

Reviews and projections

By Edwin Madunagu

is Macebuh's introductory thesis. So there was, and there is, *The African Mind*; in particular, there was, and there is, *The Nigerian Mind*.

For the avoidance of doubt, for completeness, and in the context in which Macebuh applies the term, and according to my own understanding, the philosophical term; *Mind*, can be defined as "intellectual ability"; "the elements or complex of elements in an individual that feels, perceives, thinks, wills, and especially reasons"; "the conscious mental events and capabilities in an organism"; "the organised conscious and unconscious adaptive mental activity of an organism". The term is elastic enough to include, in its definition, "a person or group embodying mental qualities".

First, a general comment. The Euro-American scholars who wrote volumes on *The European Mind* and *The American Mind*, etc, but denied the existence and reality of *The African Mind* and, in particular, *The Nigerian Mind*, were also aware that the American and European societies which they analysed were not homogenous (racially, socially, politically, culturally, ideologically, etc). In spite of this fact, the fact of the European and American societies not being homogeneous, the scholars were still able to write on *The European Mind* and *The American Mind* in the singular – that is, not MINDS, but MIND. And we understand them, or seem to understand them. It is in that sense, and with that understanding that we approach the terms, *The African Mind* and, in particular, *The Nigerian Mind* which is Macebuh's concern in his essay. The last observation can put more directly: The Nigerian society is fundamentally non-homogeneous; but in spite of this we can speak of this abstraction, this product of intellectual exertion on complex reality called *The Nigerian Mind*.

The general point I have just made can be

broken down and pursued further. Nigeria came into existence at the turn of the nineteenth century. The name itself was coined about 1900. Before then one could speak of the African Mind, but not of *The Nigerian Mind*. Instead there were Hausa Mind, Fulani Mind, Igbo Mind, Yoruba Mind, Urhobo Mind, Tiv Mind, Efik Mind, etc. Indeed some intellectuals would even argue that before mid-19th century, in relation to the Yorubas, for instance, one could speak only of Egba Mind, Ijesha Mind, Ekiti Mind, etc. Even today, one could still talk of these minds and many people are proposing geopolitical and ethnic nationality restructuring on the bases of certain differences including differences of "minds". I have recently read an old essay by the prominent Nigerian historian, Obaro Ikemi, affirming the existence of *The Isoko Mind*, as different from *The Urhobo Mind*. None of these submissions is contentious; but it is necessary to state them – for completeness.

Furthermore, without disputing the existence, or derogating from the reality, of *The Nigerian Mind* today, we may legitimately apply terms like *Bourgeois Mind*, *Proletarian Mind*, *Feminine Mind*, *Masculine Mind*, etc – not to speak of *Adult Mind* and *Youthful Mind* – to contemporary Nigeria. Let me round off this segment of my comment by making a potentially contentious leap: Whenever we speak of *Mind* in an intellectual excursion we have behind our own minds a social category, or class, or subclass, that is the embodiment, or claims to be the embodiment, or aspires to be the embodiment, of that *Mind*. Marxists are not afraid to make this type of claim and will point at the working people as the potential embodiment of the *Nigerian Mind* – bearing fully in mind that *The Nigerian Mind*, like *Human Nature*,

is no static, but dynamic. I may not pursue this point further in this piece, except to say that my leap is informed by my understanding, hitherto, and Stanley Macebuh's application and implicit illustration of the term.

With this general comment, which is an appreciation of Macebuh's introduction to his 3-part essay – covering the first four paragraphs of the first part – I shall proceed more or less systematically with the body of his discussion. Macebuh's first proposition prepares the reader for one of his main punches. It says "Violence as a means of settling political disputes was always there in our history, but we must never forget that the weapons which the heroes of our Independence struggle employed in their confrontation with the British colonial master were not, in the main, the ordinary weapons of war but the weapons of the mind...". He goes on to elaborate, but there is no deviation from the position embodied in the segment I have just quoted.

One of the elaborations, made further down, is that "it is amazing, is it not, that very seldom; if at all, do we find in the writings of Zik and Awo and the Sardauna any concession to the supposed redemptive value of violence as an instrument of political agitation". Then the punch: *But the soldiers changed all that*" (emphasis mine). Macebuh blunted my own weapon against his proposition with the phrase "in the main", an attitude of mind that he maintained – except in few instances – throughout his essay. However, I would still say that Macebuh's implied and an actual concession to the presence of "violence" in Nigeria's Independence struggle was not strong enough. His mention of the Tiv crisis is however noted.

Yes. The Constitutional Leaders of our Independence struggle, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo and Ahmadu Bello, the

Sarduana of Sokoto, did not make concessions to violence. But many of those inspired directly by them did. With particular reference to Zik, we should not forget that although the militant nationalist organisation, the Zikist Movement, had, as its advertised objective, the "defence and dissemination of the message of Zik against his enemies – the colonialists and their local petty – bourgeois allies, and apologists", what, to my mind, actually brought it into existence on February 16, 1946 was the need to protect Zik physically against assassination. The plot was real, and Zik himself believed it.

The Zikist Movement was, perhaps, the strongest militant nationalist political organisation in Nigeria Between 1946 and early 1950 when it was proscribed by the colonial power. It was proscribed not for sedition – for which its leaders and activists were routinely jailed – but for sabotage. It was blamed for the widespread violence which occurred in several cities in colonial Eastern Nigeria following the November 18, 1949 Enugu coalmine shooting. We may also record – in defence of history, and not in praise of violence – that the Zikist Movement in its foundational document, as reported in the 1979 edition of Mokwugo Okoye's *A Letter to Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe* (1955), was fully prepared for "terrorism" and "sabotage".

Having made my point, I would agree with Macebuh's proposition on the place of violence in our anti-colonial struggle. I would also agree that the military "changed all that" on January 15, 1966. But let me also play safe like Macebuh and add "in the main". I may also add that at some points between October 1, 1960 when Nigeria became independent, and January 15, 1966, when the army intervened, several political formations in Nigeria seriously considered initiating armed struggle. I can affirm that the military intervention of December 30, 1983, aborted the preparation for an armed struggle – in response to the rigging of the August 1983 general elections. As I had earlier said, this is in defence of history, not in praise of violence.

• *To be continued.*

THE period under review is the year 2009, more specifically its last quarter. The subject matter is Nigerian politics, or more specifically, ideas generated in Nigerian politics. Not all ideas, of course; but just a selection. I may have to state the objective of the exercise. I believe that this country, as an entity, can still be redeemed – for its peoples, for Africa and for the world – if I may borrow the term "redeem" from our Christian compatriots. For this mission, we need ideas, as many as we can access.

I consider it appropriate to begin with an appreciation of Stanley Macebuh's three-part essay, *The Nigerian Mind*, published in his *ThisDay* column, *Mediations*, on October 25, November 1, and November 8, 2009. It was a thoughtful and brilliant essay. I first encountered Stanley Macebuh sometime in the second half of the 1970s through his polemical essay, *The Red Matador*, published, if I remember correctly, in the *Page Seven* column of *Daily Times*. It was a sharp confrontation with a Leftist intellectual-activist, a Comrade of mine, on one of the University campuses in the southern part of the country. In that piece Macebuh was angry-very angry – with what he considered his adversary's ideological intolerance and therefore, political and intellectual narrowness. I benefited from Macebuh's attack, but sided with my Comrade. You will say "of course", and I will not respond. I later met, and served under, Macebuh at *The Guardian*.

Macebuh started his essay with a tribute to William Abraham, a Ghanaian intellectual teaching in Oxford, who, in the 1950s, wrote a book, *The Mind of Africa*. He considered Abraham's book "seminal" and of "special significance for Africans, in particular", because Euro-American scholars who had written "massive volumes" on *The European Mind*, *The American Mind*, etc, did not believe that Africa, still dominantly under colonial bondage, had any "authentic history". The continent "could not therefore have a mind worth of rigorous scholarly study". Abraham's books helped to shatter that arrogant, but racist, proposition. That

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THE second core proposition of Macebuh's essay is embodied in the opening paragraph of the second part. It says: "The classical, post-colonial Nigerian mind was a liberal mind, not a conservative one. The formal culture of the Republic which we inherited from our founding fathers was a predominantly liberal culture, suitably illustrated in the 1979 Constitution". (The Nigerian Mind, *ThisDay*, November 1, 2009). I agree that the 1979 Nigerian Constitution can be described as a liberal document. But this declaration can be made confidently only if the document is detached from the concrete socio-historical reality of Nigeria in 1979, and particularly from the popular needs and demands of the time. However, if the document is placed against the concrete socio-historical reality, it will be seen to be less than liberal.

In defence of history, however, let me testify that a senior Comrade of mine strongly argued at a time during the Second Republic (1979-1983), when the 1979 Constitution was supposed to operate, that if Nigerian Marxists and revolutionary socialists were serious, a lot of useful political work could be done using that Constitution. I would hasten to add that this Comrade was not, and is not, a "reformist" or a "revisionist". He was, and remains, a revolutionary socialist and was, in his view, only eager to pull the movement away from mere "sloganeering". I shall return to this point.

Macebuh's third core proposition says: "Two countervailing impulses, the liberal tradition and the culture of violence, represent the major antagonisms struggling for supremacy in the Nigerian mind today. And but for the intervention of a third, less vocal but more systematically argued impulse, that is, the leftist radical impulse in Nigerian thought, the liberal tradition would by now have become extinct in Nigeria. And that is the supreme irony". If Macebuh had ended his essay at this point, without the necessary elaboration, I would simply have endorsed the proposi-

tion with humility. But ending it there would have been damaging to his beautiful essay and to himself as an intellectual. So, he had to elaborate. And a response has to be given.

The elaboration of Macebuh's third major proposition goes thus: "Radicalism tends to be more comfortable with the creative possibilities of violence as a political tool. It is seldom at home with the opioms of liberal thought. But because of the global collapse of Marxist vision of existence, and the domestic threats against a humanistic vision of life in Nigeria posed by a burgeoning culture of violence, such radical writers and thinkers such as the late Claude Ake and Omofume Onogwe, and Eddie Madunagu and Biodun Jeyifo, to name only a few, have been obliged to strike a strategic alliance with the liberal persuasion, if only to rescue the only society we do have from the ravages of the priests of violence".

Two general points before we go to the elaboration proper. Elsewhere in his essay Macebuh integrated the concept of violence: it now extends from violence as: "political tool", possessing "creative possibilities", which leftist radicals allegedly endorse, or used to endorse and employ, to corruption, election rigging, impunity, and to "all forms of brigandage, armed robbery, kidnapping, and perverse forms of militancy". Indeed, according to Macebuh, anything that subverts the "social order" is violence. This is a very perceptive and holistic definition which is at once political, social and philosophical. The second general point is an observation: the near-absence of, or degraded status accorded, class perspective. No socio-economic or socio-political category is mainly responsible for anything! I insert this observation here only, again, for the sake of completeness - because I don't think that this absence is either new or accidental in Macebuh.

Now, to Macebuh's elaboration of his third proposition. It is simply not true that the "Marxist vision of existence" collapsed. Defeat in battle, or even war, is no verdict on vision - absolutely or relatively. The more visionary is not always the victor. Or else, how do we explain tragedies - in real life or in fiction? The "Marxist vision of existence" did *not* collapse. But something very tragic - to use a mild term - happened. Late Joe Slovo, former General Secretary, and then Chairman, of the Communist Party of South Africa, and Minister under Nelson Mandela, described the events of the second half of 1989 in Eastern Europe as "*popular revolts against unpopular regimes*", and then warned: "*If socialists are unable to come to terms with this reality, the future of socialism is indeed bleak*" (emphasis mine).

Joe Slovo wrote before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The case of the Soviet Union was a classical one: a total collapse of the state before it was captured - or rather collected - by a counter, but popular, revolution. How else do we explain a situation where a ruling elite could not remove its President - who was on vacation - when it had total control of all the apparatuses of state - political, military, communication, security, judicial - as well as trade union formations and the bureaucracy. So a monumental tragedy took place. The effect was devastating and global because it involved the collapse of a super-power and a global system that was historically still an "underdog". The structures (not vision!) that collapsed claimed to be informed by Marxism. That was a big lie. In any case, their collapse did not bring down the "Marxist vision of existence".

The formation of "political alliances", either strategic or tactical, is, and has always been, a categorical imperative in Marxist politics.

I am categorical. Macebuh's observation of current development of "strategic alliances" between radical leftists and liberals in Nigeria is perceptive and correct. He is also correct that this new situation has been informed by considerations including the threat to liberalism in Nigeria. But not the "collapse of Marxist vision of society". There was a big organisational challenge for the Radical Movement in 1950, in response to which several radical nationalists moved into the "Constitutional" Parties. But there was no "collapse". In 1964, leftist formations went into the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) - deliberately, and not in response to a collapse. In 1982, some radical leftists lined up behind Zik, some others marched behind Awo. They did all these, rightly or wrongly, but not in response to a "collapse".

On the question of violence and its alleged "creative possibilities", I start by affirming that Marxism *recognises* that the state - any type of state - is violence. And every struggle against the state, or within the state, is violent - almost by definition: With Macebuh's adoption of a holistic definition of violence, these two declarations cannot be contentious. But this does not mean that Marxism or Marxist politics *advocates* violence. There is a world of difference between *recognition* and *advocacy*. The former simply informs the organisation of Marxist *political* struggle: It should suffer no illusion, and must be prepared to defend itself against state violence and in exceptional cases to take pre-emptive action (including running away!) against forces preparing to launch violence against it. Only a tree, we are told, learns of the approach of an axeman and remains where it is.

Of all the major Marxist theorists of armed struggle that I have studied - Mao Zedong of China, General Giap of

Vietnam, Frantz Fanon of the Algerian Revolution, Che Guevara of the Cuban, Congolese and Bolivian Revolutions, and his French biographer, Regis Debray, etc - only Frantz Fanon talked of the purifying power of revolutionary violence for the oppressed or what Macebuh called "creative possibilities of violence". He was the only one - to the best of my knowledge - who raised the question of revolutionary violence in general to the level of categorical imperative. Nigerian Marxists do not believe that revolutionary violence in general, or armed struggle in particular, is a categorical imperative. But I am categorical that groups of Nigerian Marxists, at various points in our history, actively prepared for armed struggle.

Macebuh's fourth major proposition is a projection and is embodied in the concluding paragraph of the second part of his essay. It is based on his concept of *categorical poverty* which he described as the "lowest form of poverty" and "that condition of existence in which there does not appear to be any meaningful relationship between the state and the citizen, in terms of the presumed obligations of the state to its citizens". His fourth thesis says that to defeat the cult of violence and impunity, the current alliances between "humane liberalism" and "radical leftism" will have to be continued, and strengthened, or categorical poverty will have to vanish, somehow. He is not too optimistic.

Macebuh does not consider a third possibility: the victory of "radical leftism" which will deal a single blow to both "categorical poverty" and the "cult of violence and impunity". In spite of this, I think the Left could work for the realisation of the first scenario. In general, I am impressed by Macebuh's perspective on, and analysis of, "categorical poverty". I agree that the latter is used as justification for much of the violence we see today in Nigeria. Beyond "justification", however, I see categorical poverty as the root cause of much of the "senseless" violence that has become a frightening feature of our national life.

I am resting my appreciation of Macebuh's essay for the time being, but will be continuing with my Reviews and projections.