

# Opinion

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## Eskor Toyo on Nigeria's self-rule

By Edwin Madunagu

LAST Thursday, in this column, I introduced Professor Eskor Toyo. He had delivered the Nigerian Golden Jubilee Independence Lecture, "Project Nigeria: The journey so far", in Calabar on Monday, September 20, 2010. In the present article I intend to appreciate the 59-page paper which both Eskor Toyo and the Chair of the event, Professor Okon Edet Uya, said was very important. I agree. My present exercise is particularly targeted at young Nigerians, much younger than "independent" Nigeria in age and whose ranks constituted the vast majority of those who listened to Eskor Toyo in Calabar on that Monday afternoon.

The lecture starts with Prolegomena (page 1). This word is the plural of Prolegomenon which is defined generally as a "prefatory remark" and specifically—as in Eskor Toyo's lecture—as "a formal essay or critical discussion serving to introduce and interpret an extended work". In the one-page prolegomena, Eskor Toyo tells two short stories. In the first story, based on John Milton's Sampson Agonistes, we see the Biblical Sampson, "the tower of physical strength", in captivity. He had been incarcerated in what is now known as the Gaza Strip along the Mediterranean Sea. Sampson had been captured by the Philistines. In his loneliness the captive reflected: "Promise was that I should deliver Israel. But look at that deliverer now and find him in Gaza... A living grave".

Sampson's "grave" was thick darkness, without all hope of day. Yet outside the dungeon the sun was blazing. The subject of Eskor Toyo's lecture reminded him of the story of Biblical Sampson. Reconstructed, the story is like this: A potentially powerful "delivered" himself requires "deliverance". He is not only in chains, but in a dungeon. He is in thick darkness, literally or metaphorically, or both. But the irony is that outside his dark hole it is noon, and the sun is blazing.

The second story in Eskor Toyo's prolegomena is a passage taken from A History of Eu-

rope written by H.A. Fisher. The passage reads: "The fact of progress is written plain and large on the page of history, but progress is not a law of nature. The ground gained by one generation may be lost by the next; the thoughts of men may flow into channels which lead to disaster and barbarism". To appreciate this passage further, I refer the reader to any academic introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of History. In case you cannot find any book around, you may visit the Internet the contemporary College "Bible".

The prolegomena is followed by the Introduction (page 2) which is just a description of the structure of the lecture. Even then the opening statement of this introduction may be taken as Eskor Toyo's first thesis: "There is poetry, but we shall take the path of science. The listener or reader will notice that we rely very much on history as an ocean of facts." (Emphasis mine). I agree completely with Eskor Toyo's view of history. The facts referred to are not only facts in the specific sphere of knowledge called "History", but fact in all branches of knowledge. The historical method is a very powerful and heuristic method. It is simply a scandal, which can be associated only with most of the philistine rulers that Nigeria has had since self-rule, that history, the "Ocean of facts", desperately needed by the youths of an enslaved and internally-colonised country like Nigeria, has virtually disappeared from the country's school curriculum.

The main text of Eskor Toyo's lecture can be re-organised into six sections; Section 1: Creation, Nationality, Self-Rule and Visions (pages 2-10); Section 2: The global environment (pages 10-15); Section 3: What Nigerian rulers have done (pages 15-22); Section 4: Certain specific questions (pages 23-51); Section 5: The revolutions of our time (pages 51-57); and Section 6: Conclusion (pages 57-59).

The "specific questions" mentioned in Section 4 are the questions included by the organisers of the lecture in the invitation to Eskor Toyo. He was requested to answer them in his lecture. The questions cover the follow-

ing seven themes: Social and political transformations; democratic governance and social justice; economic growth and social policy; education; culture and identity; citizenship and social inclusion and exclusion; and Nigeria in the global economy and the global economy in Nigeria". The "revolutions" mentioned in Section 5 of the lecture are four in number: the scientific revolution; the industrial revolution; the socialist revolution; and the national liberation revolution.

The thrust of Eskor Toyo's lecture is implied by the story of Biblical Sampson and the philosophical reflection made by the historian, H.A. Fisher. This thrust can be put like this: Although power was not handed at independence, or more appropriately, at self-rule, to the nationalist forces that actually fought for Nigeria's freedom, and although the immediate post-independence agenda was not what was fought for, "the whole of suffering humanity" had risen in unison on October 1, 1960, and "cheered a physical giant that was expected to stride forward powerfully towards liberation in all ways, holding the touch of freedom and progress for all of African and oppressed nations". But "from the summit of ecstatic goodwill, the world's opinion has slumped into the vale of despair". For the vast majority of our people it is now misery and poverty and powerlessness. But for the perpetrators of our national calamity it is millions or billions or trillions of naira and dollars—in Nigeria and abroad.

My original plan was to proceed with this appreciation systematically, section by section, summarising each section, identifying what I consider the main theses, and then running commentaries on them—where necessary. I had to abandon this project on account of the need to closely follow the current flood of calamities now defining the country. Consequently, in what follows, I shall limit myself to highlighting some of the key ideas, positions and opinions advanced in the lecture.

To begin with, let us try to locate the year 1947 in the trajectory of Nigeria's political history. It is an important year in the real history of

the struggle to free Nigeria from colonial bondage. And it is the year Eskor Toyo, the author of the lecture under appreciation, made his entry into the nationalist struggle. The National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC), later re-named the National Council of Nigerian Citizens, when Cameroon was excised from Nigeria, was formed in 1944. The NCNC was the first nationwide nationalist movement in Nigeria. It had Herbert Macaulay as pioneer National President and Nnamdi Azikiwe as pioneer National Secretary. The Zikist Movement a militant youth movement, inspired by the writings, speeches and other activities of Nnamdi Azikiwe and Eyo Ita and Nwafor Orizu's book, *Without Bitterness*, was formed in 1946.

The most important thing to be observed here, said Eskor Toyo in his lecture, "is that, the Zikist Movement and the NCNC stood for political and economic independence". The Trade Union Congress (TUC) was formed in 1943. Two years later, in 1945, this militantly anti-colonial labour union called a general strike. The strike was obeyed by workers "with exemplary unity", asserts Eskor Toyo. The colonial power was forced to grant the Richard's Constitution in 1946. But this constitution, rather than grant self-rule as demanded by militant nationalists, merely divided the country into three administrative regions: North, West and East.

The NCNC leadership embarked on a 12-month country-wide tour between 1946 and 1947 to mobilise colonised Nigerians against the Richard's Constitution. Led by Azikiwe, Michael Imoudu and Oged Macaulay, the son of Herbert Macaulay, the mobilisation tour started in Lagos, moved to Kano, moved through the North, down to the East, crossed the River Niger into the West, and ended in Lagos where it was welcomed by a mammoth crowd. The Richard's Constitution collapsed. It was in this anti-colonial revolutionary ferment that Eskor Toyo emerged on the political scene of Nigeria. Michael Imoudu and Anthony Enahoro had emerged a few years earlier.

• To be continued next Thursday.



# Opinion

## Eskor Toyo on self-rule (2)

By Edwin Madunagu

LAST Thursday, I began the appreciation of the lecture, *Project Nigeria: the journey so far*, delivered by Professor Eskor Toyo in Calabar on Monday, September 20, 2010. All I did in that first part was to introduce the 59-page lecture, having introduced the lecturer the week before, and try to locate the year 1947 in the trajectory of Nigeria's political history. We found that the year 1947 stands near the apex of militant anti-colonial nationalism in Nigeria. Incidentally, that was also the year Eskor Toyo, according to an autobiographical passage in his lecture, made his entry into Nigeria's radical politics. In this second, and concluding, part of my brief appreciation I shall be highlighting only three of the numerous core ideas and theses in the lecture. I shall come back to the lecture in the near future.

Before I continue, a point of clarification is necessary. As Eskor Toyo himself said in his answer to one of the questions a listener asked him at the end of his lecture, when someone approvingly cites a statement made by another person, the former is not approving the entire world-view or the totality of the political and ideological positions of the latter. He or she is merely approving that particular statement. A holistic approval, which can be made in certain circumstances - including revolutionary engagements - is quite problematic, and often dangerous, my citations in this appreciation should be taken with this caveat.

We begin with the line which Eskor Toyo draws between "self-rule" and "independence". We have frequently drawn attention, in this column, to the difference between office and power. Eskor Toyo pursues this type of distinctions more elaborately: "The distinction between self-government and sovereignty on the one hand and independence, on the other, is like the sociological distinction between authority and power. Authority refers to right; power refers to capacity. In the same way, self-government and sovereignty

refer to the right to take one's decisions whereas independence means the capacity to be really free from the power of others" (page 18).

Furthermore, self-rule or legal autonomy, says Eskor Toyo, "is what can be given by a master and taken as a grant by a servant. If the subject wants independence, it is his business to use self-rule or autonomy to get it. It cannot be granted to, or simply taken by, anyone. To use autonomy or self-rule to proceed to independence, a country needs leaders who value independence and know what it entails" (page 18). The implication here is that what Nigeria's "constitutional leaders" received from the English monarch on October 1, 1960 was self-rule, and not independence. This self-rule was for the country, Nigeria, as a whole, since self-rule had been granted to the different regions, at different times, in the preceding two years. Hence what the perpetrators of our national tragedies were noisily celebrating on October 1, 2010 with legal and illegal appropriations accompanied by the slaughter and maiming of several innocent citizens - was the 50<sup>th</sup> year of self-rule, not independence.

To further illustrate Eskor Toyo's distinction, we may recall that Cuba was granted "something" in 1904 or thereabouts by America when the later defeated Spain, Cuba's colonial ruler, in a war. The Americans and the Cuban stooges called the "something" independence, but it was, in reality, something less than self-rule. It was on January 1, 1959, that Cuba actually became independent. It is, however, possible for a country to move straight from colonial bondage to independence, by passing self-rule. A classical example is Vietnam. Eskor Toyo is right: "To use autonomy or self-rule to proceed to independence", or to proceed directly to independence, by passing self-rule, "a country needs leaders who value independence and know what it entails".

The second theme is *colonialism and nationality*. After creating, constituting and securing colonial Nigeria, the British imperial power carved the colony into 24 provinces: 12

in the North, and 12 in the South. Of this division Eskor Toyo says: "It is important to note that these provinces were not arbitrary but followed as reasonably as possible what anthropologists found out concerning the political systems, loyalties, and cultures of the various peoples they found" (page 3). Further down in the lecture, he says: "It is of utmost importance to mention that in the course of all these evolutions, under colonialism no section and no public leader renounced belonging to the country called Nigeria" (page 4).

I now refer the reader to the public lecture, *The Future of the Nigerian Federation, Public Accountability and the Rule of Law* delivered by late Dr. Bala Usman in Maiduguri on July 15, 2004. Usman said: "The British conquered the polities they met in these parts and destroyed their sovereignties. The sovereignties which were lost to the British were not recovered by any of the successor entities of these pre-colonial sovereign polities, or, by the new ethnic nationalities which have come to identify with them... Sovereignty was fought for and recovered by organisations and movements whose identities and aspirations were pan-Nigeria and pan-African".

If I combine what Eskor Toyo and Bala Usman are saying in the passages cited above with my own studies I arrive at the following propositions: *One*: Although British colonial power created and constituted Nigeria by force of arms, the internal re-structuring of the country which the colonial administration thereafter carried out was not as arbitrary as many "micro-nationalists" now claim. *Two*: Although various nationalities, kingdoms, chiefdoms, collapsing empires, city states, etc, were brought together, by force of arms, to constitute a colony called Nigeria, these communities and powers were not as strange to one another before British occupation as many micro-nationalists in Nigeria would now claim. *Three*: The demand of colonised Nigerians was that this colony called Nigeria should become free; and the struggle to free Nigeria was a pan-Nigeria

struggle. It was not a struggle to free Hausa-Fulani, or Yoruba, or Igbo, or Ibibio, or Ijaw, or Kanuri, or Efik, or Tiv, etc, but the struggle of Nigerian peoples for the freedom of Nigeria.

My political conclusion is also straightforward: Every Nigerian is free to take any position or make any demands concerning the future of Nigeria. In particular, any Nigerian, or any Nigerian group, can campaign or agitate for any type of geo-political restructuring: true and fiscal federalism, regionalism, or even separation. Radical patriots and socialists are also free to put their programmes and manifestoes before the nation and fight for them. But whatever any group or individual may demand should proceed from historical facts and not a falsification of our history. No one should distort history simply to be able to proceed in a straight line to his or her current political preferences.

On the question of *Federalism*, which is the third theme I am picking out, Eskor Toyo has this to say on Azikiwe's and Awolowo's advocacies: *Azikiwe*: "Nnamdi Azikiwe was the first to suggest that Nigeria should be a federation. This proposal was made in his pamphlet, *The Political Blueprint of Nigeria*. In it he advocated eight states arrived at by a grouping of the provinces. This was published in 1943. While I agreed with Azikiwe on federalism as a future way of organising Nigerians, I did not agree with his scheme of states. My view was simply to turn the provinces into states instead of going into a certain grouping of provinces which would be somehow arbitrary". *I agree*.

That was Eskor Toyo's view as Azikiwe's proposal. As for Obafemi Awolowo, Eskor Toyo says: "After this book, *The People's Republic*, Chief Awolowo got published a book entitled *Strategy and Tactics of the People's Republic*, being the constitution of the Peoples Republic. In this book, he advocated that Nigeria should become a federation in which each ethnic groups would be a state. I considered this an unrealistic advocacy and rejected his scheme of states and not his federation as an ideal". (Page 9&10). *I also agree*.

• *Concluded*.