

Opinion

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For the Nigerian Left: Facing 2022

By Edwin Madunagu

MY difficulties in this discussion began with how to construct a title for it. I could break down what I wanted to say into bits of statements and questions. But I could not agree with myself on how to craft a befitting title for the discussion, even a provisional one, in the manner of many writers. Before finally adopting the title that now appears I had serially considered several alternatives. One of the earliest, the one I loved most, was "Marxism in our time", which simply lifts the title of Leon Trotsky's essay written in Mexico in 1939, but titled and published posthumously in 1970. Thereafter I had asked myself: Should Trotsky be rather adapted or modified to read: "Marxism in our time, in our land"? Or, should it be "The universe of Marxism and Marxists, through history", partly adapting the title of Sina Kawonise's 2014 collection of essays?

Or, indeed, should the title of what I wanted to say be a long one, in the manner of the columns of Comrade Biodun Jeyifo (BJ) in Nigeria's *The Nation on Sunday* (and earlier, in *The Guardian on Sunday*)? That adaptation would then have led me to: "Critical and heuristic questions on theory and use of Marxism for Marxists, in our time, in our

land". In this title, as in BJ's column, each word or phrase is a definitive aspect of the discussion and makes a definitive contribution to it. Eventually I returned to my earliest, even unlisted title, as I often do, without repudiating any of the latter alternatives. I do request readers to bear this in mind as they go through this fragmentary piece.

It is almost certain that at least one fairly large Left party or "Left-leaning" party will emerge as a contestant for power or office in the 2023 general election in Nigeria. It is also clear that even without this emergence or early emergence, popular-democratic struggles, organized and spontaneous, planned and unplanned (against mass poverty, impoverishment, immiseration, "insecurity", corruption and neofascist dictatorship) will intensify and expand in the period leading up to the election, and beyond. The main task of the Nigerian Left and Nigerian Leftists in this period is therefore "cut out for them", as the saying goes. That task is to actively "guide" this trend as responsibly as possible, mitigating negative effects and consequences of possible errors and, of course, preventing foreseeable ones.

Beyond all the above, but equally as important: I would propose that by the end of 2022, the Nigerian Left would have established a

functional National Consultative and Coordinating Centre (NCCC) to assume the functions that the name suggests including the publication of a periodic newsletter. I know that there exists, or can be found within the movement, at least one or a small group of Leftists that can volunteer to pay the rent and underwrite the cost of running the Centre for the first five years. The history of the Nigerian Left has taught us all that in matters like this, individual small monetary donations and pledges can play only a small material part beyond the moral, the ideological and the symbolic.

Among the possible "byproducts" of this broad projection, if nurtured by older Leftists, especially Marxists, will be the emergence of a much needed People's Manifesto for the Nigerian Left or a clear qualitative advance to its emergence; and the engagement in dialogue of segments of the Nigerian Left who have been alienated by their "unpopular" or "minority" positions on several strategic and tactical issues, including the question of electoral strategy and the issue of "national unity". A "byproduct" is used here to deliberately designate its ordinary meaning, that is, "a secondary and sometimes unexpected consequence" or "a product made during the manufacture of

something else". It is on the last listed possible "byproduct" that we shall now focus in the remaining part of this piece. I preface this with the affirmation that the question of "national unity" has been central in the agenda of the Nigerian Left right from its birth several decades ago.

Some weeks ago, on Sunday, December 5, 2021, I called up a younger comrade of mine to re-state a conclusion to our discussion of the day before. Since the telephone line was unclear that previous day I was not sure that he properly understood me. The discussion was on "national unity" and the attitude of the Nigerian Left to it. That conclusion which I thought needed a re-statement may be framed like this: I find it difficult, as a revolutionary Marxist and as a Nigerian, influenced by Samir Amin's youthful but highly heuristic description of Marxism as "the social science of revolutionary socialist praxis" to break with a Nigerian Marxist comrade solely on the ground that she or he is a secessionist agitator — if she or he had not taken up arms. The situation, of course, changes if she or he becomes involved, at any level, in an armed struggle, that pinnacle of Marxist revolutionary politics. That changed situation is outside the scope of the present article. To be continued tomorrow

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For the Nigerian Left: Facing 2022 (2)

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Continued from yesterday

THE reason for the first part of the position stated above — the part of not breaking with a Nigerian Marxist comrade solely on the ground of being a supporter of secession — is simple and straight forward: The Nigerian Marxist Left, including the tendency to which I belong, has not articulated or adopted a categorical position, ideological or political, on what Marxism designates as “the national question”, that issue dramatized in a bitter, but enlightening debate between Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Lenin over a century ago and which has littered the history of Marxist and non-Marxist revolutions ever since. The issue is prominent in the relationships between Marxists in the countries they have either led or in which they are in contention for power, and between states that are led by Marxists.

A clear position ought to have emerged on the twin-questions of “national question” and the question of “national unity” in a Manifesto of a substantial Marxist formation or Marxist-influenced Left formation since the end of the Civil War in Nigeria more than 50 years ago. But unfortunately, it has not. Once such a clear position emerges it becomes binding. Why? Because a Left movement seriously fighting for power must have clear positions on such strategic issues.

A clarification: The point about not breaking with a secessionist, but non-arms-bearing comrade will require a re-consideration if, in arguing for a “break-up”, the comrade also argues, directly or indirectly, for a revision of a foundational pillar of Marxism, such as “anti-capitalism” and “anti-

imperialism” or “class struggle” being the “motive force of history” or the strategic and vanguard role of the working class in the struggle for, and construction of socialism. These are “red lines”, comparable, in a sense, for Christians and Christianity, to the belief in Christ’s death and resurrection.

A global or universal statement of the ideological and political principle articulated above can be attempted. And my attempt is this: I would not argue against a Marxist’s continued claim to be a Marxist solely on the ground that she or he argues for, or supports the “breakup” of her or his “homeland”. Again this position will call for a review if in the course of this argument this Marxist calls for a revision of a foundational pillar of Marxism, as illustrated above.

The reason for the first part of my position — the part of not breaking with a non-Nigerian Marxist comrade on the sole ground of supporting the breakup of a “homeland” — is two-fold: First, historically, for Marxists, in Nigeria and abroad what is called the national question has not been “settled” in the manner of Marxism, that is, settled by history itself. Second, for many Marxists, there is embedded in the national question what is known as “national oppression”. This, for them, exists side-by-side with class oppression. And, also for many of them, including those in Nigeria, “national oppression” is not “inferior” or “subordinate” to class oppression.

In fact in a given historical context, they argue, “national oppression” can become a “dominant” contradiction, though — many of them concede — never a “determinant” one.

Nothing in what I have said in these study notes so far will

derogate from the fact that I, myself, have a clear ideological and political position on the national question in general and the question of Nigeria’s unity in particular. And that position, which I canvass, may be stated, in part, as the struggle for: national unity within the struggle for workers power, popular democracy and socialism. I must humbly admit, however, that this position is a “reduced version” of a complete statement on the national question. A complete statement must await the resolution of the National Question by Marxism globally, because it is a global question. In a lighter mood, we may recall Fermat’s Last Theorem in Number Theory which waited for almost 400 years before a globally acceptable proof emerged only recently!

Two final propositions may be used to summarise and conclude the latter segments of these study notes: **One:** Although we may speak of fixed pillars for Marxism, history has shown that the universe of Marxist politics or politics informed or inspired by Marxism is very wide and complex. **Two:** The Nigerian Left or a substantial Left political formation when it emerges — I hope very soon — should begin to engage secessionist but non-arms-carrying and non-revisionist Marxist comrades from different regions of the country in sustained debates on “Marxism, history and politics.” In these debates, conducted and engaged as Marxists and as comrades, we shall propose that only socialism, guided by revolutionary Marxism, as Science and Ideology, that can finally eliminate the National Question — not only its capitalist forms, but down to its historical roots. Politically we shall propose, for this task, a united revolutionary Marxist force in a united country.

Concluded