries to vow to prevent future EndSARS.

If a vow is however necessary, I would like to suggest that it should be a serious and credible vow that the federal and state governments would actually do what they promised they would do in response to the specific demands of EndSARS (2020). In other words, and more directly, rather than vowing to prevent future EndSARS or seeing every assembly as a preparation for another EndSARS, the Nigerian state, through its institutions, agencies, and functionaries, should begin to do and be seen to be doing what it promised to do.

On Christmas Day of 2020, the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Sokoto, Reverend Matthew Hassan Kukah delivered a message on the situation in Nigeria. It was a critical statement on the state of the nation. In summary, the bishop accused the government of President Muhammadu Buhari of nepotism, tribalism, incompetence, insensitivity to the material conditions of the masses of Nigeria, and exploitation of the current unequal ethno-religious and regional structure of political power in Nigeria. This message, as expected, polarized public opinion in the country. While several commentators accused the cleric of partisanship, indiscretion, lack of patriotism, and even treason, others supported him, absolving him of all allegations. A small minority of commentators however restricted themselves to “on the one hand ... on the other hand” types of commentary, that is, dancing on the fence. I propose that in matters like this involving radical religious leaders like Bishop Kukah, the Nigerian Left should base its intervention on the freedoms enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution, its own principles of “secular democracy” and “national equality” and, of course, the facts of the issue.

My introduction to contemporary Trump and “Trumpism” will here be limited to the following reminder: In the late 1920s, mid-way between the end of the First World War and the start of the Second, the revolutionary Marxist Left in Europe sounded a general alarm on the threat of fascism in Germany. Unfortunately, the social-democratic movement which then controlled the bulk of the German labour organisation did not (and could not) apprehend the seriousness of the situation until Adolf Hitler actually came to power, through elections, as Chancellor of Germany in the early 1930s. The task then shifted from that of preventing fascism from coming to power to that of uniting all “unitable” forces to defeat fascism – which was a clear danger to all.

It was at this point that Leon Trotsky, already in exile, proposed the following tactical formula to the Marxist Left in its necessary alliance with the social-democratic movement and liberals of the Right: “March separately, but strike together; agree (with allies) on where to strike and

when to strike, but maintain your organizational independence". The reason was simple: Social forces outside the Left may soon realize their limited objectives and give up the fight. They may even join yesterday's opponents against the Left.

Hence, in analyzing what is now happening in America and drawing lessons for itself, the Nigerian Left should go back to the rise of German fascism and remember that the factors went beyond the dismissed Army Corporal, Adolf Hitler. And, lest I forget, the Nigerian Left should also go back to, or research anew who actually "financed" the rise of Adolf Hitler. Trotsky once described the fascist rule as a "regime of petit-bourgeois despair". I am seeing traces of this in "Trumpism" which should not be seen as an aberration. However, the slogan "March separately but strike together" is not an argument in support of aloofness or sectarianism. It is a reminder of a repeated lesson of history.

Study notes on 'state' and 'state failure'

By Edwin Madunagu, The Guardian, 22 December 2020

This piece is dedicated to two of the surviving members of the Old Guard of the Nigerian Left: Comrade Biodun Jeyifo (BJ) who turns 75 on January 5, 2021, and Comrade Bene Madunagu.

As this extraordinary year 2020 comes to a close, the Nigerian Left appears to be faced with a mocking challenge partly orchestrated by radical and Leftwing social media: "revolution or state failure". It is a challenge also appearing to leap directly from the packed events of the year: Coronavirus pandemic, youth protest or EndSARS, deepening mass poverty and desperation, Boko Haram and kindred insurgencies, banditry, kidnapping and armed robbery, deepening class exploitation and state robbery, state delinquency, increasing resort to fascist approaches to governance, increasing separatist agitations, state violence and lawlessness, generalized insecurity and the emergence of state-inspired, state protected, but formally "non-state" fascist movements.

The Left movement, as a whole and in its essential divisions, has a large body of working ideas and experience of "revolution" or what some Nigerian Leftists, in their tactical wisdom, now call "system change". The possibility and prospects of it taking place in Nigeria can also not be regarded as a strange proposition to the Nigerian Left. But the concept, "state failure", is much less understood and much less used in current revolutionary politics. And when "revolution" and "state failure" are posed as real and immediate alternatives, the movement appears to be faced with an entirely new summons. Since I am unable to persuade myself to dismiss this summons, what I need to do in this piece is to look at the "state" and "state failure" generally and in the context of our recent experiences and current national situation and then look boldly at the new summons: "revolution or state failure" and see to what extent it is a real alert.

The theory of the state to which the Nigerian Left subscribes is the one originated by Karl Marx and based on the separation (not dichotomy) between the state and the society, the former having risen from the latter at a particular point in human history. This point in human history is associated with the development of productive forces and mode of production, production of material surplus, and the appearance of private property and hence social classes. One of the "take-aways" here is this: The state has not always existed and need not continue to exist for eternity. The first part of this proposition is what we already know; the second part is what the Left, including the Nigerian Left, is projecting scientifically and ideologically.

The fundamental function of the state is associated with the need for the state's emergence: it is to "sustain" a "class structure" and "relations of production". This fundamental function can be broken down into several aspects and elaborated. Millions of books have been written on the fundamental function of the state and this function's main aspects. Another take-away: The fundamental function of the state has remained a class function since the state's emergence. Finally, although what we have said so far relates to the state in general, that is, the state through all ages, the state with which we are dealing here, in these notes, is the capitalist state. And although there are fundamental attributes common to all states, past and present, there are also significant differences arising, in particular, from the different ways by which class exploitation is carried out in each mode of production and enforced by the state. Finally, we must not forget to underline this fact: the Nigerian state, our subject, is a capitalist state.

When the fundamental function of the state has been broken down to its main aspects, three of the latter can be isolated. Two of these may be summarised and given as: "Provision of those general conditions of production which cannot be assured by the private activities of

the members of the dominant (or ruling) classes”; and “repression of any threat to the prevailing mode of production from the dominated classes or particular sections of the dominant classes, by means of the army, police, judiciary and prison-system”, etc. (Ernest Mandel: Late Capitalism). Each of these control institutions has grown beyond what Mandel saw and could project.

The third main aspect of the state’s fundamental function is critical but prone to be forgotten, wrongly ascribed or taken for granted: According to Mandel, it is the “integration of the dominated classes, to ensure that the ruling ideology of the society remains that of the ruling class, and that consequently the exploited classes accept their own exploitation without the immediate exercise of repression against them (because they believe it to be inevitable, or the ‘lesser evil’, or ‘superior might’, or fail even to perceive it as exploitation)”.

Roughly, Mandel’s first aspect may be called the “coordinating, administrative and organizational” aspect of the capitalist state’s fundamental function. The second aspect is the “repressive” or “coercive” aspect. The third aspect is the “ideological” subfunction. Generations of early Marxists did not pay sufficient attention to this ideological subfunction; or, when they did, they tended to merge it with the repressive subfunction.

We may note: When we say the “fundamental function” of the state or the main aspects of this function, it should be clear that the state does not perform all the functions that ensure the reproduction of society. Not the pre-capitalist state, not the capitalist state, not the capitalist-state – in – transition and not the projected post-capitalist (socialist) state. What the state (especially the capitalist nation-state) does exclusively is to provide and enforce the framework for this reproduction. This exclusive domain (or sphere) is what Mandel refers to as the sustenance of “class structure” and “relations of production”. This clarification is important for strategy and tactics and for focus. For instance, when we say that the Nigerian state has “failed” or is “failing” what actually has failed or is failing? We shall return to this presently.

A failed state is currently defined in several popular reference books and essays (in the Internet and elsewhere) as “a political body that has disintegrated to a point where basic conditions and responsibilities of a sovereign government no longer function properly. A state can also fail if the government loses its legitimacy even if it is performing its functions properly”. There is no problem here. An alternative definition is given like this: “A failed state is a state that is unable to perform the two fundamental functions of the sovereign nation-state in the modern world system: it cannot project authority over its territory and peoples, and it cannot protect its national boundaries”. Again, no problem.

Finally, another definition: “A failed state is a state whose governing capacity is attenuated such that it is unable to fulfill the administrative and organizational tasks required to control people and resources and can provide only minimal public services. Its citizens no longer believe that their government is legitimate, and the state becomes illegitimate in the eyes of the international community”. Well, well, still no problem.

Observations: When we combine these definitions of “state failure” with the definitions of “state” and “functions of the state” given earlier, we note, first, that the three alternative definitions of “state failure” are so close, complementary and non-contradictory that a composite definition can easily be articulated from them. Secondly, we may note that the various definitions of “state failure” and a composite definition are not contradictory to, or inconsistent with Mandel’s definition of the fundamental function of the state. Thirdly, we may also note that from the three alternative definitions of “state failure” and a composite one that can be articulated, we can distill the following specific forms (or aspects) of “state failure”: state disintegration, state collapse, state delinquency, state illegitimacy, etc.

The fourth observation flows from the third: If we say that a state has failed, what aspect or aspects have failed? A person may lose a foot or one or both eyes and still continue to move. But not when the heart is lost! This confirms the need for focus. In the fifth place, just

as in the consideration of “revolution” we may conceive “state failure” both as an event and as a process. Hence the concept of “failing state” comes in. A sixth and final preliminary observation here is the dialectical relationship between “revolution” and “state failure” in the sense that the latter – conceived dynamically – may trigger or initiate the former, and conversely. All depends on the historical and political conjuncture.

So, judging from the multitude of crises partially listed in the opening paragraph of this piece, has the Nigerian state failed? Is it failing? Is the summons: “revolution or state failure” real? In other words, is a fundamental change of agenda called for in the Nigerian Left? I may attempt a provisional answer: The situation in Nigeria is serious, very serious. But it calls only for intensification of the current course of popular struggle and organization, not romance with a formula that may lead to unhelpful, if not dangerous, voluntarism or adventurism. The Nigerian Left should simply carry into the year 2021 a renewed revolutionary commitment to both electoral politics and direct popular struggle. And it must never, never again, allow the following three objectives – popular democracy propelled by popular power, national unity and socialism to either separate from each other or shift from the movement’s strategic focus.

Again, time to remember

By Edwin Madunagu, The Guardian, 25 November 2020

This is a combined personal tribute to two personages: Flt-Lt Jerry Rawlings and Comrade Bassey Ekpo Bassey. I have isolated them from a longer list of personages that came to my mind to publicly remember – at this time. The other personages, all comrades, who will also be publicly remembered in no distant future, include Curtis Joseph, Arthur Nwankwo, Olu Adebayo, Bjorn Beckman, Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe, Ingrid Essien-Obot, Yima Sen and Balarabe Musa. I have here isolated Jerry Rawlings and Bassey Ekpo Bassey because of my particularly intense ideological and political relationship with each of them at certain periods in my more activist past. Here I mean relationships of specific compatibility and absolute trust, the type that early Marxist revolutionaries regarded very highly in proposing the composition of groups for sensitive or delicate assignments.

But side by side with what the two comrades have in common in this combined tribute are things that separate them. One of them is this: Whereas I know that Jerry Rawlings is dead, I can only say that Bassey Ekpo Bassey has traveled for a long time. This is because my knowledge of the latest segment of Bassey's life is limited. And this limitation reflects the limitation of my knowledge of the politics of the revered traditional institution which he entered – a politics that dominated his life before he traveled. Beyond this hard difference between Rawlings and Bassey are the differences of nationality and age as well as differences of location, date and circumstances of my first meetings with them.

Now, should a young comrade or compatriot wonder why Jerry Rawlings, a recently departed Ghanaian Head of State, would qualify to be lumped together with my comrades I would, in turn, return to the need to return to serious study and appreciation of history. I would thereafter go back to the time, about 40 years ago, that Rawlings exploded on the scene, the immediate impact of that explosion in Ghana and beyond, and the possibilities (I mean just possibilities) that the explosion threw up in the struggle against neocolonial capitalism, corruption, imperialism and dictatorship in Africa. Rawlings' dramatic emergence drew several of the continent's best-known revolutionaries to Ghana.

However, should an older Nigerian Leftist raise the issue of Rawlings' inclusion I would go beyond my answer to the hypothetical question from a young comrade and ask the older Leftist (better if she or he is a Marxist) to consider the following 27 randomly selected list of "big names" in modern political history of Marxism and Marxist Revolution: Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Rosa Luxemburg, Alexandra Kollantai, Leon Trotsky, Broz Tito, Nikita Krushchev, Kim Il-Sung, Mao Zedung, Liu Shao Chi, Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Amilcar Cabral, Eskor Toyo, Ikenna Nzimiro, Ola Oni, Balarabe Musa, Paul Sweezy, Hugo Chavez, Antonio Gramsci, Ernest Mandel, Santiago Carrillo, Pol Pot, Salvador Allende, Imre Nagy (Hungary, 1956), and Alexander Dubcek (Czechoslovakia, 1968). And my first question will be: Which of the personages listed above was not a Marxist? My second question: What does the selection tell us about the complexity and expanse of the composite universe of Marxism and Marxists?

Although this is a combined personal tribute to two personages, the circumstances in which I met them were not personal. It is these circumstances and what happened immediately after our first meetings – rather than the personages' careers and larger lives – that are here remembered. I met Comrade Bassey Ekpo Bassey in Zaria at the end of July 1977. This was at the start of that year's All Nigeria Socialist Conference, otherwise known, in the history of Nigeria's Socialist Movement, as the Zaria Conference. He was just below 28; and I was just above 31. I met Jerry Rawlings in Accra, Ghana in January 1982 shortly after a particular form of armed popular uprising, principally in the capital city, at the end of the preceding year. I was 35 and a half; and I took the slim Air Force pilot in combat uniform to be about the same age with me.

In my first meeting with Jerry Rawlings in Burma Military Camp, Accra he challenged me to ask Ghanaian intellectuals, mainly academics, in economic exile in Nigeria to return to Ghana and join the revolution. He said he was prepared to serve the revolution only as a fighter pilot. On my return I was able to persuade some of them to return. What happened on their return – and, indeed, what happened to the incipient revolution – is another story. In all my revolutionary expeditions to Ghana, I insisted, and Rawlings was persuaded, that the regime should only be responsible for my accommodation and security. Nothing.

Comrade Bassey and I came separately to the 1977 Zaria Conference from Calabar with nothing more than the knowledge of each other's existence as young Nigerian Marxists. He was the Political Editor of the Cross River State-owned Nigerian Chronicle and a popular Leftist columnist of the newspaper. He called his weekly column "Unpopular Essays", inspired, perhaps, by Bertrand Russell's collected essays of the same title. I, myself, had just relocated from Ode-Omu in present Osun State after a 12-month rural conscientisation. I came to Calabar to join my wife, Bene, who had also just been confirmed a lecturer in the Department of Biological Sciences of the University of Calabar.

In Zaria, Bassey Ekpo Bassey and I were introduced by an older comrade from Calabar, Chief Ernest Etim Bassey, a veteran journalist trained in Eastern Europe, a Leftist activist and self-determination agitator. As soon as Comrade Ernest mentioned my name, Bassey Ekpo Bassey, rather than take my extended hand, confronted me: "I heard you are a Trotskyite". I withdrew my hand and responded: "I learnt you are a Stalinist". But the older comrade persuaded us to shake hands. To cut a long story short, Bassey and I not only settled our "differences" at the conference, but travelled together in his Volkswagen Beetle car out of Zaria at the end of the conference. At Onitsha, I alighted and took a bus to see my mother in our home town, Nnobi, in the present Idemmili South Local Government Area of Anambra State. Bassey continued to Calabar.

To cut this long still shorter, a few days after the Zaria Conference, the Calabar Group of Socialists (CGS) was formed and the Movement for Progressive Nigeria (MPN) was transformed into a radical Students' Movement in the University of Calabar. Bassey and I had discussed these steps on our way from Zaria to Onitsha. Now joined by Bene, we hit the ground running, as they say. Agenda? Peoples Power and Socialist Revolution.

Let me dramatise the closeness between Bassey Ekpo Bassey and myself with the story of a real domestic "accident". From late 1970s to late 1990s three comrades could come into the bedroom which I shared with Bene without knocking. These were Biodun Jeyifo (BJ), Assim Otto Assim Ita and Bassey Ekpo Bassey. One day Bassey came in and almost met my wife and I in an early morning "encounter". Rather than scuttle away in embarrassment, he merely chuckled, quietly closed the door, went to the living room and asked one young person to prepare him a cup of "black" coffee.

He was calmly taking the coffee and reading a newspaper when I came out to join him.

In conclusion: How did Comrade Bassey Ekpo Bassey and I resolve our "Trotskyism-Stalinism" allegations? When we returned to Calabar from Zaria I formally rejected the "Trotskyism" charge but admitted that I had been influenced by Leon Trotsky just as I had been influenced by several other early revolutionary Marxists with Lenin as my primary ideological inspirer outside Marx and Engels. Much later, I presented Bassey with one of Trotsky's earliest and most romantic formulations of his theory of "Permanent Revolution". Here it goes: "The permanent revolution, in the sense which Marx attached to the conception, means a revolution which makes no compromise with any form of class rule, which does not stop at the democratic stage, which goes over to socialist measures and to war against reaction from without, that is, a revolution whose every stage is anchored in the preceding one and which can only end in the complete liquidation of all class society".

We both accepted this formulation, and agreed to ignore all labels.

Study notes on Nigeria's youth revolt

By Edwin Madunagu, The Guardian, 06 November 2020

What actually happened in Nigeria, from October 8, 2020 to the last week of that month? Did we see a protest, a revolt, an uprising, a rebellion, a nihilist – anarchist self-expression, an insurrection or a revolution? But why have I decided to put “revolution” last? Is it because it is the “greatest” on the list or because it has elements of each of the acts listed before it, but has something which others do not possess or possess in degrees that are not decisive?

To this loaded question I reproduce an explanatory note which I gave to three younger Nigerians – all female – during the event we desire to give a name. It was an explanatory note which, though not useless, begged the direct question that I have asked. I told them, individually: “Revolution – as we know it today, in fact, every actual revolution – has brought out the best and the worst of human instincts However a revolution not only says “No”, which other listed acts also say, but goes on to say “Yes” in a self-conscious and self-confident way.

Let us now attempt a “fair” and “liberal” (that is non-ideological and non-partisan) sub-narrative on this latest “class war” in Nigeria. This may begin somewhat like this: At the beginning, some well-educated young Nigerians – Leftists, liberal democrats, pure idealists, etc – came together, directly and with the help of the Internet, and decided to initiate a national mass protest, physically and in the social media, against the brutality and apparent impunity of a Nigerian Police formation called the Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). This group of young Nigerians, on behalf of the Nigerian youths (roughly ages 18-35), who constituted the main targets and victims of SARS, and on behalf of the Nigerian people generally, demanded, primarily, the dissolution of the fascist police formation. But they also made some ancillary, though equally popular-democratic demands.

The protest which became known as EndSARS, was at first peaceful (that is, non-violent) and was supported by many Nigerians across age, gender and ideological lines. But soon it was joined not only by thousands of other like-minded youths across the country, but also by other categories of Nigerian youths described as “hoodlums”, “miscreants”, “outlaws”, “thugs”, “anarchists”, “thieves”, “looters”, “nihilists”, etc. A leading Leftist lawyer (Femi Falana) described these latter joiners, now called “infiltrators” and “hijackers”, as “lumpen elements,” a category in Marxist class analysis. A veteran Leftist public intellectual and columnist (Biodun Jeyifo, BJ) then supplied a definition of “lumpen”, citing Online Dictionary: “Of or relating to dispossessed and uprooted individuals cut off from the economic and social class with which they might normally be identified”.

These “infiltrators” and “hijackers”, because they were large in numbers and were less disciplined, or rather, lacked disciplining social bases, changed the course and character of the protest. Their appearance alone alarmed the Nigerian state, which then sent in threatening coercive forces to maintain “law and order”. It did not take time for these armed agents of the state to start acting against the crowd-initiators and hijackers alike. Unarmed youths were shot at Lekki. The government and the president spoke, but could not persuade many people. Rather, the protest became violent and destructive of public property, private property and human lives. And when COVID-19 palliatives were discovered in many government warehouses and private homes and offices, the character of the protest changed again. Violent “looting” became its main feature. Many more youths and non-youths now joined and it became an uprising which savagely invoked an old poetic cry: “That distribution undo excess and each person hath enough!”

It was a class war in its crudest, most savage and most frightening forms. It was a war that was directed not only against perceived “enemies” but also symbols of “enemies”. It was a war in which “collateral” damages and self-inflicted injuries were, in summation, as heavy as

damages and injuries against enemies and symbols of enemies. Eventually, however, “law and order” was restored, the Nigerian state regained control and began the inevitable “settlement of accounts” with the protest and the protesters: initiators, sympathisers, legitimate joiners and illegitimate infiltrators and hijackers. End of narrative.

Now, we may ask: Taking the Nigerian youths, as organized or simply brought together in EndSARS protest, as a detachment of the popular masses (as opposed to the ruling class, the power blocs and the state) and taking a long and dialectical view of history, was EndSARS protest a victory or a defeat for the popular masses? And, also taking a long and dialectical view of history, was it a victory or a defeat for the Nigerian nation as a whole?

My answer to this question is heavily qualified: It was a victory at both levels: a victory which was however obtained at a very high price both in human lives and material acquisition, public and private. The task of the Nigerian Left in this regard now becomes to make such victories less and less costly—even if the immediate organisers and inspirers of the struggles believe – erroneously – that they are historically or ideologically autonomous or independent of the Nigerian Left! We may recall or research the role of Karl Marx in the premature uprising of the workers of Paris in 1871 (Paris Commune).

How does the Nigerian Left contribute to making future protests less and less violent and destructive? I propose: By expanding the popular-democratic struggle, that is: expanding popular political education, fighting to strengthen and expand the “rule of law” and the enactment of “good laws”, fighting for socio-economic reforms to ameliorate the condition of the popular masses and seeking to influence mass protest movements up to and including the assumption of leadership.

When I discussed the youth protest with a radical female academic, who claims honestly and self-consciously not to be ideological or partisan, her response was that it was a “pyrrhic victory”. That is, with reference to Greek history, a victory obtained at a very high cost. In other words, we were in agreement, except that I would not bring in the Greek history – inspired qualification. I seized on my advantage and asked her: “What will you have regarded as a clear victory for the popular masses in this particular struggle – that is, real victory?” She responded: “Social reform, restructuring, some resignations and dismissals of public functionaries, the decimation of demigods”.

Suppose these minimum objectives have not been met, would the EndSARS protest be in vain?, I asked my female compatriot. She responded: “Those objectives failing, then let it at least be that notice has been served regarding the masses’ capabilities and readiness to ensure that going forward cannot be business as usual”. She then added: “I just wish this mass awareness will be reflected in 2023”. I accepted the lady’s listing and delineation of upper and lower minimum objectives.

At a stage in the EndSARS protest, after the Lekki-Epe Toll Gate shooting, after the president had spoken, after the protest had moved to the massively destructive stage in Lagos, Abuja, Benin, Calabar and other parts of the country, it began to acquire an ethnic, micro-nationalist dimension. I held my breath and started exchanging calls and notes with comrades and compatriots across the country. Fortunately for the nation and for the Nigerian Left, the “fire” went off. But it went off not because sufficient conscious efforts were made to put it off but mainly because the original struggle, the EndSARS protest, de-escalated and therefore was no longer available to be used or converted by the ruling class in its fight-back.

In conclusion: In the near future we shall discuss the objectives, organization and conduct of Nigeria’s Youth Revolt 2020, or EndSARS Protest. We shall analyse and evaluate the “absence” of “leadership and organization” or the presence of leaders but absence of “central leadership and organization” in the protest. We shall then propose that the tragedy we witnessed was, in part, a reflection of the current weakness of the Nigerian Left, a

weakness that ab initio indicated a possible derailment and contributed to setting a limit for that struggle.

Study notes on “revolution” and “national unity”

By Edwin Madunagu, The Guardian 24 September 2020

The importance and urgency of this subject to the Nigerian Left, at this time, demand that I begin the discussion with a series of clear propositions. And that is what I intend to do here. None of the propositions, in its essence, will be new to the movement or in the movement. What may be new will be the way they are articulated and brought together here.

The over-flogged and yet not too-illuminated subject, the national question, may enter this particular discussion because of its connection with the question of national unity. The first two propositions will establish the link I am making between “revolution” and “national unity” in Nigeria.

The opening proposition is this: Historically and philosophically, “revolution” is the core reason – if not the only reason – for the emergence, continued existence, vitality, and resilience of the political Left. In fact, the political Left will cease to exist in essence if “revolution”, conceived as the overthrow of a class-state by its class enemies and the establishment of another class-state ceases to be its core basis of existence. And this thesis remains valid even if the ideological embodiment of this particular hard conception of “revolution” is a numerical minority of the movement.

Second proposition: The question of “national unity” has become such an urgent and burning issue in our country and Nigeria’s present ruling class has become so incapable of leading the country to it that the very first proclamation of the Nigerian Left on coming to power or office in Nigeria, must embody a clear statement on “national unity”.

Third proposition: By “revolution” in Nigeria I mean, for the avoidance of doubt, a revolution of the Lower Classes of the Nigerian People: a revolution which may be further characterized, depending on the concrete situation and correlation and balance of (social) forces on the ground, as a socialist revolution, a popular-democratic revolution, a national-democratic revolution or a people’s revolution. The last three characterizations are conceived by some Marxist tendencies in the Nigerian Left as “stages” or “moments” in a socialist revolution.

The ideological core of the Nigerian Left is committed, in principle, to the world revolution. When my generation of the Nigerian Left was young we believed and used to say that the last battle of this revolution would be fought in America, the strongest bastion of capitalism and imperialism. It was an event we put very far, beyond our own life-time. We, however, also believed that the import of the American (Socialist) Revolution would extend to the whole world. Since it was going to be the last battle-ground we paid little attention to what was happening in that northern half of the American continent – beyond reading books and journals and magazines flowing like water from the place. Comrade Biodun Jeyifo (BJ) ensured that he brought to my possession every new Left publication in America (book or journal) that he considered important.

With what is now happening in America under the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the inspiration this has given to oppressed peoples and revolutionary forces across the globe, and – for me – the analyses which BJ has embarked upon in his column in the Sunday Nation newspaper (Talakawa Liberation Herald) I have begun to think that the revolution in America will not wait to be the last revolution on the planet Earth. And because of the wealth and power of America and its global reach and influence the revolution there will be as earth-shaking as that of the Russian Revolution of 1917. It will throw up new perspectives on “revolution” and simultaneously challenge many orthodoxies. However

Fourth proposition: As long as the overthrow of a class-state and the creation of another is the road through which every socialist or popular-democratic revolution will pass, I do not foresee the overturning of the conclusion reached by Marxist politics long ago and voiced by Leon Trotsky in his *The History of the Russian Revolution* (1932): “Organisations and leaders constitute not an independent, but nevertheless a very important element in a revolution. Without a guiding organization the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam enclosed in a pistonbox. But, nevertheless, what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam”. We in Nigeria, operating from various revolutionary formations, independently and from first principles reached this same conclusion more than 40 years ago. Of course, many things have changed since then, but none of these changes has challenged that conclusion. We must therefore continue to insist on the inevitability of organisation in our exhortation to the current fighting activists of the Nigerian Left.

This piece, or rather, the set of propositions in it, should be seen as a memorandum to a future committee or commission of the Nigerian Left on People’s Manifesto. It is not an infallible diktat. With this understanding, we may proceed to the question of national unity. If Nigeria’s ideological spectrum is broadly divided into the Left and the non-Left, I propose that only the Nigerian Left has been consistently committed, in principle, to the just resolution of the national question which I broadly define here as the complex of problems of “national unity” that arise when two or more ethnic groups or ethnic nationalities – each of them class-divided – are brought together under one sovereign state.

It is and should be a matter of regret for the Nigerian Left that in spite of the vigorous debates on the national question and the question of national unity pursued by the international revolutionary movement before, during, and after the 1917 Russian Revolution and more than a century beyond the triumph of that first socialist revolution, a period that witnessed many other triumphs – and, of course, defeats – each providing deep experiences and lessons, the questions have remained defiant (before socialism).

However, it is also true that no other social system, least of all capitalism, has rivaled socialism in the formulation of the conditions – human and material – for the resolution of the national question, the ending of national oppression, and the building of national unity. Put differently: Although socialism, as the ultimate goal of the Left, has not been able to resolve the “national question” and the question of “national unity”, it remains the only social system that is irrevocably committed to creating the conditions and laying the foundations for their resolution. This is the fifth proposition.

We provide the following as background reminder for the benefit of our young Leftist activists who may have been denied the benefit of learning their own history in school: Nigeria became independent on October 1, 1960, as a federation of three regions (North, East, and West) and a federal capital territory, Lagos. In 1963, the Mid-West Region was carved out of the West. In May 1967, Nigeria was re-divided into 12 constituent states including Lagos State. In 1976, the country was further re-divided into 19 states and a designated new federal capital territory, Abuja. In 1987, the number of states became 21. In 1991 the number of states became 30. And in 1996 Nigeria became a federation of 36 states with combined constituent Local Government Areas (LGAs) numbering 774. In 1995 a constitutional conference proposed the grouping of Nigeria’s constituent states into six geopolitical zones. Although this proposal was rejected by the military junta in power, Nigeria’s ruling class unofficially adopted the zonal framework for political use.

It is important to note that all acts of state creation in independent Nigeria that raised the administrative division of the country from 3 regions in 1960 to 36 states in 1996, except the creation of the Mid-West in 1963, were carried out by military dictatorships. Nigeria’s ruling class, or rather its political subclass, has not, again, been able to produce the type of correlation and balance of forces that made the Mid-West creation possible.

On the question of “restructuring”, what Nigeria’s ruling class did was to appropriate the idea, empty it of revolutionary content and leave it essentially as a framework for

redistributing power within the class along ethnic and regional lines. They are incapable of seeing in it a framework for the promotion of popular power or at least the advancement of democracy, as proposed by the Nigerian Left.

It is not necessarily burdening this article with details of the restructuring that will be consistent with the outlook of a People's Manifesto. It is sufficient to propose that restructuring should not tamper with the present 36 states and 774 LGAs and must leave inviolate certain institutions and people's rights, freedoms, privileges, and entitlements that the Nigerian Left will insist should remain Nigerian and should not be "restructured" along state or regional lines. But this will be a responsible revolutionary insistence only if the Nigerian Left sharpens its focus on political power, that is, fight for the power to execute the programme itself.

In a very private intervention that I recently made in an argument between some younger comrades, I said: "The struggle for secession is not, in principle or in every particular case, reactionary. Such a struggle may, in fact, in some conjunctures, be revolutionary. Illustrations can be found in all continents, including Africa. The adoption by the Nigerian Left of the platform of national unity is a conscious decision which is based on a set of concrete historical, ideological and political principles and working-class internationalism and not on some abstract, metaphysical or a-historical principles that could lead the movement, for instance, to holding the same flag of "One Nigeria" with Nigeria's ruling class". Put differently and more directly: The Nigerian Left stands for "national unity"; but we proclaim this from a platform radically different from that of Nigeria's ruling class. This is proposition 6.

In praise of Marxism

By Edwin Madunagu, The Guardian, 25 June 2020

One of the earliest objections we encountered from our opponents when we entered the organized Marxist political activism in the early post-Civil War years was the one built around the thesis that Marxism, our ideology, was alien to Africa and to Nigeria in particular. We soon realized that this objection was not new, that it was as old as the history of the Marxist ideology in Africa and Nigeria. We found that our older Nigerian comrades (especially the intellectuals and academics among them) had confronted the objection for at least two decades and a half before our entry. Still later, we learnt that the objection we are talking about was, in fact, a particular application of an older and larger objection, namely, that Marxism, as the overwhelmingly dominant ideology in the socialist and anti-capitalist movements, was alien to human nature.

As we grew older and stronger, but still early in our career as revolutionary Marxists, we found that German Nazism, under Adolf Hitler, had proclaimed that Marxism was an international Jewish “conspiracy” – originated by Karl Marx and promoted by international “conspirators” like Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky. This was, in fact, one of the specific Nazi “charges” against the Jews, as a race. It later became a pillar of Nazism as an ideology.

This admission may be made: As a young graduate student of mathematics, I was first destabilised – but not intimidated or tempted – by these objections and charges. But, soon, I became strong enough to begin to respond along this line: To question the relevance, applicability and appropriateness of Marxism in Africa (or Nigeria in particular) is to inquire into the mode of arrival of Marxism in this continent and in this country. And, for a serious student of history (academic or non-academic), to inquire into this arrival is, in some respects, similar to an inquiry into the arrival, in our land, of modern religions, including Christianity and Islam. Finally, the general proposition: To question the relevance of Marxism in the revolutionary understanding of, and intervention in human society or in any segment of it, is to ask how capitalism arrived in human society or in the particular segment, and what it is still doing there.

To put our response more directly: To study the origin of Marxism and its historical trajectory is to study the origin and historical trajectory of Capitalism. Why? Because Capitalism and Marxism are inseparably bound, the latter being the organic “nemesis” of the former. If a young Nigerian asks me what Marxism is doing here I will ask her/him to go and find out what Capitalism which originated in England is doing here. I will also tell her/him that both Capitalism and Marxism emerged as adults, with clear identities, in England. Finally, before we end that session, I will re-state the mission of Marxism. This mission is not to defeat Capitalism and thereafter supplant it as “king”. No. The mission statement is that Marxism, as an anti-capitalist “weapon of criticism”, will defeat and bury Capitalism and thereafter become superfluous in an emergent classless and genuinely human society whose initial stages we call socialism.

In my recent published article, “Dialoguing with Pan-Africanist compatriots” (early June 2020), I subscribed to the view that Marxism is a science. Specifically, following Samir Amin, I defined it as the “social science of socialist revolution”. I have also described Marxism as an ideology, an ideology of liberation. I stand by both definitions: Marxism is both an ideology and a science. When I came in contact with Marxism it “fired” me because it rationalized and promoted my previously existing radical and rebellious consciousness. Karl Marx’s writings and deeds between 1843 and 1848, the teachings of my elders and contemporaries in the Nigerian Left and my own studies and experiences contributed immensely in making me a Marxist ideologically. Later, I realized that Marxism is more than an ideology, that it is also a science. Is there a contradiction here? No, not at all.

Speaking specifically about my own development and experiences I would say that I would, perhaps, not have become a Marxist if I had not first encountered Marxism as an ideology. I would, also, probably, not have remained a Marxist if I had not, at a stage in my development beyond the original “firing”, come to see that Marxism is also a science. At the risk of being schematic, I would say that Marx’s writings from 1843 to 1848, including “Towards a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts”, “Theses on Feuerbach”, “The Poverty of Philosophy” and the “Communist Manifesto” made me a Marxist ideologically. But his writings in the decade following the “Manifesto” (which included “Wage Labour and Capital” and “Critique of Political Economy”) plus “Capital, volume One” made me a Marxist scientifically.

The 1848 “Manifesto” remains the clearest statement of the ideology which bears the name of Karl Marx. But, as the world later learnt and saw, even before the appearance of this “Manifesto”, Marx had produced enough materials to lay the foundations of an anti-capitalist ideology of liberation: not just liberation from capitalist wage-labour and slavery but liberation from “all circumstances” (capitalist and pre-capitalist) in which segments of humanity are “oppressed, humiliated or despised”. These segments include class, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, culture and religion. Before the production of the “Manifesto” Marx had proclaimed that the proletarian, anti-capitalist ideology which was later codified and given the name Marxism was the solution to the “riddle of history”, a solution that was conscious of itself as a solution.

Two quick footnotes should follow here: One: I think the title of the Manifesto should be read in full as “The Manifesto of the Communist Party” – the title given by the authors themselves – rather than “The Communist Manifesto”, a title that editors, writers and codifiers of Marxism later gave to it. The two titles do not mean the same thing when put in the proper historical context. Two: The battle-cry with which the “Manifesto” ended remains ever fresh: “Workers of all countries, unite ... you have nothing to lose but your chains ... you have a world to win!”

Karl Marx’s 1859 Preface to his “Critique of Political Economy” may be taken as one of the clearest introductions and statements of Marxism as a science. From this point onward Marx poured out scientific works – always spiced, of course, with ideological and journalistic polemics. Speaking personally again and by way of emphasis, I would say that Marx’s simple demonstration of the critical difference between “labour” and “labour power” (a self-correction he made in his “Wage-Labour and Capital”), his demonstration of the inevitability of workers’ vanguard role in the struggle for socialism and his demonstration of the reality of the state and its role in pre-socialist history helped to make me a scientific Marxist in addition to being a Marxist ideologue.

Karl Marx died in 1883. That was 137 years ago. Since then Marxism has grown both as ideology of total and universal liberation and as social science of socialist revolution. But it has also, naturally and inevitably, developed so many factions and so many tendencies. But then: Is there a line, a red line, beyond which a Marxist faction or tendency can no longer seriously or legitimately claim to be Marxist? Should one of my numerous young Christian compatriots ask me this question, I would polemically, but with sufficient sensibility, answer her or him along the following line: Is there a red line beyond which a Christian individual, or formation, or sect, or tendency cannot continue to claim to be Christian? The answer I receive will not settle the matter, since there is a big difference between the nature of Christianity and the nature of Marxism. But the answer will provide a sufficient basis for further discussion.

Dialoguing with Pan-Africanist compatriots

By Edwin Madunagu, The Guardian, 02 June 2020

On April 21, 2020, and for a couple of days thereafter, my article, “Re-introducing the Lugano Report”, appeared in the media and on discussion platforms.

The content of the piece is what the title indicates: a repeat introduction to readers, particularly from the Nigerian Left, of a book I had previously introduced under a different rubric. The earlier introduction of the quasi-fictional book, “The Lugano Report: on preserving capitalism in the 21st century”, written by Susan George, was published about a decade ago.

In re-introducing the book I proposed that Nigerian Leftists “ought to search out and read or re-read this book either now or as soon as this grave global danger to humanity and human existence – the Coronavirus – is over.”

Why the re-reading? Because “the task before the global Left and the Nigerian Left is to become more conscious of how doubly endangered humanity as a whole and its segments – including Nigeria – have become under global capitalism. Humanity’s double tragedy is that the global social forces responsible for this tragedy are also the selfish and corrupt forces in power and directing the solution!”

My article ended on a note of optimism and exhortation to the Left: “Humanity will survive this pandemic as it survived others before it. But the Left and all anti-capitalist forces should determine that global capitalism, together with its regional and national segments, will not be allowed to reconstitute its pre-pandemic political hegemony when all this is over.” Thus, I started my article with a focus on the Nigerian Left but ended it on the global plane. Readers should, please, note this.

On May 22, 2020, a month after my article appeared, a piece titled “To Madunagu on the Lugano Report” came out in The Guardian. It was written by the paper’s Associate Editor, Omokioja Julius Eto. On reading and re-re-reading Eto’s article, I could see that he was not directly responding to my article, at least not in his piece published in The Guardian. Rather, as I felt, he was provoked or inspired by my article to share his strongly held views on a broad, historically-determined range of issues of mutual interest to him and to me. These issues include global exploitation, oppression, discrimination, social injustice, racism and imperialism. In his article, Eto copiously quoted Biko Agozino, a professor of Sociology who, like Eto, is a member of the respected “Africa-USA Dialogue Series” platform.

However, whereas in his article, Eto approached the subject of our mutual interest from the Pan-Africanist perspective (where Pan-Africanism may be briefly introduced as a “movement, founded around 1900, to secure equal rights, self-government, independence and unity for African peoples”), I have been doing so from the Marxist perspective. And on account of my perspective, I have, from time to time, posed the question sharply as “capitalism versus socialism”. And to remove all ambiguities or doubts, by “socialism” I mean “anti-capitalist socialism”. I also believe as Samir Amin affirmed long ago, that Marxism is essentially the social science of socialist revolution. And finally, along this line of thought, I believe that Marxism, as defined here, will become largely superfluous, if not obsolete, as soon as socialism is realized on a global level. (Please, note that in its original sense, the term “socialism”, understood in the Marxian sense, can be used interchangeably with “communism”. Eto implicitly did this in his piece, and I love it).

The preceding paragraph is my first clarification. The second clarification is this: I have been engaging the Nigerian Left from the Marxist perspective on the triple question of popular democracy, workers’ power and socialism in Nigeria and globally. In particular, I have been urging the Nigerian Left to raise the level of its organization to reflect its current responsibility to the working and exploited masses of Nigeria.

As I said earlier, my Pan-Africanist compatriot, Julius Eto, did not, in his article, “To Madunagu on the Lugano Report” directly address the issues I raised and the propositions I presented in my earlier article, “Re-introducing the Lugano Report”. I have even been tempted to believe that both he and Biko Agozino were not patient enough in reading my article. But since a number of statements in Eto’s article are of public interest and also of immediate relevance to our common interests, I shall briefly respond to them in broad terms. And my response will be summarized in two points of further clarification: one theoretical and ideological, the other practical and political.

My first point is this: Although it is possible to de-couple a political ideology into its constituent elements – called ideological elements – a reverse process is a “hard nut to crack” in the sense of not being capable of yielding a complete or coherent or even intelligible statement, talk less of restoring the original ideology. This is because an ideology is not the arithmetical sum of its constituent elements – just as a wall is not the sum of the blocks used in building it. There are critical (though, in places, intangible) links and connecting glues that are lost when an ideology is being decoupled. It is the building blocks plus these links and connecting glues – rather than the blocs alone – that give an ideology its logic, shape, strength and uniqueness.

When two different ideologies, such as Marxism and Pan-Africanism, are broken down, we may find that some or several ideological elements are common to both ideologies. That is what makes political collaboration or alliance potentially possible. However, what is crucial is the place and role of a particular ideological element in the ideology into which it is fitted. For instance, “anti-racism” appears as an ideological element in both Marxism and Pan-Africanism but they play different roles and carry different imports and implications in these different ideologies.

My second concluding point is this: In the central part of his article, Eto said: “As noted in my contribution on this issue (the issue of the “Lugano Report” – EM) to the USA Africa Dialogue Series, individual African nations alone, in their present small sizes, cannot survive even if they all become communist/socialist because they will still be susceptible to manipulation by the dominant political powers (Russia, USA, China, EU etc). I also stressed that all communist/Marxist theories become practically limited when applied to Africa if the continent remains fragmented. All black intellectuals and some enlightened politicians know this truth, though it is bitter to some of the selfish ones and agents of capitalist and communist imperialism”.

My response here is a promise to my compatriot, Julius Eto. And the promise is that I shall discuss, in not too distant future, the concerns he raises here under the long-standing revolutionary Marxist thesis on the challenges of building socialism in a single country or even in a combination of countries – as long as capitalism dominates globally. I shall also show that the “anti-racism” and “revolutionary internationalism” to which I subscribe, as a Marxist, subsume some of the concerns of Pan-Africanism. Finally I shall show that though Marxism, as a living, fighting ideology of liberation is strong and resilient, it is not, and cannot claim to be, and does not need to claim to be “pure”, “infallible” or “monolithic”.

Finally, the opening sentences of Biko Agozino’s statement – which Eto quoted in his (Eto’s) support read: “What you (that is, Eto) identified is the weakness of national Left groups in Africa. Comrade Madunagu is directing his challenge to the Nigerian Left but relatively left out the Pan African Left. Meanwhile, the Lugano Report was pitched at the global level and not at the micro-national level because capitalism is a global mode of production.” I give two short responses here. One: Agozino and Eto may need to re-read my “Lugano” article or go back to the first three paragraphs of the present article to realize they had not been patient in reading me. Two: The Marxist goal is a global socialist revolution, but I have to engage the struggle here or anywhere history places me – provided, always, that my perspective is global.