

READING through Reuben Abati's article, *Where are the Marxists?*, published in *The Guardian* of Friday, January 21, 2000, I felt there was a public duty to respond to some of the issues he touched upon. But in deciding to enter this response, I cautioned myself against abusing the forum by, for instance, writing what he would label a "Marxist article". My public duty is to answer and explain, as simply and effectively as I can, not to defend or polemicise. Three months before Abati's article appeared, another writer, Wale Okediran, had contributed in this same newspaper, an opinion article which was titled *Marx: Not the millennium man* (October 24, 1999), a response to my earlier essay on Karl Marx. The articles by Abati and Okediran are complementary. Incidentally, I am sentimental about my relationships with these younger, but very bright, friends of mine. Abati was my former colleague on the Editorial Board of *The Guardian* and a first-class student in the university where I had taught. Okediran was a brilliant student of mine in the high school. I cannot pretend to be teaching them now; I can only respond, in public interest, to the questions they had raised.

Reuben Abati began his article with the questions "Where are the Marxists?" and ended with Karl Marx? Candidly, who is that? Let me expand and extend the questions: Who are these Nigerians called Marxists? What are they? What are their relationships with Nigeria and Nigerians? I answer and say that Nigerian Marxists are Nigerians; they are not aliens. In fact most of them are from the interior parts of the country where it is not easy to confuse them with alien refugees or illegal immigrants. These are, however, objective facts, accidents of birth, so to say, over which they have no control. To strengthen the objective facts we have the subjective credentials: Nigerian Marxists are conscious and committed nationalists and patriots. Therefore the nationality and citizenship of Nigerian Marxists cannot be in

Understanding Nigerian Marxists

By Edwin Madunagu

Let us now make an analogy which I hope will not be offensive Christians. I am only trying to make myself understood by using a popular subject. Jesus Christ was born, and did his work, in what is now known as the Middle-East. Shortly after his death his followers started missionary work in that region. They were first called Christians in Antioch. Eventually Rome became the headquarters of the movement. From here the faith spread to all the corners of the world, including Nigeria. Today, the Christian faith is embraced by hundreds of millions of adherents worldwide. Now, my questions: If a Nigerian Christian defends Christianity, is it legitimate to charge him or her with defending Nazareth, Jerusalem, Antioch or Rome? If a Nigerian Christian goes on missionary work, can he or she be accused of trying to create Nazareth, Jerusalem, Antioch or Rome in Nigeria? I shall answer my own question and say "no". The Nigerian Christian is only trying to transform his or her society using a system of beliefs which has become universal because it has a universal history. If Nazareth, Jerusalem, Antioch or Rome renounces Christianity, or is alleged to have renounced Christianity, in what ways is the Nigerian Christian message affected, and to what extent does Nigerian Christianity lose credibility? I shall answer my own question and say: "in no way at all". What I have said about Christianity and Nigerian Christians goes for Marxism and Nigerian Marxists. There is nothing to add except to note this difference: There are no sacred texts and no heresy in the marxist movement although internal disagreements can be violent; there is no adoration, no worship.

The struggle against social injustice and oppression has been going on since the emergence of human society; in other words, social struggle is as old as the hu-

man society itself and can be taken as a defining characteristic of that society. From time to time, this continuous and global struggle produces exceptional figures in different parts of the world, who give the struggle, or aspects of it, a qualitative leap through their intellectual, moral, practical or organisational contribution and leadership. Such exceptional figures and their works and deeds immediately become the property of humanity as a whole. This appropriation of regional human achievement by the entire humanity is a characteristic of humanity as a specie and social being. There is no mystery about that. This was how the exceptional figure called Karl Marx emerged less than 200 years ago in Germany in the struggle of proletarians, or wage-workers, against the capitalists and the capitalist mode of production (called capitalism) and the various forms of despotic state authorities (spiritual and temporal) that served them. Having emerged, Marx became the property of humanity, and will remain so. Humanity, we are reminded, never gives up any conquest until the circumstances which gave rise to it are exhausted and transcended.

That was how, in Africa, Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Ahmadu Bello, Obafemi Awolowo, the Zikist militant nationalists, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, Nelson Mandela, among others, emerged in the struggle of African peoples against colonialism and neo-colonialism; that was how Eskor Toyo, Ola Oni, Bala Usman, Dapo Fatogun, Wahab Goodluck, Tunji Otegbeye, Aminu Kano, Joseph Tarka, etc., emerged in the struggle of the Nigerian people, after independence, against forms of internal oppression, that is, the oppression of Nigerians by Nigerians. The Nigerian crisis threw up Chukwuma Nzeogwu, Ifeajuna, Ademoyega; the Civil War threw up Yakubu Gowon and Ojukwu; and the current ethnic nationalism has

thrown up Ganiyu Adams and others.

How do I define Marxism in such a way that two opposite dangers—mystification and distortion—are avoided? I may have to adopt Samir Amin's 24-year old definition and describe Marxism as the anti-capitalist social science of workers' liberation and socialist revolution. As a social science Marxism has continued to grow. Marxists are adherents of that social science initiated by Marx; Nigerian Marxists are Nigerians who subscribe to Marxism. Just as Kepler, Galileo, Newton, Einstein and a couple of Nigerians, separated by geography and time, are all physicists, regardless of this separation, so are Nigerian Marxists in the year 2000, French Marxists of 1968 and Russian Marxists of 1930 etc., are all Marxists regardless of separation by geography, time and the different levels of development of Marxism. Contrary to popular perception, only a small fraction of Nigerian Marxists have been educated "in Europe, America, but significantly in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe". For instance, I had all my education here in Nigeria and visited the Soviet Union only in 1990 for two weeks as a journalist working in *The Guardian*. It was the same year I visited New York for five days. I have not left the shores of Nigeria since then.

Marxism, as an ideology, is not dead as some writers claim. And I want to say, by way of general information, that once an ideology rises from historical and material circumstances, it will remain alive as long as those circumstances are alive and as long as that particular ideology is anchored to the reality of those circumstances. Capitalism, in opposition to which Marxism arose, is still there with all its characteristics; its victims are there. The contradictions are there, so is the exploitation, poverty and misery. Absolute and relative poverty is growing. Regional disparities and gaps between nations and within nations are growing. The number of people below the pov-

erty line world-wide is growing in absolute and relative terms. In every continent of the world, in every region, in every country, including those countries ruled by castes fundamentally opposed to Marxism, the Marxist ideology lives with concrete manifestations including: human adherents, political parties, mass organisations, ideological influences in the educational system, publications, armed and unarmed rebellions, representation or presence in institutions including state institutions. A socialist has just won the presidential election in Chile more than 26 years after Augusto Pinochet and his imperialist backers proclaimed the ideology dead. Marxism is alive in Nigeria, and effectively so. The world has of course witnessed rapid changes in the balance of ideological and political forces in the past one decade. The marxist ideology has also lost grounds globally and nationally. But this is not strange in human history which is punctuated by waves and cycles.

The strange life-styles and mannerisms associated with Nigerian marxists are products of their confrontation with reality. They are products of contradictions and live in contradictions: They reject the present order of things—something only symbolically—but they are in it. They have one foot in the present and the other in a future that is not well defined and cannot be well defined. They reject capitalism, but they reproduce their lives and carry on their struggle in the capitalist political economy. They know what culture, traditions and family are and the social roles played by them; but they are in those institutions. I may add here that, in general, any genuine revolutionary must be a bundle of contradictions. There is only one solution to the oddity of Nigerian Marxists—indeed of all revolutionaries: the revolution. There are, of course, opportunists and careerists in the marxist movement, just as in the larger society. The difference however is that in this movement, these weaknesses are regarded as such, and battled.