

Independence - the grand metanarratives of liberation and/or the micro-narratives of dignity and survival?

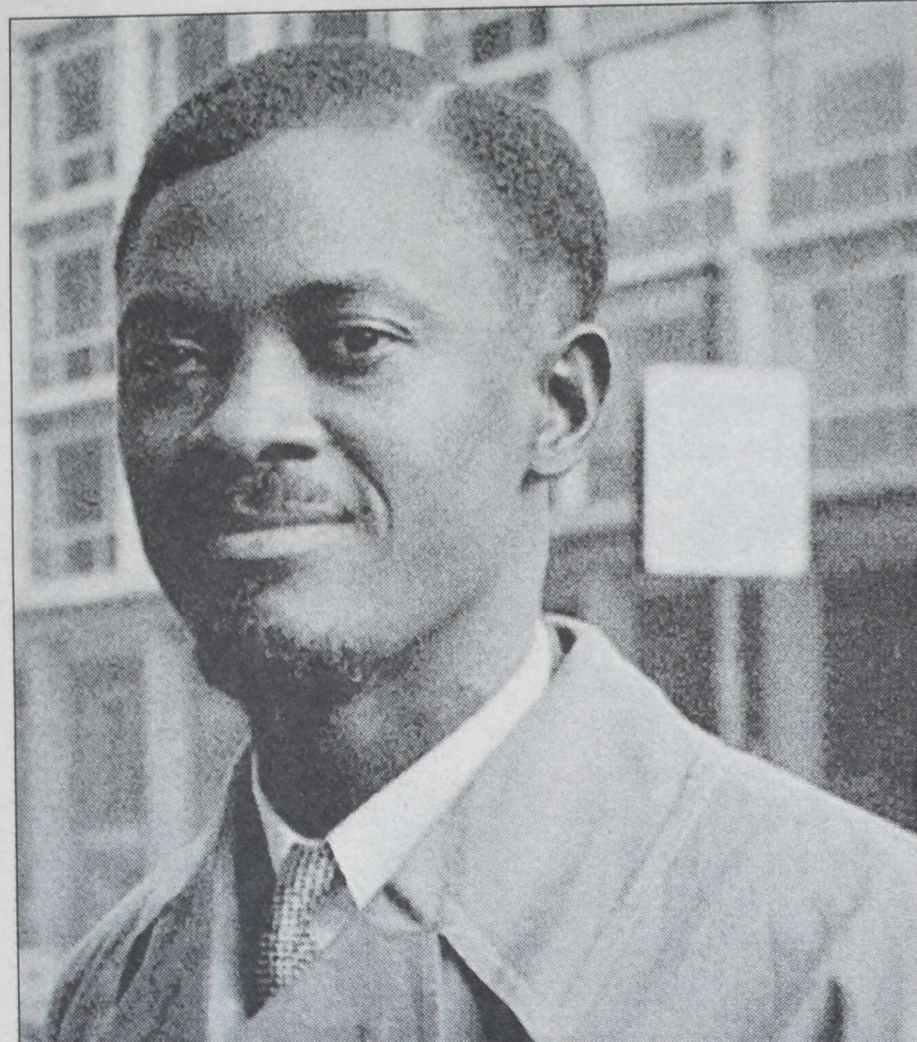
We are going, heavens know where we are going / We know we are going / We will get there, heavens know how we will get there / We know we will!
Osibisa, "Woyaya" (1971)

IN 1984, I made my first and only visit to Russia, then still the heartland of the Soviet Union. After my two-year tenure as National President of ASUU, I had become the Immediate Past President (IPP) of the Union and a continuing member of the National Executive Committee. Which was why, when an invitation came from the Educational and Scientific Workers' Union (ESWU) of the Soviet Union to Dr. Mahmud Tukur who succeeded me as ASUU President to visit the Soviet Union and he couldn't honor the invitation, our Union asked me to go to Russia in his place.

The visit lasted about two weeks, travelling time included. Everywhere I went where I had to make speeches on behalf of ASUU, I brought greetings not only from ASUU itself, but also from the NLC and all the workers' and trade unions in Nigeria. At this time, ASUU was not yet an affiliate member of the NLC - that would come two years later - but that didn't stop me from bringing greetings from all the working people of Nigeria and expressing solidarity with all the workers, manual and intellectual, of the Soviet Union. As a matter of fact, in all my speeches, I also included all the workers and farmers of Africa, indeed all African peoples on behalf of whom I presumed to speak, even though I was just the IPP of ASUU. This account may surprise readers of the younger generations, but older compatriots reading this piece will, I hope, easily remember the discursive and ideological context I am invoking here. What was this context? It was, simply, the fact, the practice of speaking about the independence and liberation of every and all African countries, together with their workers and peoples, as a connected, indivisible historical and political project. This practice, this context is what, in the title of this piece, I am calling the grand metanarrative of liberation.

I recognize that to many readers of this piece, "grand metanarrative of liberation" may sound like Big English, like jargon from Dogon Turenchi. But that is not the case at all! Throughout all the years and decades of my primary and secondary school education, there were expressions and manifestations of this grand metanarrative of liberation at every level and in all the expressions of popular culture in Nigeria. And from what we could garner from news reporting, this was true of all the African countries. Here are some examples. In the Onitsha Market Literature pamphlets written by and for consumption by modestly educated people, the heroes of African independence struggle of the 1940s and 1950s constituted favorite protagonists of many titles - Zik of Africa; Patrice Lumumba; Kwame Nkrumah; Jomo Kenyatta ("Burning Spear"); Awo; Albert Luthuli. Similarly, many Highlife recordings, of Yoruba "Juju" and "Apala" music sang in praise of the exploits of these leaders of our liberation struggles.

It is impossible to overstate the scope of this phenomenon. Everywhere you went in West Africa at the time, you saw uncountable



• Patrice Lumumba

paintings and sketches of these figures in the colorful, romantic and "naïve" style that would become the hallmark of the genre or tradition of the pop and tourist art of Africa. In all of them, the driving idea, the constant and underlying narrative is that the independence, progress and development of all African countries and peoples are, for better or worse, linked. That is the essence of what I am calling the grand metanarrative of liberation in this essay. Although in all my expressions of this idea in my trip to the Soviet Union in 1984 I had in mind revolutionary theory and practice, especially in the Pan African and Marxist intellectual and ideological traditions, I am sure that somewhere at the back of my mind were all the Onitsha Market pamphlets, the street art, the musical compositions I had read, seen and heard on the same themes. To this very day, I distinctly remember the words, instrumentation and orchestration of the late I.K. Dairo's tuneful, elegiac composition on the murder of Patrice Lumumba, a composition which, by the way, was one of Dairo's greatest hits.

It is perhaps instructive to reflect briefly on the prefix, "meta" in the word metanarrative. From classical Greek, the term means "after" or "beyond". In its English usage in such terms as our metanarrative or others like meta-psychology, metaphysics and meta-theatre, it connotes an abstraction that is added to a phenomenon, a discipline or practice to broaden, complete or add meaning to it. Thus, in our term,

metanarrative, what we have is an expansion or transformation of narrative in order to add meaning and wider application to it. In plain language, this means a mega narrative that enfolds other narratives into itself, a story that is widely dispersed over wide spaces and contexts. Thus, in metanarrative, even if you are telling one particular story, at the back of your mind is the awareness that the story you are telling is one story among many other similar or related stories.

This is why narratives of the heroes, heroines and struggles of African independence and unity were all deemed to be aspects of the same mega or metanarrative. The stories of the lives of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, of Margaret Ekpo, of Gambo Sawaba and Miriam Makeba were all deemed to be part of a grand, metanarrative as were the stories of the heroic sacrifices in the lives of Amilcar Cabral, Thomas Sankara, Steve Boko, Ken Saro-Wiwa and Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. And just to show how wide and far-reaching these metanarratives can be, when revolutionaries and activists in Nigeria and African think of these heroic sacrifices on our own continent, they typically link them to stories of figures from other continents like Leon Trotsky, Che Guevara, Martin Luther King, George Jackson and Subhas Chandra Bose, founder and leader of the anti-colonial Indian National Army.

But why have I dwelt so long in this discussion on this idea of a grand, totalizing metanarrative of

liberation that was at the base of all the speeches that I made on that visit to the Soviet Union in 1984? Well, don't be surprised to discover that the answer to this question is quite simple and uncomplicated: in all the email messages of ceremonial greetings that I received this past week to mark the 58th anniversary of Nigeria's independence, there was not the slightest hint of the link between our independence, progress and development - or lack thereof - and that of Africa and the rest of the developing world. In the main, this is true of nearly all the articles and commentaries that I read in the newspapers, most of them rightly bemoaning the disappointments, the tragedies and the insecurities haunting our country nearly six decades after independence. In other words, it seems that the great Pan African metanarrative that we used to read about in some pamphlets of the Onitsha Market literature, in popular music and pop art, in murals and newspaper headlines are gone, completely gone out of the unfolding narrative(s) of our country's present and future appointment with history.

Writing now as a professional cultural theorist and critic, let me quickly say that it is not exactly true that Pan African metanarratives of liberation have completely gone out of currency or circulation in contemporary African art and culture. For instance, in contemporary works of fiction and poetry of the younger generation, we still find expressions of concerns and sensibilities of a collective African presence in the world, if not in the terms or accents in which, more than a half century ago, such concerns were expressed in the works of, say, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka or J. P. Clark. Also, these grand metanarratives are still there in Afropop world music in which figures like Fela and Hugh Masekela continue to be huge influences. And they can be found, too, in the movement of art, sculpture, architecture and design known as Afrofuturism in which, as a matter of fact, the metanarratives reach out far into the global African diaspora.

But that is not the end of the story. This is because having duly noted all these vestigial remnants of Pan African metanarratives in the present period, it is indisputable that in comparison with the decades leading to the independence struggles of the 1940s and 1950s and the first three decades of the post-independence era, there is now a profound wariness about those inherited and cherished metanarratives of our common destiny as Africans and Black people. Indeed, beyond this, something else, something I am, for want of a better term, calling micro-narratives of survival and dignity have taken pride of place to displace the authority and appeal that Pan Africanism and the universal solidarity of all oppressed regions, na-

tions and peoples used to have. What exactly does this term, micro-narratives of survival and dignity, mean?

Here, it becomes pertinent for me to reveal why I began this piece with an account of my visit to the Soviet Union in 1984. At that time, the breakup of the Soviet Union in December 1991 was still seven years away and was barely perceptible as a looming, historic eventuality. In history, ideology and idealism, the Soviet Union was quite easily the best instantiation of a grand, totalizing metanarrative. Close to its end, it had about 15 Republics or "Soviets" and more than 100 nationalities. And it was spread across two continents, Europe and Asia, with hundreds of ethnicities and clan groups speaking languages that belonged to at least two or three mutually unintelligible language families. Since its demise, both informed and uninformed ideologues of Western capitalism have identified a combination of Greater Russian hegemony and Communist dictatorship as the glue that held this vast exemplar of a grand metanarrative together. And according to these ideologues, once the glue melted, everything melted with it and the Soviet Union descended into one of the most astonishing cycles of dissolution of political unions in modern history. First the Soviet Republics separated; then the nationalities; then the ethnic-nations; then the clan groups, some of them within the same nation. And at every level, micro-narratives of dignity and survival arose to completely displace the old grand metanarrative that had been deployed to hold the Soviet Union together.

Of course, in size, population and ideology, Nigeria has never remotely approached the defunct Soviet Union in bringing its multiple and diverse ethnic nationalities and peoples together by a grand metanarrative of liberation. But this is to misunderstand the essential point that I am making here. What is this point? This is it: we do not need a vast political union like the old Soviet Union, China, India or the United States to argue for the necessity of grand metanarratives of liberation. At the broadest possible level, we all live on the same planet that happens to be the only planet in the universe, as far as we know, on which we can survive as a species. Indeed, to the extent that we all live on a planet that is in perpetual and everlasting orbit in space, we are all space voyagers and need one another to survive. This, at the end of the line, is the fundamental basis of the grand, totalizing metanarratives of all human liberation.

But what of the micro-narratives of survival and dignity for all the nations, ethnic and clan groups in the world? What of the fact that they are now rampant, not only in the successor nations of the Soviet Union but in nearly all the regions of the world? And Nigeria, why do musicians no longer sing of continental heroes of the struggles of Africa? Why is a Pan Nigeria metanarrative, not to talk of a Pan African one, so widely held in suspicion now? These questions will serve as a composite point of departure for next week's concluding essay in the series.

Biodun Jeyifo
bjeyifo@fas.harvard.edu

(292)

Talakawa Liberation Herald
BIODUN JEYIFO

Independence - the grand metanarratives of liberation and/or the micro-narratives of dignity and survival? (3)

IT is perhaps necessary in this concluding piece in the series that began two weeks ago in this column to start with the observation that even though the voices and forces of, on the one hand, restructuring and, on the other hand, anti-restructuring have dominated political discourses in our country in the last two or three decades, the real fault lines lie elsewhere and not in this particular opposition. In other words, I am suggesting that beyond and perhaps also above the opposition between federalists and anti-federalists, there are deeper, indeed more fundamental oppositions and contradictions in the role that metanarratives and micronarratives play in the constitution and the continuation of our country as a national political community. Please take note, dear reader, that I am talking specifically here of narratives - meta or micro - that are both told and untold on either side of the divide between federalists and anti-federalists.

In order to make a brief elaboration of this observation, permit me to quickly draw attention to one untold narrative before spending more time on the narratives that are regularly told and peddled, justifiably but also endlessly. What is this untold story or narrative? It is the terrible story of the conflict between justice and injustice in every part, every inch of the country, absolutely without any exception. Everywhere in the country, among and within all the ethnic, religious and regional-zonal communities of the land, this narrative exists anywhere and everywhere that one chooses to look, hear and listen. It is a quality of life narrative and also a narrative of bare existence itself; it is a human rights story and a socio-economic justice narrative. Of course, it is not the case that it is a forgotten or ignored story; rather, what I am arguing is the fact that it is a story that is set apart and bracketed in the controversies between the federalists and the anti-federalists, almost without any exceptions.

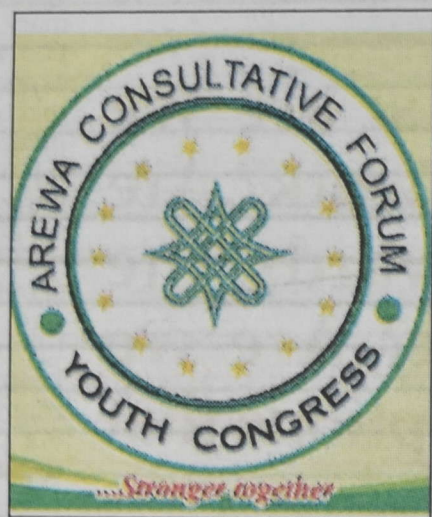
Readers of this piece familiar with Marxist revolutionary thought and history might perhaps see in what I am arguing here a recycling of the old, so-called contradiction between the class question and the national question. I admit that this is not incorrect. However, beyond an impulse to revisit this old Marxian dialectic of class and nation, I am in this concluding piece to the series drawing attention to what strikes me as almost a Nigerian exceptionalism in the contemporary global rise and spread of ethno-nationalism. Let me put this observation or claim across as simply and directly as possible: in most of the other parts of the contemporary world, those who lead the ethno-national movements or struggles, whether separatist or only devolutionary, are not those who have robbed and looted their own peoples; rather, it is for the most part those who have consistently opposed the oppression and suffering of their peoples that lead the movements. Yes, wealthy ethno-nationalists who made their wealth through heartless looting and cheating often bankroll many of the ethno-national movements of the contemporary world, but it is rare for them to be the leading voices and figures in such struggle and movements - of course Nigeria excepted!



(294)

Talakawa Liberation Herald

BIODUN JEYIFO



•Arewa Consultative Forum



•Ohaneze Ndigbo



•Yoruba Council of Elders

In order not to be accused of distorting the actual facts of the opposition between the fervent proponents of restructuring and federalism and the diehard apologists of the hegemonic, business-as-usual anti-federalism in power in the country at the present moment in history, I should perhaps specify here that I am making a distinction between the intellectuals and the politicians on both sides of the divide between federalists and anti-federalists. What do I mean by this distinction? Well, take this newspaper, *The Nation*, as an instructive case. Together with *The Punch*, this newspaper arguably has the most articulate and persuasive phalanx of proponents of federalism and restructuring among the news and information media in the country. Now, none of them can be accused of being unaware of the fact that the two leading ruling class political parties, the APC and the PDP, are totally dominated by wealthy men and women whose sources of enrichment are not in industry, not in manufacturing, not in inventions and innovations and not even in venture capitalism, but in naked and relentless looting of the wealth and resources of the nation. But all the same, for the most part, these intellectual warriors of federalism look to reformists and strongmen in either of these two parties - but mostly in the APC - for leadership of the federalist, restructuring projects. Or, failing that, they have not looked elsewhere - for instance, among the masses themselves - for leaders of clean, robust and mature movements of devolution. This observation brings me to a crucial point in the ongoing discussion.

Permit me to state the point with as much clarity as I can muster since its significance for present and future developments in the durability of political community in our country cannot be overstated. And so, very simply, I say that the case for federalism, for restructuring and devolution has been powerfully and persuasively made in

Nigeria in at least the last decade and half - perhaps even longer than that. That being the case, we need to pay attention to how this significant development came to be. The conventional wisdom would give the tireless official and non-official debates that have taken place in the country - at national conferences, in seminars and public lectures and in newspaper advertorials, reports and columns - as the source of this triumph of the case for federalism and restructuring in our country. But this completely ignores the fact that the cause or project of federalism or restructuring is yet to achieve the status of a project or movement involving the masses of Nigerians in their millions, in their tens of millions. I make this assertion in light of the documented fact that in many other parts of the contemporary world, ethno-national and religious communities demanding true federalism or devolution are, typically, mass movements, i.e. movements in which the masses are actually matching and demonstrating with their feet, with their hearts and with their minds. But not in Nigeria.

I take a pause in my feelings, my ruminations on this matter. Ethno-national narratives are rife in our country. There are well-known stories of long held dreams of perpetual domination of all other groups in Nigeria by the Fulani or the Hausa-Fulani. There are narratives of the plight of the ethnonational groups of the South-south, in particular those in the Niger Delta. The narratives of the exclusion of Igbos, after the alleged failure of the project to exterminate them during the civil war, are known to every literate, adult Nigerian, Igbo and Non-Igbo. In the Southwest, quite possibly the ideological and intellectual powerhouse of the case for federalism and restructuring in the country today, there are innumerable stories being openly told of divide-and-conquer projects from the "North", with "traitors" and "op-

portunists" on one side and "defenders" and "saviors" on the opposing side. Also well-known are the stories of the past and present travails of the peoples of the North-central region of the country, especially of the Benue and Plateau States, on both religious and minority-status grounds. Indeed, in the wake of the repeated cycles of savage killings associated with unchecked, rampaging herdsmen, these narratives from the Middle Belt region of the country have become the core of the case for the prevalence and "authority" of ethno-nationalism in our country at the present time. I think about all these narratives and I ask: why are there no mass protests and demonstrations for federalism and restructuring in Nigeria? I ask further: the stories are there, the mass feelings and sentiments subtending them are there, but where are the mass protests and demonstrations, the likes of which we routinely find in many other ethnonational movements in the world?

I would be lying if I said that I know or have the answer to these questions. I am not entirely clueless about probable answers, but I think it is meet and proper for me to admit that what I have in lieu of definite answers are hunches, educated guesswork. Here is one hunch, the one about which I spend most of my waking hours worrying about the most: all over the country, in every ethnonational and regional community, the masses of ordinary people are too preoccupied by the challenges of surviving with the minimum of material and psychological resources they can muster for them to march and protest about the narratives of exclusion, marginalization or domination they are told and themselves talk so much about. I think also of the Yoruba adage which, roughly translated, states that when hunger takes residence inside the stomach, there is no room for any other thing to enter therein. And please note that Nigeria is not noted for

hunger demonstrations and marches either. Finally, I think: yes, the masses everywhere are not marching and protesting about the ethnonational narratives of domination they are so much obsessed by and that's probably a good thing for Nigeria in the short run, but in the long run, it will all explode one day, in what ways and with what effects, no one can tell.

On the grounds of the global balance of forces and the world-historical process, everything that I have talked about in this series has happened or is happening in the age of a fully globalized neoliberal capitalism. Here are the few important things to keep in mind about this phrase which, to many right-wing or even independent readers, sounds like jargon, a Marxist jargon, if you please. Perhaps the most important thing of all to know and keep in mind about neoliberal capitalism everywhere is determination to keep regulations in check, to the barest minimum possible. There was an earlier phase of capitalism known as laissez faire capitalism which also tried to keep regulation within and between countries minimal, but it did not achieve success anywhere close to neoliberalism. That is because under laissez faire capitalism, it was still possible to distinguish between foreign and domestic capital, with a view to protecting domestic capital from the more powerful and rapacious foreign capital. But that is no longer deemed particularly necessary as all the financial services industries of the world are now very closely integrated and the billionaires of the world really have no country, so to speak.

To deregulation must be added privatization, on a monumental scale, of public wealth, resources and assets as the second important thing to keep in mind about neoliberalism. There is talk of PPP, public-private-partnership, but na lie! In many places throughout the world, where the "public" should be in the so-called PPP talisman, there is only "property" which gives us "private-property-partnership": it is the same groups or classes of people who sell off public properties and assets that buy them. Only in a few places in the world has PPP worked to the betterment of public good and in those places, the difference has always come from how mobilized the public, the people are to protect and defend their interests. This leads us to the final or closing arguments in this series.

Neoliberalism has generated untold wealth in the world, probably on a scale that was thought impossible in all previous stages of economic growth in human history. But so also has it produced a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots, this in the very face of wealth production on a monumental scale. This, in turn, has turned many communities in the world against globalization. Hence the rise of nationalism and ethnonationalism in virtually all the regions of the world. The question is: when will the project of federalism and restructuring in Nigeria be informed by these worldwide currents?

Independence - the grand metanarratives of liberation and/or the micro-narratives of dignity and survival? (2)

We are the stories that we tell ourselves
Shekhar Kapur, Bollywood/Hollywood
Director

Oro o dun l'enu ole [The word of a confirmed rogue carries no weight]
A Yoruba saying

As a sort of recapitulation, here are the questions with which I concluded last week's piece in this column: "But what of the micro-narratives of survival and dignity for all the nations, ethnic and clan groups in the world? What of the fact that they are now rampant, not only in the successor nations of the Soviet Union but in nearly all the regions of the world? And Nigeria, why do musicians no longer sing of continental heroes of the struggles of Africa? Why is a Pan Nigeria metanarrative, not to talk of a Pan African one, so widely held in suspicion now?"

On the surface, the answer to these questions is quite simple: in our continent today, very few are the political and civic leaders who can speak in terms of the struggles of all the African peoples and be believed, not to talk of being followed. African leaders still talk of the continent as a whole, but only in terms of cooperation between the different sub-regions and countries, in discourses that vigorously and jealously guard the sovereignty of each nation. And within the nations themselves, leaders still speak of national unity and a common destiny, but everyone knows that they act mostly on behalf of their kinsmen and their ethnic and religious communities. Indeed, most important of all, everyone, including the leaders' kinsmen and women and members of their ethnic and communities, know that political leaders, with very few exceptions, act only on behalf of their own individual selves, their own individual greed, lust and thievery. As the second epigraph to this piece states, the word of a confirmed rogue carries no weight!

Ah, but that adage comes from another age! Now, in our postcolonial age that has been overwhelmed by a rapacious global neoliberalism, the words of confirmed and even convicted rogues carry weight within their own ethnic and religious communities - as long as they are seen by and within those communities as heroes and champions. This point leads us to an appreciation of the complexity of the questions with which I began this piece. This point has to be very carefully and clearly explained: the micro-narratives of survival and dignity of ethnic nationalities and regional blocs in our country and our continent are not the creation of the looters in power in most of the African countries and the developing world; the rulers and politicians are for the most part cynical opportunists that are appropriating the micro-narratives for and in their own interests. This is because the micro-narratives have, in a manner of speaking, always existed. They were there when, in virtually all the colonized regions and spaces of the earth, the grand, totalizing metanarratives of struggle and liberation dominated the politics of more than three-fifths of the population of the planet. If this observation or claim seems too abstract, permit me to make it plain and straightforward.

All human groups, no matter how small and marginalized, have their own separate narratives of their struggles for survival and dignity, of their right to be in the world and in history with other groups. And we know that there is no extant language in the world in which such narra-



(293)

Talakawa Liberation Herald BIODUN JEYIFO



•Chinua Achebe



•Hubert Ogunde

tives are absent. More importantly, we know now that such narratives become "micro-narratives" when they are superseded by metanarratives that link them to the struggles of other peoples and communities. In other words, all the ethnic and language groups in Nigeria, Africa and the world have their own separate narratives of survival and dignity, narratives that became "micro-narratives" when they were subsumed into the grand, totalizing metanarratives of the struggles of all the colonized nations and peoples of the world. Anyone who knows the intimate details of the struggles for independence from colonialism in Nigeria, Kenya, India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and all the other countries of Africa and Asia knows of what it took to incorporate the pre-existing micro-narratives into the historic metanarratives.

At this juncture in the discussion, I come to a particularly subtle or enigmatic issue concerning how narratives, whether they are meta or micro, operate in our world, especially with regard to building and sustaining political communities. It has been said a million times that we became Nigerians, we became Africans on the basis of colonial acts, edits and policies. In the specific Nigerian case, who does not know, putatively, that it was Lord Lugard that made us "Nigerians" by the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1914? But then, why have we left out of the story the fact that we became "Nigerians" also because we began to tell stories of ourselves as Nigerians, stories that we told both to ourselves and the whole world? "We are the stories that we tell our-

selves", as the first epigraph to this piece declares. Please note this hugely crucial fact: having made us "Nigerians" by colonial fiat, the British actually continued to encourage and manipulate the different and separate micro-narratives of our ethnic groups and religious communities. To the very last days of their overlordship in Nigeria, the British never tired of their exoticizing fascination with what they considered the "riot" of languages and ethnicities in our country. In other words, we, not the British, created and told metanarratives of ourselves as Nigerians, as Africans, as Black people.

It is important to put some flesh on the bare bones of this general profile. Thus, while it is true that the English language played a huge role in creating and legitimating metanarratives that made us Nigerians, it is also true that virtually all our indigenous languages and mother tongues played their own important parts in the story. The same is true of all the arts, all the idioms and genres of performance. Remember Hubert Ogunde? He wrote and performed in Yoruba, but his materials came from everywhere in the country: the Iva Valley miners' strike and massacre of 1949; the agitation and struggles of the trade unions and the nationalist leaders; the Aba Women's Revolt of 1929. The Onitsha Market Literature pamphleteers, as I reminded readers in last week's piece, wove stories, in their inimitable manner, of the heroes of Nigerian and African liberation struggles. Nigerian Pidgin of the period was redolent with songs, tales and jokes about us as Nigerians and our tumultuous struggles against the Brit-

ish. One radio program in the then NBC, the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, comes to mind: "Save Journey". It was the rage of the whole country in its fascinating tales of the escapades of Nigerians of diverse ethnic backgrounds forging common identities on the road across the length and the breadth of the country. We are indeed the stories that we tell ourselves.

The case of Hubert Ogunde is indeed instructive. I have said that he drew the materials for his plays from a broad, Pan Nigerian archive. But he also relayed stories that could be regarded as micro-narratives of Yoruba ethno-national provenience. The latter was mostly in plays from the 1960s onward, while the former was in plays of the 1940s and 1950s, "Yoruba Ronu" ("Yorubas, Think!") being the most ethno-nationalist of the 1960s plays. But here is the important point that I wish to make here: while Ogunde's plays and films of the 1960s to the end of his life were centered around ethno-national themes and ideas, he did not abandon the metanarratives of his younger and earlier years and days. Was this because Ogunde's plays and films of this period were rooted in a metaphysics, a spirituality of general human dread and deliverance? Perhaps, but the broader point to take away from this observation is the fact that, at bottom, there really is no fundamental contradiction between metanarratives and micro-narratives; the one should flow or lead into the other. Why so, if so?

Here, I draw briefly from the ideas of the German Marxist philosopher, Walter Benjamin and our own Chinua Achebe on the heritage of

narratives in and for all human communities. From Achebe: there are benevolent and malevolent fictions and narratives. Often, we can distinguish one from the other, but then quite often also, it is difficult to separate them. That being the case, we must always be vigilant, we must never give up in our efforts to separate the benevolent from the malevolent fictions and narratives. For those interested in exploring these ideas about narratives in the works of Achebe, the most relevant texts are the powerful essay titled, "The Truth of Fiction" and the series of metafictional reflections in the novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*. Here is the kernel of Walter Benjamin's ideas about narratives: at one time in the cultural evolution of humankind, there were two distinct and separate traditions. These were, one, stories based on local experiences and told only by and to neighbours who have never travelled and for the most part will never travel far from home and, two, stories told by travelers of experiences and encounters on their journeys to close and distant places. But then, adds Benjamin, that age of complete separation between the two historic traditions of narrative is long gone and now local stories have merged with stories of faraway places.

In case anyone might miss the point I am deriving from Achebe and Benjamin in this discussion, let me make it clear: metanarratives and micro-narratives are often intertwined; and they both must pass the difficult test of their truth and falsehood contents, considered in terms of what good or harm they might cause to those who tell and hear them as stories. There is a special reason why I am placing this emphasis on this point and this is because now that ethno-nationalist micro-narratives have largely replaced or displaced the metanarratives of liberation of the late colonial and early postcolonial periods, the purveyors of the reinvented micro-narratives seem unaware of, or indifferent to the two conditionalities of Benjamin and Achebe. And please note, dear reader, what I ascribe to Achebe and Benjamin in this piece is actually not limited to them: all the cultures, all the language or speech communities of the world know that there are harmful stories and morally uplifting stories; they know that if you allow stories that frighten you and cripple your will to dominate your life, you will pay dearly for it.

I had expected to conclude the series this week, but clearly, there are still a few loose ends to tie up. One of these is precisely what kinds of micro-narratives I have been talking about in this series. I have said that these micronarratives are dominant in Nigeria and much of Africa and indeed, other parts of the contemporary world: well, what is the truth of this assertion? For instance, in the Nigerian case, is this related to the debates over the confrontation between proponents of restructuring and the unrelenting apostles of national unity and a strong, over-inflated centre? And if we are now beyond neo- or postcolonialism in a fully globalized capitalist neoliberalism, what does this portend for the pervasiveness of micronarratives of ethno-nationalists of the Left and the Right? Please join me in next week's piece that will most assuredly conclude the series by taking up these questions.