

# Opinion

## Notes on the 'modernity perspective'

By Edwin Madunagu

ALTHOUGH the topic of our discussion has now changed, the theme remains the same: *changing the world*. In the opening segment of the preceding essay, *Endless debate over changing the world (1)–(6)*, I introduced three books and their authors: *How to change the world: Tales of Marx and Marxism* by Eric Hobsbawm; *Africa must be modern: The modern imperative in contemporary Africa (A Manifesto)* by Olufemi Taiwo; and *The world we like to see: Revolutionary objectives in the 21st century*, by Samir Amin. To these three texts I may now add – for the purpose of this continuation – selections from Biodun Jeyifo's *Talakawa Liberation Courier* column in *The Guardian* (Sunday). Let me simply, for now, call these selections *Essays on modernity and post-modernity* (June 2011 and April, May and June, 2012).

In the second segment of the *Endless debate*, I listed the contemporary "problems with Nigeria" to include: mass poverty and unemployment; poor healthcare system; armed robbery, kidnapping and terrorism; corruption and ethnicity; exploitation and oppression; social inequality, marginalisation and alienation; cultural backwardness and socioeconomic underdevelopment; ignorance and superstition; state bankruptcy and delinquency; patriarchy and sexism; and inhumanity and immorality. I claimed that, "nearly every critic of the *human condition* in Nigeria today, from functionaries of the Nigerian state and its various governments, to the ruling classes and elites, down to the ordinary citizens ("citizens without labels") would subscribe to the use of these condemnatory terms to describe our contemporary national existence".

The real question before the nation, I suggested, divides into two: "the type of society we would like to see and live in; and the transition to it". The first part of this question – except, possibly, the concept of exploitation and its absence – will also most likely produce a unanimity: we are all agreed on the elimination of the calamities and maladies listed above. The question on which there will not be unanimity therefore boils down to how to transit to the new society.

The very first sentence in Femi Taiwo's book, *Africa must be modern*, makes a declaration:

"The thesis of this book is very simple and straight-forward: there is nothing that is wrong with Africa at the present time that a *serious engagement with, and acceptance of, modernity* cannot solve or, at least, contribute to solving. I argue in what follows: Africa must be modern. And it must be modern now; not tomorrow; not in the near – future; not in the far future" (emphasis mine). The author's point is strongly and clearly made. It is categorical. Taiwo then lists the quarters from where he anticipates denunciation (not just criticism) of the book. They include, in his own words, "nay-saying nativists", "the do-nothing, 'let's find an African solution to our problem' advocates", "the pseudo-anti-Western – imperialist crowd", "the renegade rump of anti-neo-colonialist noise makers".

To these anticipated denunciations, Taiwo says: "You do not have to read this book. It is not directed at the likes of you. By the same token, if you are one of those in the African world who believe that being modern is synonymous with being Western, this book is not for you and you may be too close – minded to benefit from the discussion to follow". My simple response to Taiwo here is that this type of pre-emptive attack is really not necessary. The author should have waited for actual criticisms and then incorporate his responses in a future edition of the book; or, if his responses cannot wait he could respond through any of the various media outlets available. And they are many. Some parts of the prefatory section of the book may actually put off some ideologically innocent or uncommitted "general readers".

However, the effect the pre-emptive attacks (or self-defence) had on me was to persuade me to read the book even more thoroughly and calmly. And I enjoyed it. As an intellectual production, the book is good: highly intellectual, but not jargon-infested. It can be seen by any knowledge – seeking reader that the book is a product of serious research (driven by keen interest and passion). It was obviously designed, in its language, for audiences beyond schools and the academia, beyond intellectual communities. For instance, it is free of tedious annotations, which many authors use not because they are needed, but to intimidate readers and show the degree of their learning and erudition. As for the content, if I were to vote, in a "yes-or-no" referendum, on the book, I

would definitely vote yes. I am approaching *Africa must be modern* and its author with seriousness.

What Africans need and want and aspire to, according to Taiwo, on page 8 of his book, include: "ensuring for themselves and their posterity lives that are free of the trinity of hunger, disease and ignorance. They want to live in healthy environments. They want to lead hopeful lives where they can always expect that the future, near or far, will be better than the present, that they will have more control over the direction of their lives, that they will not live under regimes in the constitution of which they have had no hand, and that they will live long prosperous lives marked mostly by happiness". I don't think that anyone genuinely concerned about Africa and its future will disagree with Taiwo's general articulation of our "problems" – for which he recommends *modernity* as solution.

To prepare to follow Taiwo we may need to do a general survey of the concept of modernity, outside Taiwo's book. When introducing the book, along with two others, in the opening segment of my preceding series, *Endless debate on "Changing the world"*, I said that modernity "can be taken in its literal meaning, and then understood historically as refereeing to a "post-traditional, post-medieval historical period". This working definition, taken from the internet (Wikipedia), continues: "This historical period is marked by the move from *feudalism* (or *agrarianism*) toward *capitalism*, *industrialisation*, *secularisation*, *rationalisation*, the *nation-state* and its constituent *institutions* and forms of *surveillance*".

Further down, we are told by this same source that "conceptually, modernity relates to the *modern era* and to *modernism*, but forms a distinct concept", and that "whereas the *Enlightenment* involves a specific movement in Western philosophy, modernity tends to refer only to the social relations associated with the rise of capitalism". You may need to bear this in mind because what we are doing here is beyond simply appreciating Femi Taiwo's book. We are generally taking down *study notes on modernity* and the perspective it throws up for social transformation of Africa.

Modernity can be periodised into "three conventional phases: *Early modernism* (1500–1789); *Classical modernism* (1789 – 1900); and

*Late modernity* (1900 – 1989). Classical modernity corresponds to Eric Hobsbawm's *The Long 19th century* (1789 – 1914)". I would like to draw the attention of the reader to the years 1789 (French Revolution), 1914 (beginning of First World War) and 1989 (Fall of Berlin Wall) in this periodisation. Finally, Wikipedia tells us that whereas some authors believe that "modernity ended in the mid or late 20th century and this has defined a period subsequent to modernity, namely *post-modernity*", some others "however consider the period from the late 20th century (around 1989) to the present to be merely another phase of modernity". In other words, the *fourth* or *current* phase of modernity is what is known as post-modernity.

From this general characterisation of modernity, we may move to the political and ideological plane. How does a radical leftist intellectual see modernity – not alternatively to the general characterisation, but additionally to it? I shall go back to my background texts: first to *Samir Amin*, and then to *Biodun Jeyifo*. Amin says that, "modernity is a rupture in world history, initiated in Europe during the 16th century. Modernity proclaims that human beings are responsible for their own history, individually and collectively, and consequently breaks with the dominant pre-modern ideologies. Modernity then makes democracy possible, just as it requires secularism, in the sense of separation of the religious and the political". (*The world we wish to see*, page 87).

Samir Amin continues: "Formulated by the 18th century Enlightenment, and implemented by the French Revolution, the complex association of modernity, democracy, and secularism, its advances and retreats, has been shaping the contemporary world ever since. But modernity by itself is not a cultural revolution. It derives its meaning only through the close relation that it has with the birth and subsequent growth of capitalism. This relation has conditioned the historic limits of "really existing" modernity" (*The world we wish to see*, pages 87 and 88). I would again ask the reader to bear this passage in mind: the relations between modernity and capitalism, on the one hand and between modernity, democracy and secularism, on the other. Also note Amin's concepts of "*historic limits*" and "*really existing modernity*".

• To be continued next Thursday.

# Opinion

## Notes on the 'modernity perspective' (2)

By Edwin Madunagu

THESE are study notes on *modernity* (and *post-modernity*) and the social-transformational perspective it throws up for Africa. They are also, in particular, an appreciation of Femi Taiwo's *Africa must be modern: The modern imperative in contemporary Africa (A Manifesto)*. Last Thursday, in the opening segment, we introduced and characterised the subject, highlighting some of its key features - but mainly from sources outside Taiwo's book. We also re-introduced the book and criticised some parts of its introduction (as I did in the first segment of the preceding series, *Endless debate*). The present segment concludes the general characterisation of "modernity" (and *postmodernity*) and then moves on to the appreciation of *Africa must be modern* - against the background of the little we think we now know about the subject.

In the past 16 months, Biodun Jeyifo has written at least three series of essays on *modernity* and *postmodernity* in his *Talakawa Liberation Courier* column in *The Guardian* (on Sunday). These are: *Things could be far worse, compatriot: Nigeria and the myths of capitalist postmodernity* (June 12, 19 and 26, 2011); *Transistorisation and miniaturisation: Fables of modernity and its discontents* (April 1, 8 and 15, 2012); and *Modernity and neurosis: Theirs and Ours* (May 2 and 27, 2012; June 3, 2012). In the second part of the last of these series (May 27, 2012), Jeyifo talked of *two essential faces of modernity*.

The first face of modernity, according to Jeyifo, is "the face on which is boldly etched the promise of ease, convenience and comfort for all regardless of race, nationality, ethnicity, gender and class. People, goods and services are transported around the world at speeds and with the kind of regularity that our ancestors of the recent, pre-modern past would have found confounding and confounded. And all areas, all regions of the world are connected and interconnected now. We now have a common fate, all of us on our planet. In this regard, modernity may have come too late for our grand-grandparents, but it has come just in time for us and those who will come after us."

The second face of modernity is "the face on which the masks of tragedy, with its searing lines

of broken promises, are sculpted with ferocity. This is because modernity has also meant the simultaneous concentration of wealth in a few countries and vast increase of poverty and destitution in a majority of the countries of the world, a pattern that is replicated within nearly all the nations of our world. At the base of this tragic modernity are racism, ethnocentrism and chauvinism, especially as they are institutionalised in a world system of superpowers and great powers ranged against barely industrialised, low-income economies. In this particular incarnation of modernity, hundreds of millions of the world's population are literally *in* modernity, but are substantively *outside* of it.

These passages from Jeyifo's essay and Samir Amin's statement on modernity (see last Thursday's opening segment) now lead me to George Hegel. Taking a long view of history, we can confirm what Samir Amin has said, namely, that modernity was a revolutionary "rupture" in world history. It was not only revolutionary; it was progressive in the sense of human progress. But that "progressiveness" now has to be qualified because "actually existing" modernity has been heavily constrained and limited by capitalism. Or, to follow Amin and Jeyifo, "actually existing" modernity is *capitalist modernity*. Taiwo himself calls *capitalism the economic component of modernity* (pages xvii, 74).

Please, permit me a digression here. About 32 years ago, in November 1980, at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), under the auspices of the Alliance of Progressive Students, (ALPS), and under the inspiration of Biodun Jeyifo who was then teaching there (teaching Literature officially and teaching several other things unofficially), I delivered a lecture titled: "*Human Progress and Its Enemies*" to mark the 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the "brutal killing of the miners at the Iva Valley Mines by the colonial police in November 1949." It was to be a four-part lecture. But for many circumstantial reasons, as Jeyifo explained later, I was "unable to deliver the entire lecture." It was then decided that the entire lecture should be published. And it was so published as a book - with the same title.

This was part of what I said in the opening section of the lecture: "But there was at least one

philosopher who appreciated the contradictory character of historical progress and attempted to theorise it. George Hegel (1770-1831) claimed that all forward movement in history has been double-edged, since the creation of the new inescapably entailed the destruction and transcendence of the old, its particular virtues included. He observed that social progress has not followed a straight line, but a complicated path with many lapses and detours; that regress has mingled with progress, and that a certain price, sometimes a very high one, has been exacted for every advance."

Modernity and postmodernity bring me this type of (Hegelian-like) mixed feelings. What I described above as "contradictory character of human progress" in 1980, I later called "contradictions of progress". But whatever the mixed feelings, I hold that human progress is not only *real*; it is also, in the words of Jeyifo, *measurable*. It is "measurable in the degree to which the exploited, marginalised groups and classes in society liberate themselves from poverty and degradation..." I was, therefore, pleased to read in Taiwo's *Africa must be modern* that it is the "idea of progress and the unrelenting faith in its possibility that dominate modernity" (page 188).

Olufemi Taiwo says his book is a *manifesto*. A manifesto may be defined as a "written public declaration of the intentions, motives, or views of the issuer, be it an individual, group, political party or government. It is often political in nature, but may present an individual's *life stance*. Manifestos relating to religious beliefs are generally referred to as *creed*." World-historic political manifestos would include the *United States Declaration of Independence (1776)*, the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789)*, during the French Revolution, the *Communist Manifesto (1848)*, and South Africa's *Freedom Charter (1955)*. A political manifesto is expected to contain at least three essential elements: a critique of the present, a description of the desired future and a transition mechanism between the present and that desired future. The third element is itself a mixed bag, which may include a prescription of the envisaged historical agency or agencies to effect or initiate the transition.

Taiwo's *Africa must be modern*, considered as a manifesto, has all the essential elements listed above, including agencies - as we shall see. Beyond this, the author makes this important statement about the *specificity* of the mission of this particular book and of his intellectual strivings in general: "I determined that I was going to do my best as an interpreter of the African world, one that would do research and write essays, reports, articles, etc, which would equip those who wished to change the world with left interpretations to aid their exertions" (page 6). If Taiwo had stopped here, and had not proceeded to abuse the *Left*, I would have simply applauded - because, frankly, we are all still searching. I would then have had only his anti-Marxism and capitalism to contend with in an otherwise brilliant and refreshing *modernist manifesto*.

The book seeks to persuade the reader and Africans in general to adopt *modernity* as a "*principle of social ordering*" and as a "*mode of living*". But then: What does it mean to be modern? And what is modernity's claim to supremacy over other principles and modes in history? These are questions Taiwo sets out to answer in this book. He does this generally in the Introduction and Chapter One, and then systematically by considering *five dimensions of modernity* (in Africa) in Chapters Two to Six of the six-chapter, 243-page book. Each of the chapters (2-6) deals with one dimension of modernity.

The chapter titles are deliberately didactic: *Chapter One: Why Africa must get on board the Modernity Express*; *Chapter Two: The sticky problem of individualism*; *Chapter Three: The knowledge society and its rewards*; *Chapter Four: Count, measure, and count again*; *Chapter Five: Process, not outcome: Why trusting your leader, godfather, ethnic group or chief may not secure your advantage*; *Chapter Six: Against the philosophy of limits: Installing a culture of hope*. I said earlier that I would vote *yes* in a yes-or-no referendum on Femi Taiwo's book. What this means is that first, I would recommend it to the public for reading, and second, I would recommend to the *Nigerian Left* that the book be freed from its idealist and capitalist integument and the product of that exercise integrated into the socialist programme.

• To be continued.

# Opinion

## Notes on the 'modernity perspective' (3)

By Edwin Madunagu

IN the opening segment of this article, I defined and introduced the concept of *modernity*, surveyed its key features and sketched aspects of its history and its relationship with capitalism, democracy and secularism, and then re-introduced Olufemi Taiwo's book, *Africa must be modern: The modern imperative in contemporary Africa (A manifesto)*. I introduced Samir Amin's concepts of "actually-existing modernity" and modernity's "historic limits" imposed by its relationship with capitalism. In the second segment, I brought in Biodun Jeyifo's concept of "two faces of modernity" and introduced my own concept of "contradictions of progress".

What I intend to do in this segment is to present an inventory of some key ideas and propositions of Taiwo's *Africa must be modern*, and comment on them - where I have not already done so. Incidentally, the titles of Chapters 2-6 as formulated, and the summaries of the chapters provided immediately below the titles, embody such key ideas and propositions. In chapter two, under the caption, *The sticky problem of individualism*, Taiwo asks the question: "Why are Africans hostile to individualism, the dominant principle of social ordering and living under modernity?" He points to a direction for some answers: "There are diverse possible answers but, in light of our primary focus on modernity, a case can be made for the fact that much of the hostility directed at individualism originates from the conflicted legacy of modernity and colonialism in the continent."

Since this book is designed also for the general reader - and this is one of its main attractions for me - it is immediately necessary to caution that the ordinary, popular, everyday-life meaning attached to the word *individualism* (together with *individualistic*) in these parts of the world is different from, and less odious than its meaning in social theory and in philosophy. It is the latter meaning (rather than the "popular" meaning which connotes greed, selfishness, among others) that Taiwo's use of the term carries. Even this latter meaning - which will be given presently - is still received with hostility, according to *Africa must be modern*. So, what is the meaning of individualism in this book?

The *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* defines individualism variously as: "A social theory advocating the liberty, rights or independent action of the individual"; "the principle or habit of independent thought or action"; "the pursuit of individual, rather than, common or collective interests; egoism"; "individual character; individuality"; "an individual peculiarity," and (in philosophy) "the doctrine that only individual things are real;" "the doctrine or belief that all actions are determined by, or, at least, take place for the benefit of the individual, not of the mass of people."

It must be said at once that *individualism*, in the sense of Taiwo, does not include the more offensive strands of the broad definition given above. The bottom-line, for him, is this: "In a community in which the sovereignty of the individual predominates, when the free individual says *No* to an idea, action, or programme designed to advance the good of the community, we may not proceed to compel her to fall in line" (pages 57-58). (Throughout this book, Taiwo uses *she*, rather than *he*, to represent the abstract individual. I love this). This strand of individualism (freedom and rights of action of the *individual*, as against those of the *group*) brings me back to the second half of 1970s, a critical period of my revolutionary development. I frequently exhibited extreme and, at times, quite dangerous, forms of romanticism and idealism. I once upheld the right of a member of a revolutionary group not only to say *No*, but to act it out - if he or she believed that the revolution or its soul was under threat. Although my position has since undergone several revisions, the question remains basically unresolved for me. This aspect of Taiwo's theory of *individualism* (and its limits) deserves close study by the *Left*.

To bring out this meaning of individualism more clearly, we may contrast it, as Taiwo does, with *communalism*, which is not just an abstract concept in social theory, but a concrete social formation that actually existed - and may still exist - in various forms in Africa and several other parts of the world.

*Communalism* is defined by the same book of reference, as "a theory or system of government according to which each commune is virtually an

independent state and the nation is merely a federation of such states"; "the principles or practices of communal ownership"; "strong allegiance to one's own ethnic group rather than society as a whole." *Communalism*, in the sense of Taiwo, includes what I may call "*primordialism*" and even "*primitivism*."

Taiwo argues in the Introduction and in Chapters 1 and 2 that Africa cannot lift itself up and march with the rest of the world economically, socially and politically unless and until the continent embraces *individualism*. This is a central proposition of the book and in it, we see an illustration of what I mean by the need to rescue Taiwo's manifesto from its idealist and capitalist integument. This is what I mean: A historical - materialist (that is Marxist) reconstruction of the proposition would bring out its full strength and explain the resilience of aspects of primordialism, as well as cultural contradictions and *hybridism* in African societies especially among their elite. Taiwo confirms that the actually-existing modernity is capitalist modernity, cites some newly-industrialising countries of Asia and Latin America - and even China - to show what can happen to nations and societies when they decide to join the "Modernity Express". Taiwo also uses these same countries to "prove false the Marxian orthodoxy that capitalism could not be built in the so-called periphery" (page 7).

Let me begin with a *clarification*: That a country, like Nigeria, is described - correctly - as capitalist does not mean that capitalism is the only mode of production in its economy. What being a capitalist country means is that the capitalist mode of production dominates, that the capitalist mode has penetrated the remnants of pre-capitalist modes, and that capitalist logic governs the economy as whole.

With this clarification we may go to the so-called "Marxian orthodoxy". Let me admit at once that I have heard some Nigerian Marxists say that the Nigerian economy is not capitalist, that it is something else - a caricature of capitalism, at best. I have always argued that such Marxists are wrong, very wrong. Capitalism has always been, and can only be understood, as, a world system, an organic world system that is structured. It has always had

a *centre* and a *periphery* with unequal relationships. This feature of capitalism cannot be clearer than it is today - thanks to *globalisation*, the *Washington Consensus*, *neoliberalism* and the *computer revolution*.

Nigeria is in the periphery of capitalism together with all the countries Taiwo has cited: South Korea, Philippines, Taiwan, Brazil, India, South Africa, among others. The latter countries were in the capitalist periphery before their "industrialising revolution" began, and they are still there. You may debate how Nigeria can get out of that system, or develop within it. But it is today in it.

The point to be made is that the ruling classes of the "newly industrialising countries of Asia and Latin America" have *re-negotiated*, and are still *re-negotiating*, the terms of their relationships with the ruling classes of the capitalist centre: America, Western Europe and Japan. The factors that enabled each of these countries to embark on its re-negotiation project, and the successes so far scored, can be discussed and debated indefinitely. The prospects of re-negotiation in African countries can also be discussed and debated.

I propose that each country in the periphery needs a renegotiation in this "world system", but would add that in the case of Nigeria and virtually all other countries in Africa, a pre-condition for starting this renegotiation is the replacement of the present totally bankrupt ruling classes by a coalition of social forces that aim at eventually opting out of the system and abolishing capitalism. Africa is not different from the rest of the world (as Taiwo correctly says that many African intellectuals claim). The true situation is that each country on this planet is unique. The combination of the peculiarities of each country with what that country has in common with other countries produces, at each point in time, that country's uniqueness. This uniqueness in turn points to possible roads to meaningful re-negotiation, and eventual disengagement from the capitalist system.

A friend of mine once argued that "anyone can make it in this society". I first refuted his assertion. I told him that not everyone "can make it", but beyond that, that not everyone has "equal opportunity to make it." I told him that I desire a system where everyone has equal opportunity to "make it", and that capitalism is not such a system.

• To be continued next Thursday.

# Opinion

## Notes on the 'modernity perspective' (4)

By Edwin Madunagu

OLUFEMI Taiwo's *Africa must be modern* proposes, and I agree, that the brand of modernity that colonialism brought to Africa was fake, not genuine; that this fake colonialist modernity did not, in particular, come with modern institutions - for advancing democracy, human rights and freedom of thought. But then, these are among the pillars of genuine modernity, which developed in Europe, the colonisers' home.

Africans, Taiwo says, are hostile to modernity because of the latter's historical connection with colonialism (case of "throwing away the baby with the bath water"). He says that Africans, especially its elite and intellectuals, live a *double life* with regard to modernity: their attitudes to modernity are contradictory, hypocritical and selective in the sense that they just pick aspects of modernity that are convenient for them and reject those that are inconvenient or throw challenges. The author argues that Africans largely confuse *modernity* with Westernisation. And I would add: Africans also confuse Westernisation with Imperialism.

In the second segment of this series, I said that *Modernity* confronts me with what I have called *contradictions of progress*. This is what I mean: Chinua Achebe's four novels, *Things fall apart*, *No longer at ease*, *The arrow of God* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, give me successive pictures of an African society just before its encounters with European merchants and Christian missionaries to these encounters, to formal colonialism, to independence, to post-independence civilian administration, down to military dictatorship. This is a long and tortuous movement from primitivity and barbarity. Taking a long view of history, we see that this particular society, and the African continent as a whole, have made tremendous progress.

While not denying the reality of human progress, we also know that there are existence-threatening problems with Nigeria today, and that some of these problems are tied up with elements of progress recorded. The composite picture (of progress and problems) is the *contradictions of progress*. Who is not struck by the contradictions of: coexistence of abject poverty and obscene wealth, hunger and waste; big personal mansions with almost un-

torable access roads; "natives" living in mud houses very close to ultra-modern cement factories; simultaneous increase in crude oil production and prices of petroleum products, and the co-existence of that reality with the virtual destruction of host communities' means of sustaining and reproducing life?

Who is genuinely interested in the future of Africa and will not endorse Taiwo's critique of *state and society* in the continent: abject poverty, anti-science and anti-knowledge culture, corruption, state robbery, ethnicity, religious intolerance and fundamentalism, violence, godfatherism in politics and in bureaucracy, promotion of mediocrity, cultural philistinism and backwardness and socio-economic and political primitivity?

I have already proposed that to go beyond denunciation and move toward acting on Taiwo's manifesto, that is, transforming African societies and modernist features, the manifesto itself has to be liberated from its "idealist and capitalist integument." The point can be put differently: Anyone who has seriously given a thought to the question of radical transformation in Nigeria, or any other country in Africa for that matter, will not have any difficulty in agreeing that you cannot take two steps in implementing Taiwo's manifesto at any level of the civil society or the state before encountering the mighty hand of the capitalist ruling class. Your first step will alarm the real owners of the land and put them on alert; the second step will result in a collision.

You will collide with the powers-that-be unless you are executing the reform programme without lifting, or without a plan to lift, some layers of the state-imposed existential problem burden that the masses presently carry. You will encounter the capitalist power brokers unless you, as "prophet without arms," are planning your "crusade" without a plan to redistribute and re-deploy our national resources. You will encounter them unless you are planning a transformation that will not threaten the sanctity of the "free market" or the "contract system".

Eric Hobsbawm has described the commitment of the ruling class and its government, at all levels, to "handing over human society to the (allegedly) self-controlling and wealth- or even welfare-maximising market, populated (allegedly) by actors in rational pursuit of their interests" as "market fundamentalism", which is

"closer to theology than economic reality".

Taiwo's identification of social agencies to lead the transformation is implicit, rather than explicit, descriptive rather than concrete. He says: "Africa is not lacking in the seed personnel for this transformation. As in all situations of progress, it does not require large numbers to move things forward. But it does require the kind of leadership that has the fortitude to realise the path that the continent is right now will only make us permanent research assistants to the rest of professional community. Such leadership will have to be supported and advised by intellectuals equipped with the right kind of fierce pride and confidence in their abilities; the kind of self-respect that Africans seem to lack at all levels at the present times..." (pages 118-119).

You may see that Taiwo's propositions are *ideologically neutral* in the sense that it is neither *Right nor Left nor Centrist*. In concrete terms, there is no political party or group in Nigeria that will not agree to endorse them. Most will, in fact, be ready to appropriate and integrate them into their programmes and manifestos. They are like *free education*, which can fit into a very broad range of ideological orientations. In the propositions can be found large doses of harmless *nationalism*, which no one will oppose. You will observe this feature runs through Taiwo's *Africa must be modern*: absence of class analysis, even implicit, all we have are *We, Africans, African intellectuals*; among others, we are all to blame. The closest to class analysis is Taiwo's contempt for Africa's "wealthy classes" (page 139).

Chapter Three of *Africa must be modern* is titled: *The knowledge society and its rewards*. A knowledge society, in the sense of Taiwo, is one that is "dedicated to the expansion of the frontiers of knowledge". By this, he does not mean the sponsoring of "only that knowledge that promotes immediate relevance to practical everyday concerns," but also knowledge that may not, or does not seem to have, immediate practical application, but geared towards the "liberation and "cultivation" of the human mind. Incidentally, argues Taiwo, knowledge societies "are often the same societies with more robust economies." (Page 105).

The essence of Chapter Four, titled *Count, measure and count again*, is captured by this statement: "In other words, at the commencement of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and its constituent federated states do not know

roughly how many people inhabit their physical space or how that population is distributed among the units" (Page 127).

In Chapter Five, with the title, *Process*, not outcome, not outcome: *Why trusting your leader, godfather, ethnic group or chief may not best secure your advantage*, Taiwo argues for the "rule of law" and "due process" in place of the "rule of men" and "godfatherism" that currently predominate in African societies.

Chapter six, which is the concluding chapter, is titled *Against the philosophy of limits: instilling a culture of hope*. The chapter summarises and integrates the arguments of the Introduction and the preceding five chapters, and then, denounces the "philosophy of limits" and upholds the "culture of hope". He says on page 204: "We always look, not at what enables us, but what disables us and we agree with our rulers our patrons that Africa's problems can only or ultimately be solved by divine intervention..." This philosophy of resignation Taiwo rejects. I also reject it.

Femi Taiwo says in his *Africa must be modern* that "capitalism is the economic component of modernism" (page viii). But he also says that he embarked on the writing of this book and, of course, on the research which gave rise to the book because he wanted to "equip those who wish to change the world with left interpretations" (page 6). The two statements are not contradictory. For me, he has written a book, which anyone worried by the present sad situation in Africa, in Nigeria - anyone from whatever ideological or political orientation - will benefit from.

In conclusion: *Africa must be modern* implicitly rejects the central claim of my book, *The making and unmaking of Nigeria* (2001), namely, that the "blame" for the state in which Nigeria finds itself today cannot be shared equally between all classes, social groups and segments of society. This was how I put it in that book: "The main feature of Nigerian history, truthfully observed and researched, is that it is a simultaneous process of making and unmaking. In other words, while certain social forces are making and building the country, others are unmaking and dismantling it." (Page 25). Taiwo's rejection of this thesis notwithstanding, I commend and recommend his book, *Africa must be modern*.

• Concluded.