

Dissertation Theses

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A History of Ideas in Nigeria – The Marxist Challenge

My interest in the subject of this dissertation was strengthened by the following factors. First of all, I knew that Nigerian Marxism was far from dead. Indeed, as a Lecturer of Politics at the American University of Nigeria, I was fortunate to meet Gramscians such as Usman A. Tar in person (he was responsible for our Department's mock accreditation), or the fiery Trotskyite Edwin Madunagu of the Guardian (Nigeria) who in Calabar, opened not only his private library for me, but the world of the Nigerian left. My old friend at AUN, Bill Hansen (a hero of the civil rights movement in the US,¹ now an expatriate professor in Adamawa state and a lifelong Marxist) had known Yusufu Bala Usman, one of the best Marxist historians of Northern Nigeria – I was to devour Bala Usman's works in the course of my research. Still, I was less surprised by all this, since Marxism as an intellectual pursuit, is a stock feature in many countries that refuses to whiter away. What really struck me was the fact that Nigerian labour leaders evoked ideas and images of class warfare very openly, at the January 2012 fuel subsidy strikes, and at other times as well. Many Nigerian labour leaders still refer to themselves as "Comrade," and labour personalities such as Dipo Fashina of the Academic Staff Union of Universities and Hassan Sunmonu, formerly of the Nigeria Labour Congress, or the indestructible Femi Aborisode continue to be Marxists. The "Occupy" movements in the West drew inspiration from the well of Marxian, socialist and communist traditions. In Nigeria, the connection between the anti-capitalist counterculture and its 20th century antecedents seems even more visible to the naked eye. Marxist inspired movements are not in oblivion in the country. Chinua Achebe's party, the People's Redemption Party, the oldest political party in existence in the country with roots in 1978 Kaduna, is still in operation, and it proudly displays its Marxian inspirations. Adams Aliyu Oshiomhole, former leader of the Nigeria Labour Congress, is the governor of Edo state since 2007, on the platform of the Action Congress (which is allied with his own Labour Party, a social democratic party with links to the NLC). There are a number of

diehard Marxist parties, such as the Democratic Socialist Movement and its Socialist Party of Nigeria (associated with the Committee for Workers' International under Segun Sango's leadership), the Socialist Workers' League (Femi Aborisade, Baba Aye) and the National Conscience Party with a left leaning progressive agenda. Two major newspapers, *This Day* and the *Guardian*, are sympathetic to the cause of the left. Party 'hard core' reads also periodicals such as the *Workers' Alternative*² and the website that the Democratic Socialist Movement maintains³ (both issue pamphlets, booklets, and leaflets too).

The Nigerian condition poses some very difficult questions to every observer. I devote an entire chapter to that general condition in this dissertation. Every researcher of Nigeria ends up doing so, because the "Nigeria *problematique*" is simply inescapable for anyone who spent time in the country and knows how horrible its condition really is. When I claim that Marxist inspired analysis and Marxian answers might be part of the solution, I do not necessarily push a left wing analytical agenda. Indeed, it was none other than John Campbell, former United States Ambassador and currently, Council on Foreign Relations Fellow and the single most important US expert on Nigeria, who aired the view that Nigeria might well still produce a Fidel Castro (!).⁴ Nota bene, he did not say that Cuban, North Korean or any other saboteurs, agents or spies might produce just such a leader: he thought that the Nigerian condition itself might. Obviously, for John Campbell and for United States foreign policy, the emergence of a Castro in Nigeria would be a very unwelcome development. Most of the Marxist thinkers, organizers and leaders that appear in my work, would welcome such a development.

This does not eliminate the problem, however that this study is indeed about an intellectual movement that has not succeeded, and that has never achieved its most important aims in the theatre of politics. At the same time, it would be foolish to discredit their many and varied works, their movement, their toil and their thoughts, on the sole ground that they and their activist friends have not captured political power in Nigeria historically. If for no other reason, then for the fact that they still might. In May 2013, for the first time since 1967, the Nigerian air force conducted attacks on home territory as part of the government's continued fight against Boko Haram, their Islamist menace. What is brewing in Nigeria might very well

bring unexpected conundrums in this decade, and a social revolution is the only one among them that offers any hope for change for the better.

This dissertation is a history of socialist ideas and of left leaning thinkers, and in it the history of the socialist movement is presented as the larger milieu where those alternative ideas grew out of. I devoted a chapter to the movement to provide the necessary framework for understanding the works themselves. This is more than what has appeared in the literature on the subject so far, but hardly a complete narrative. There is a technical reason for this relative hiatus: writing the detailed academic history of the movement would necessitate multiple trips to all Nigerian states, a focus on oral history and on personal archives (as public archives are so nondescript in Nigeria), and an altogether different methodology. But it was not only for those negative reasons that I opted to write on Nigerian thinkers more than on Nigerian strikes. First, it was because these works outline alternatives to the existing hell for millions. Secondly, because those books were so well written, so entertaining, so stimulating, dense, humorous, witty, apt, and so singularly clever. The world has discovered literary giants such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, but the world has *not* discovered (or, has not re-discovered anyway, since the 1970s/1980s) the prolific Mkwugo Okoye, the fiery Edwin Madunagu, the heterodox Eskor Toyo, and so many others such as Bene Madunagu, Ola Oni, Bade Onimode, Tunji Otegbeye, Niyi Oniororo, Ikenna Nzimiro, Yusufu Bala Usman, Igbo Natufe, Wahab Goodluck, or the early Adebayo Olukoshi. To some extent even radical young Toyin Falola⁵ and Biodun Jeyifo leaned towards Marxism in the 1980s, and so did many more Nigerian Marxian authors who discussed and still discuss vital social, political, economic and cultural issues in their works. In the 1990s, a new cohort appeared, with Claude Ake, the feminist poet Ogundipe-Leslie, the socially committed writer Ifeoma Okoye; and others simply continued their work well into the 1990s and beyond. This dissertation aims to be a testimony to their eloquence, their acumen, their “rock of eye” for the problems of Nigerians. It is also one of the aims of this book to familiarise the reader with the frames of references that might make reading those authors somewhat hard. Their books have all been written entirely in English. At the same time, most of them were written for a readership that claimed a close familiarity with Nigeria and West Africa, including even those ones that had been published by

Zed or others in the West. It is with that in view that this book has introductory chapters on the literature, on Nigeria's history, on the Nigerian independence movement and especially Zikism, the labour movement and its international aspects, including African Marxism in general, before embarking on the detailed study of Nigerian Marxists' oeuvres.

Beyond their intrinsic intellectual value, the counterculture these works sustained had a very visible presence and shaped both social resistance and Nigerian mentalities in a major way. More than that, in my work I shall argue that Marxism was seen as a major legitimizing facet even as abused by military and civilian governments. Conditions of illegality, and even military rule, did not succeed in eliminating Marxism in Nigeria. Very often, mainstream politics felt a need to use and abuse it, exactly because of its perceived legitimizing potential before the African masses. Edwin Madunagu was enticed by Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida to serve on his Political Bureau, Ebenezer Babatope was practically forced to join Sani Abacha's government, Nigeria Labour Congress' Hassan Sunmonu was carefully cultivated by the corrupt plutocrats of the second republic and the military governments of the 1980s. Their Marxian counterculture groups at universities, the NLC, illegal party circles and even village communes, were subjected to a constant pressure for inclusion in the existing power structures. When formal democracy was re-instituted in 1999, Marxism continued to underpin the NLC's efforts, and it is making a comeback with the Socialist Workers' League, the Movement for Democratic Socialism, Calabar groups, Usman Tar, and literary author Ifeoma Okoye (the author of the novel *The Fourth World*) in the 2000s. This counterculture, beyond exhibiting the most varied versions and understandings of Marxism, has constantly been intellectually inclined, and artsy in its tastes.

These books are works of African political thought, African economic thought, African feminist thought, indeed, of African philosophy. African thought is being recognised as a valuable field of study in the last twenty years. Indeed, it has been a current to decipher African philosophy from every possible source, including folklore – even Henry Odera Oruka's "sage philosophy" and "philosophic sagacity" can be traced back to such an effort. Such projects were emancipatory in their intended nature. Still I feel that we have to realise that Africa is not frozen in time, say in the 1920s. African philosophy may be found in works on political theory,

written by actual Africans. It should not deter us that some of those thinkers might not condemn Marx, Trotsky or even Lenin. Many of the Nigerian thinkers I have mentioned were (and some still are) Leninists, even if of the Trotskyite variety. There probably are reasons why African intellectuals have been drawn to especially Lenin and Leninism, beyond Marx. However, even that is a patronising remark from a non-African. Let the works of African thinkers define why, and what, they stand for. It is inexcusable to dump a rich and varied tradition of thinkers on the dust heap of academic history just because some of us academics disdain the Bolshevik tradition.

The works of Nigerian Marxists demonstrate the falsehood of the expatriate witticism that “In our Naija there is no abstraction,” where Naija is simply another word for Nigeria used by Nigerians and expatriates alike. (The word is used as a noun and even as an adjective in spoken Nigerian English.) The statement however, is false in the extreme, as the careers of brilliant Nigerian intellectuals in the UK, the US, the UN, or the World Bank, have demonstrated. More than that, Nigerian talent is being recognized beyond the well known talent for designing scams. A recent study focussed on how Nigerian “tiger moms” are actually one of the most successful groups of immigrants in the United States, to inculcate skills for success in their progeny.⁶ Nigerians are “in” not only in literature or modelling; they have intellectual strengths. More than that, the works of their Marxist thinkers go beyond day-to-day abstraction and convey the aesthetic, descriptive, and analytic qualities of true intellectual works that merit historical discussion and a monographic study such as this. This is the central claim of this book, irrespective of the specific merits of the works as Marxist treatises on any given subject.

Capitalist Nigeria as a polity is a crime against its own people, say Nigerian Marxists with convincing force. The neoliberal Nigerian leadership of the 1980s was one of the first globally, to introduce Structural Adjustment Programmes ostensibly to revive the country’s ailing economy. SAPs in the end de-industrialized Nigeria, forced upon it the worst kind of militarization of politics, sucked the blood out of its veins, and turned it into a barren land of no production, no middle class, few medical doctors (more Nigerian medical doctors practice in

the US than in Nigeria!),⁷ no oil refineries (four of which stand idle, while compradors re-import refined petrol!), two hours of city electricity a day for most people, very little indoor and no outdoor plumbing, no operational water towers (except in Calabar), no sewage system to speak of, and cities filled with filth that would startle Engels.

With a bit of self-reflection, what one has to question however is the relevance of studying Nigerian Marxist thought to non-Nigerians, for people who are generally well advised to stay askance of that country where armed robbery on the roads is rampant. It also seems questionable whether there is a point in reading about such a country. After all, what can its thinkers give to the reader who wants to find answers to 21st century problems, not problems one considers pre-modern? My own take on those questions would be the following: Nigeria is a place where everything is just more open, where every social relationship is more visible to the naked eye than it is almost anywhere else. It is not a pre-modern entity tossed somewhere else as in outer space – that would be impossible anyway. The heads of Nigeria’s “area boy” gangs administer their underlings from London by modern means of communication.⁸ Pre-modern mentalities do exist in Nigeria, but the country itself lives in the 21st century and it is capitalist; capitalist without production. Nigeria comes close to a hyperbole on how bad things may turn out to be when neoliberal policies are unleashed on unsuspecting millions.

The most important authors that my dissertation covers are Edwin Madunagu, Mkwugo Okoye, Bade Onimode, Yusufu Bala Usman, and a number of others. Claude Ake was a Marxist political scientist of global renown, the only author whose oeuvre has invited a monograph so far – but he also ventured far from Marxism, or rather utilized Marxist thought to show why revolution was irrelevant to Nigeria; hence I am disinclined to deal with him in this work. Edwin Madunagu is a mathematician and journalist, a combination of a Trotskyite rebel who founded a rural commune while hiding from the police in the seventies, and a Nigerian *Aufklaerist* who opened his private library to the public in Calabar. When 1989 came, he did not take the mantle of any petty ethnocentric cause, but set up an NGO instead to conscientise adolescents about gender. His oeuvre spans four decades and is massively voluminous even discounting his journalistic contributions. While I will try to avoid treating this dissertation as a

Festschrift to Madunagu, I will not hide my personal appreciation of many of his ideas. I also owe him much for offering me his invaluable help at the time when I started researching this topic. Bene Madunagu, Edwin's wife and a professor of Biology and a Marxian feminist argues for women's emancipation as part and parcel of a community based future in her works, some of which were published with Zed in London. Some other Marxists I deal with have been less heterodox. Tunji Otegbeye was a hero of the Marxian left in the 1960s and 1970s, especially as the general secretary of a Soviet-backed Marxist-Leninist party. Otegbeye wrote interesting autobiographies but he was not what one might call an independent Marxian thinker in terms of theory, so I decided not to discuss his contributions in chapters on Marxian thought. Reviled by the Trotskyites, Otegbeye loved ballroom dancing and street politics. After the fall of the USSR, he became a member of the Yoruba Council of Elders, a feudal institution – a curious move even in Nigeria. Mkwugo Okoye, a writer, was one of the most colourful characters in the Nigerian Marxist movement: liberation fighter and Zikist hero who knew the inside of jails, accused of plotting for political assassinations of British colonialists (of this there is no proof as I show), and an accomplished belletrist who wrote twenty books, eminently readable and very fashionable in his time, both in Nigeria and abroad. Almost forgotten abroad in 2014, Okoye was somewhat similar to one of his favourite light hearted essayists, the Chinese Lin Yu-tang. To his bad luck he was also a Marxist (albeit in a very broad sense) and that might have to do with the fact that the Nigerian *Oeffentlichkeit* excludes his texts from the Nigerian canon.

Completely non-sectarian, funny, witty, with a fantastic erudition (that he acquired without recourse to a university education), Okoye enchants the reader with his beautiful, Proustian sentences. Ikenna Nzimiro was a professional anthropologist who gave a meticulous analysis of how Igbo royal houses were run, when at Cambridge. An Igbo himself, he later participated in the Biafran war, on the side of Biafra, and was in charge of ideology and propaganda efforts to strengthen Ojukwu's secession. Nzimiro later broke the self imposed silence of the socialist left on the matter of Biafra, and wrote a peculiarly interesting book in which he argued that the Biafran conflict was primarily a class conflict, and not an ethnic one. Others, such as Ola Oni, Bade Onimode, Adebayo Olukoshi and Okwudiba Nnoli, were political economists with left leaning convictions, strongest in the case of the outright Marxist Oni and Onimode. Their doyen

was Eskor Toyo, a professor of economics in Calabar, educated in Poland and even published in Polish in Poland (!).⁹ Eskor Toyo was less of an Eastern European style grey ideological *apparatchik* than we would imagine based on his life story. He was nicknamed Mao Toyo by Niyi Oniororo, and had Maoist, as well as Trotskyite, leanings. Niyi Oniororo advocated for a radical foreign policy especially after Murtala Muhammad's assassination. Yusufu Bala Usman was a professional historian and an advisor to the People's Redemption Party, a Fulani aristocrat by birth but one who sided with the *talakawa* ('the common people' in Hausa) following a moral imperative. Bala Usman poured criticism on the modus operandi of the Nigerian elite, especially in how it abused religion and ethnicity. As such abuses provided the core of Nigeria's bloody conflicts and unending physical violence, the class that fuels them demands our close attention.

From an academic point of view, this dissertation grew out of the author's dissatisfaction with Hakeem Tijani's historical interpretation of Nigerian Marxism, where the latter treated the subject exclusively from the prism of the 1950s British anti-Communist official, internalizing *in toto* not only his class bias but also his lack of knowledge regarding what happened later. I felt that this was a bizarre standpoint, especially *ex post facto*, after we know that the Nigerian Marxism of the 1950s and 1960s, did not overthrow the existing colonial and neo-colonial arrangements; on the contrary. Again from an academic point of view, this research would have been impossible without Maxim Matusevich's results on Soviet-Nigerian relations, as represented both in his monograph on the subject and his *Russia in Africa*. Leo Zeilig's focus on African radical movements gave another scholarly impetus: I saw his works as a sign that African radical movements, after a hiatus of two decades, are now receiving attention again. The fact that compendiums on African political thought and philosophy completely omitted the subject just heightened my curiosity about the material.

At the same time, this dissertation intends to go beyond the specific interests of the academic historian. After living and teaching Politics for three years in North Eastern Nigeria, a region that now (in 2014) seems to have become a theatre of war, I felt it was imperative for me to search for answers to crucial causal questions. How could this happen in an OPEC

member state, a country blessed with so many natural resources, a country whose daughters become tiger moms in the United States, Black Africa's literary powerhouse? Why is Nigeria as it is? Generic answers such as tribalism, religious atavism and the like seem superficial.

Religious atavisms have to be re-created every day, they do not stay on through generations like some kind of psychic residue. The same is true for tribe, and even values rumoured to be essentially Nigerian (such as criminal schemata, hoarding, conspicuous consumption and the like). "Residue," and "culture," are empty concepts when it comes to explaining these behaviours; we are lucky when they do not serve as a cover for an author's subliminal racism.

As I had developed an interest prior to this research in some Marxist thinkers, especially Lukacs, it was interesting for me to look for Nigerian authors that made use of Marxian methods, in their attempts to make sense of the world that surrounded them. I looked into Nigerian Marxist authors, criss-crossed Nigeria and visited London a number of times, to get as many primary sources as I could. I present their lines of argument and what I consider their most interesting points and passages.

With this dissertation, I wanted to prove that Nigerian Marxism has been a coherent intellectual movement that provided important answers to the existential questions troubling Nigeria and West Africa, from the late 1940s up to this day. I also aim to prove that this movement had living, day-to-day labour union connections, and that in fact it largely grew out of a powerful labour movement in the country. Labour unionism has not forgotten its Marxian theoretical underpinnings even in the 21st century. Marxian critical theory has informed Nigerian feminism, and has provided one of the most important foundations for presenting a Nigerian political economy up to this day. I also posit that understanding Nigerian Marxism helps us in a major way to understand the structural problems of Nigeria and Africa.

I intended this dissertation to be first and foremost, a monograph on the history of ideas, and how those ideas interacted with reality in the form of uprisings, revolts, and military dictatorship. The dissertation sometimes takes on the form of a reader, with lots of long quotations. This was done on purpose as most of Nigerian Marxism's primary texts are virtually

inaccessible for the average reader; in the hope that in future, a more comprehensive reader will be put together.

This work does not engage in starry eyed prognosis about Nigeria's revolutionary potential. Indeed, as we can see with Boko Haram, the ugliest forms of resistance, full of nihilism and ignorance, are gaining ground at the moment in the country. In all earnestness, it would be wrong to rule out John Campbell's gloomy prediction of a morselisation of the Nigerian state. We may even go further: in Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, bizarre, murderous sects, witch hunts, Wahabi Islam and even crazier quasi-Islamist prophets may usher in a future where politics is defined by those forces. I say this with the very opposite of racist determinism. One has to keep in mind how according to Lukacs, witch hunts and an orgy of irrationalism accompanied in Europe not the Dark Ages but Kepler's own century, the days of the scientific revolution, when modernity was being born amidst a challenge to the high church.¹⁰ At the same time, it would be much better for Nigeria obviously, to skip those cataclysms. When I originally read John Campbell's assessment, claiming that Nigeria might well produce in future, a Fidel Castro, I immediately thought that the former US ambassador had intuited a very important point. (I say he had intuited, because his works never indicated any familiarity with the history of Nigerian Marxism, theoretical or otherwise. But intuitive as his statement was, it reinforced what scores of Nigerian Marxists had said before him.)

Prior to the 1980s, their message was usually that Nigeria should modernise in the Soviet/East European manner (Imoudu, Enahoro, Oni, Nzimiro, Okoye, Otegbeye, Onimode), or its modified version (Trotskyite for Edwin Madunagu, Maoist for Toyo, self-styled for Oniororo). Later, in the early eighties for Madunagu, and the early nineties for most others, a new focus developed, that of 'popular democracy.' We now see how this concept is linked with Chavezian populism, especially in the context of an oil dominated economy for Nigeria. In terms of the Eastern European example for a 'really existing socialism', most Nigerian thinkers advocate a complex attitude. Of course, we know how triumphant capitalism trampled over even the genuine achievements of Eastern Europe from 1989 onwards; totally neglecting the best aspects that those societies had to offer – and proving that way that the socialist castigation of

their Western democracy as class rule, as bourgeois democracy motivated by the interests of that class more than anything else, had been right all along. It is not *Ostalgie* that makes one think this way. Even the much dreaded regimentation of life, when paired as under Brezhnev with general negligence, did give shape to most people's existence, a step back from the abyss. Eastern Europe was a place where the communal ethos of pre-capitalist Europe thrived, with its leniency and humour. At the same time, it was also a place that created the KGB, Stasi and the Gulags. Hakeem Tijani was right when he called most early Nigerian Marxists Stalinists (albeit ones unaware of the magnitude of Stalin's crimes). For moral reasons (Madunagu, Osoba) or for technical ones (Onimode, Nnoli, Olukoshi), the Stalinist model lost its appeal for Nigerian Marxists by the 1990s. Indeed, orthodox Marxism-Leninism, with its denial of individual human rights, seems to have lost most of its appeal to Nigerian intellectuals who were, under military dictatorship, persecuted on a personal basis in the 1990s. This opened up a venue for Gramscian, Trotskyite and other heterodox ideas to flourish in the context of Nigerian academia, small Communist parties, and the Nigeria Labour Congress.

Marxist thought did not disappear from Nigeria in 1989. It has been providing the single most important alternative narrative to Nigerian history and (the lack of) development in the country. When I call it a narrative, I do that quite literally. Marxism has shaped the literary oeuvre of not only Ifeoma Okoye, Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Gambo Sawamba, and the Marxist feminist poet and writer Ogundipe-Leslie, but also shaped in a major way the novels of Festus Iyayi (his *Violence* was hailed as the first proletarian novel in Nigeria), and authors like Chinua Achebe in a non-doctrinaire way. When taken generally, this dissertation presents a prosopography of thinkers, first or second generation literates who conquered heights of literary and philosophical achievement, some middle class people themselves, but ones that recognised the traumatic limitations of middle class existence in a neo-colonial society. Their thoughts have shaped the course of Nigerian history, but equally importantly, have shaped its potentialities for Nigeria's future. Even as there appeared an absentee ruling class, and a general false consciousness that is aggressively promoted in Nigeria, creating a sense of a carnival of capitalism, a carnival of criminality.

Neither did Nigerian Marxism lose all relevance even upon deindustrialisation. There are still five million workers in the country,¹¹ and the NLC claims there are one million unionised workers (Usman Tar puts their number at even four million). This is only the classical core of the working class, which is subject to constant erosion. Leo Zeilig explains how a lumpenised urban mass in the context of de-industrialization still does not mark the end of labour resistance in Africa:

“to see ... instances of protest as simply spontaneous explosions of a slum dwelling multitude is nonsense. More often they are organized or semi-organized expressions of political dissidence...”¹² With engaging clarity, Zeilig, in discourse with Mike Davis and his *Planet of Slums*, presents us with a gripping explanation.

“Davis is, we would argue, right about the culprits of the recent devastation of the potential for genuine development on the continent, but wrong about the working class and the significance of popular protest. Actual class reconfiguration, and how it has manifested itself in the “myriad acts of resistance” in the South, does not, we believe, suggest a working class entirely dislodged from its “historical agency.” There has, of course, been a long - and often sceptical – academic debate about the nature, and even existence, of an African working class. (...) Writers doubted whether bonds of solidarity and consciousness were strong enough for a “real” working class to bring about social transformation, and suggested that the so-called working class was in any case excluded from other groups in society as “an aristocracy of labour.” It is undoubtedly true that the formation of the working class has been characterized by a complex and often heterogeneous process of “proletarianization” in most parts of Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth century – from migrant labour in the mines in Southern Africa from the 1900s to labour in oil extraction and processing in the Niger delta from the 1970s. Davis’s vision of “desperate millenarianism” can be situated within the considerable body of literature questioning the capacity of a Third World or African working class to play its “historical role.” For Davis, if this class existed, it did so in the past, but now, under the impact of neoliberalism, it has again been recast into a hybrid slum dweller, a

lumpen proletariat, unable to lead new progressive social movements on the continent. We disagree.”¹³

And then Zeilig brings into the discussion the concrete example of Soweto in South Africa:

“There seem at this point to be no surprises. The statistics do not challenge the argument that the effects of mass unemployment – typical of the deindustrialised urban life in the South – have created a new class of the wageless poor, excluded from the world of work. The working class seems now, by implication, a tiny and privileged group, many of whom live outside the township slum and have interests separate from the majority of the urban poor. However, a closer look at the statistics reveals something quite different. If we examine the household, we can see extraordinary mixing of the different and seemingly divided groups of the poor. (...) There is no “wall of China” between work and unemployment.¹⁴ (...) This does not imply that the effects of unemployment have not had a devastating effect on the poor. (...) But this has important consequences for the character and pattern of social unrest. If there is no clear divide in the world of unemployment and formal employment, then the potential for a similar crossover exists as regards popular protest and social dissidence.”¹⁵

We could extrapolate on Zeilig’s important point by bringing to the table the revolutionary potentialities of say, Europe’s young “precariate.” But for Africa and Nigeria, this discussion is relevant in many ways that would be alien even to the most precarious of European semi-employed existence. It is the fact that in a place like Nigeria, literally tens of people may depend on, and their views may be influenced by, one single worker. A worker in full employment in Nigeria may contribute to the livelihoods of as many as twenty different people, in part or in full. A domestic worker, whose occupation is outside the confines of the national minimum wage (so much so that many of them earn a quarter of that minimum wage) support spouses, children, aging parents, siblings, and friends on their meagre incomes that hover around \$40. An industrial worker at a company will usually earn the national minimum wage or beyond, but he will be expected to share his income with every hungry elder, woman,

man, and child in his compound that may house forty-fifty people, amongst whom say, two to three have formal employment. The world views of these semi-dependent unemployed people will be heavily influenced and often even shaped in a major way, by their employed brethren in a still semi-traditional society. Five million workers in formal employment, many of which are obviously, left wing when it comes to their political leanings, means fifty, or even one hundred million people who do hear of labour unrests, resistance, and organised struggle.

What I would thus add to Zeilig's findings, based on the evidence presented in this book is this: Not only there is an African proletariat or a Nigerian proletariat, not only there is organised workers' resistance in the country and the continent, but this African proletariat can represent itself in articulate ways that are armed with their own African and Marxist, theory.

In the best of cases, people eventually may even launch not only a Castro style "dictatorship of the proletariat" but genuine popular participatory democracy, where workers would have a role in governing not only via some "vanguard bureaucracy" but they would have control of their workplaces.

Today, many of the preconditions for the appearance of Nigerian Marxism are gone, most especially the USSR and its camp. Irrespective of this, some findings remained relevant: first, the centrality of class in social, political and economic enquiry. The centrality of the international nexus and embedded nature of Nigeria's political economy is the second lasting discovery. Eskor Toyo has been proven blatantly wrong when he asserted that dependency theory had overemphasized this nexus. It defines and underdevelops Nigeria every day, to extents unimaginable to Toyo earlier. Another lasting feature is the obvious interconnectedness of patriarchal domination with colonial and neo-colonial forms of exploitation: a point that Bene Madunagu and Ogundipe-Leslie predictably emphasized but that self-declared non-Marxists and even more traditional feminist thinkers could not escape in their analysis. Another core finding relates to the respective roles of the industrial proletariat, the peasantry and the students. Unionised workers are still at the heart of the resistance (as Zeilig proves) but misgivings about the students' role (especially Madunagu's) also proved too pessimistic, as students have consistently been at the forefront of class struggle in the country, along with

(according to Toyo's and Madunagu's predictions) the anti-feudal Northern peasantry that gives Nigeria its oldest existing political party, the PRP. Marxism has been a subculture with its distinct accoutrements like walking sticks, working men's khaftans and shabby Lenin-beards. But it has also been a chief analytical framework and an instrument of African self-assertion vis-a-vis the metropole and internationally. It has been the very antithesis of the bourgeoisie under primary accumulation, a class in the making (Sklar), vulgar and partly (more and more) absentee in its actual lifestyle, as their extended families move to London to enjoy better the fruits of the loot in the home country. Diametrically different, Nigerian Marxists often consciously chose to remain in their country of birth out of a sense of duty, cultural relevance, and a sense of mission. This counterculture cross-referenced and cross-pollinated each other's thinking not only in the obvious cases when the Madunagus both emphasized Trotskyite concepts in their different intellectual pursuits, but how they themselves, or Eskor Toyo, or Bade Onimode, or Mokwugo Okoye figures in every other leftist author's oeuvre, displaying a kaleidoscopic richness of ideas. Their scholarship has not only been noticed by non-Marxian scholarship, but by the people at large.

My work purposely avoided adding an extra layer to this complexity. I did not engage in independent Marxian theorisation or theorising over the historical material, and not because I do not have theoretical frameworks in mind but because the primary objective of this work was the unearthing and analysis, of the ideas that Nigerian Marxists themselves, have put forth. The most I hope for is that this work has proven Nigerian Marxists to more qualitatively different from the bunch of ridiculous, esoteric dead men that they are sometimes portrayed – these women and men are alive, and they are worthy of our interest.

¹ Sarah Riva: "Desegregating Downtown Little Rock: The Field Reports of SNCC's Bill Hansen, October 23 to December 3, 1962," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 3, available at <http://www.questia.com/library/journal/1P3-2821262761/desegregating-downtown-little-rock-the-field-reports>, Date of access 12.09.2014

² *Workers' Alternative – For the Unity of the Working Class, a Labour Party and Socialism* (based in Lagos, not dated, no details given (perhaps due to semi-legal status) On-line access: <http://www.workersalternative.com/>. Date of access 12.01.2014

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