



Published by the College of Social and  
Management Sciences (SMS), Afe Babalola  
University, Ado-Ekiti (ABUAD), Nigeria.  
E-mail: [ajsms@abuad.edu.ng](mailto:ajsms@abuad.edu.ng)

e-ISSN: 3043-4173

---

## **The Nigerian Peasantry and Impediments to a Socialist Revolution: Will the Military Support a Workers' Insurrection?**

---

Praise F. DUYILE<sup>1</sup>  
Nenpomingyi S.G. ADELABU<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract**

The socialism so far propagated in Africa has not had as much impact as it ought to. There remains a lack of social consciousness among the majority of ordinary people. Granted that the capitalist mode of production inherited from colonialism is largely to blame, it is still important to mention that African politicians and their academic henchmen have subverted even the indigenous political system into a viciously exploitative and repressive one. This paper focused on colonial rule in Nigeria as the advent of capitalist exploitation and how it was sustained by Nigerian comprador politicians. It investigated the level of revolutionary fervour among the working class and identified worker alienation and the burgeoning reserved army of labour as impediments to the dictatorship of the proletariat predicted by Karl Marx. The study also explored the potential involvement of the military in a workers' revolution. It found that, despite the Nigerian military's historical ties to imperial control over civilians, its members are not insulated from the systemic injustices and poverty affecting society. Consequently, they might choose to align with workers advocating for socioeconomic change that could also benefit them.

**Keywords:** Socialist Revolution, Capitalism, Proletariat, Alienation, Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Political Science, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna, Nigeria.

*Corresponding author's e-mail:* [praiseduyile@nda.edu.ng](mailto:praiseduyile@nda.edu.ng)

*ORCID:* <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3143-3779>

<sup>2</sup> Department of Political Science, University of Jos, Nigeria.

*ORCID:* <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2077-2740>

## **Introduction**

There has been a lot of conversations and debates recently about civil liberties, quality of life, and citizen repression by the state all over the world. Recently, Nigeria was thrown into a 17-day youth protest called #EndSARS against police brutality and poor governance. The protest resulted in a bloody state repression, with at least 12 out of the thousands of “dissenters” who were brave enough to oppose the state being killed (Akinwotu, November 1, 2021). Therefore, this study is critical for understanding the socioeconomic conditions of the Nigerian peasantry and the prospects of a socialist revolution in Nigeria.

The narrative of this study centers on the struggles and contradictions between the ruling class and the oppressed masses, especially the workers, who are stuck in their manifold states of alienation. The Nigerian peasantry, which constitutes a significant portion of the country's population, is subject to various forms of exploitation and suppression, including poverty, exclusion, police brutality, and low or unpaid wages. These conditions have been exacerbated by neoliberal, neocolonial, and predatory elite policies that have resulted in the privatization and misappropriation of public resources, as well as the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few elites.

A Marxist view of the Nigerian working class suggests that while there is a working class in Nigeria, there is no revolutionary working class. And the likelihood that such a class will ever emerge on its own, in the strict functional or historical sense, seems very remote, even for many decades to come. Several reasons account for the lack of revolutionary consciousness among Nigerian workers in the face of the contradictions in the capitalist and imperialist relations of production. Nigeria is dealing profoundly with an increasing size of the proletariat, and that is without the Marxist assumption of workers' unity and power.

Although there is a clear sense of general disenchantment among the impoverished majority with the prevailing brazen and brutal exploitation by the bourgeoisies, the workers do not possess even the slightest attributes that would enable them to articulate themselves in anything like a revolutionary movement as envisaged by Karl Marx. Should they muster the will for a revolution, will the Nigerian military provide support? Given that the organic origin of the Nigerian military takes its roots in British colonial domination, oppression, and repression, has it changed over time?

Despite these challenges, there is hope for a socialist revolution in Nigeria, especially among the teeming and increasingly conscious youths. However, the road to revolution is fraught with impediments, including the lack of a revolutionary

vanguard, the influence of bourgeois ideology, and the suppression of dissent by the ruling class. Thus, the critical question that arises is whether the military would support a workers' insurrection. The Nigerian military has a long history of intervention in politics and has been known to support reactionary regimes. This makes it crucial to consider the role of the military in any revolutionary struggle in Nigeria. After all, they are not isolated from the derogations and impoverishment of the system themselves.

The configuration of imperialism, dependency, and underdevelopment, according to Nwosu (1984), necessarily sets the stage for and equally justifies a socialist revolution, whether or not local capitalism is autonomously mature. This is perhaps reflective of what V.I. Lenin (1916) meant when he wrote that “imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism” (cited in Callinicos, 2010). Lenin, on the other hand, did not consider the military’s possible role in the context of how cruel the state’s modern military hardware could be to local hungry workers and their families, who do not have the capacity for reprisal or defence.

This study is structured into five sections, each critically engaging with Nigeria’s socio-political conditions through a Marxist-Leninist lens. The first segment provides a conceptual review, clarifying fundamental terminologies and theoretical constructs that guide the discourse. The second segment interrogates the historical roots of capitalist exploitation in Nigeria, examining how colonial policies institutionalised economic subjugation and class stratification. The third segment explores the post-colonial era, focusing on the emergence of a comprador bourgeoisie whose collaboration with external capitalist forces perpetuated economic dependency and socio-political inequalities. The fourth segment delves into the revolutionary consciousness of the Nigerian working class, analysing the extent to which structural impediments have stifled the prospects of a workers’ dictatorship. The final segment examines the military’s role in the revolutionary struggle, questioning its potential neutrality or alignment with progressive forces. This structured approach offers a dialectical synthesis of Nigeria’s historical and contemporary revolutionary dynamics.

## Conceptual Review of Literature

### *Peasantry*

The term “peasant,” as simple as it may sound, is susceptibly amorphous. This is because it is open to multiple conceptualizations. Historically, the peasantry refers to rural farm workers, either as serfs or as smallholders and labourers of low social status, often with reference to subsistence farming, non-mechanized technology, and family labour (Ogbeide, 2007). According to Chakrabarti & Cullenberg (2015), the peasantry, conceived as personifying the rural, is considered backward and regressive

in comparison to social actors in other classes of modern society, like the bourgeois and industrial working class. However, this historical obsolescence has been challenged by many scholars, like Shanin (1971) and Wolff (1966); they contested the need to position the peasantry in a thorough and less degrading way. Due to these debates, many scholars associate the subject of peasantry with third-world nations.

In pre-Soviet Russia, the peasantry was defined as belonging to a distinct, non-capitalist economy called a “peasant mode of production.” This mode of production is based on the family, the farm, and free labour (Chayanov, 1966, cited in Chakrabarti and Cullenberg, 2015). Therefore, the “what” and “who” in conceptualizing the peasantry evolve through different historical suppositions. However, in a general context, it refers to the poor and class consciousness. In modern times, it can also be used as a collective noun for rural populations in poor and developing countries, and is often interchangeable with “masses,” “workers,” or “farmers.”

### ***Revolution***

The meaning of “revolution” is dynamic, ambiguous, and controversial. Its connotation evolves from time to time and from society to society. The term is often erroneously interchanged with regime change, protests, political violence, and civil wars. Robert MacIver argues that the assassination of a president or king would not constitute a revolution, especially if it were inspired by personal motives (Appadorai, 2004). How, then, can a revolution be defined? Johari (2012) brilliantly asserts, “We have seen that the people obey the state if the authority, in their view, is legitimate; otherwise, they may overthrow it.” This perhaps suggests that most revolutions are prompted by the widespread illegitimacy of the government and government policies. A revolution, according to Nwosu (1984), connotes a deep schism with the state, which reveals a pathological condition of political will.

A revolution, according to Huntington (1961, p. 264), is “a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society.” In a rather more methodological definition, Moore (1963, p. 81) defines a revolution as a kind of violent change that “engages a considerable portion of the population and results in a change in the structure of government.” This means that revolutions are not just political but also economic, social, and cultural. Owing to the varying perceptions of what constitutes revolution, Gurr (1970, p. 5, cited in Gurr, 2011), typologizes the distinction between revolution and lesser forms of violence as the degree of organization, the scale of violence, and the focus of violence.

In classical usage, “revolution” was used as an umbrella term to include rebellion and civil war. As Calvert put it, “we are therefore left with the conclusion that

revolution among the ancient Egyptians was regarded officially and generally as being rebellious...” (Calvert, 1970, p. 25, cited in Yenicirak, 2021). The French Revolution established a largely modern context for revolution: a radical change in society accompanied by a new dawn (Goran, 2008, cited in Yenicirak, 2021).

In Marxism, a socialist revolution occurs when the proletariat captures the powers of the state as well as the crucial means of production; and as a matter of necessity, the capitalist structures and powers must remain forcibly suppressed to avoid a counter-revolution, so that the course of the revolution is permanent and eventually, the state will wither away (Das, 2022). The ideological thoughts of Lenin, Stalin, and Trosky on the socialist revolution were both convergent and divergent. In classical Marxism, there are conditions that precede a socialist revolution, referred to as pre-revolutionary conditions. They are: first, wide-spread exploitation and repression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. Second, there is a growing a social consciousness and revolutionary fervour among the peasants. Third, an organized public labour force (public servants and farmers). And fourth, a strong Marxist revolutionary party or workers’ union, preparing for armed insurrection against the exploitation and repression of the state (Moreno 2016).

The conditions that necessitated (socialist) revolutions in Europe, China, Latin America, and even Africa, are significantly different and yet similar. In the Latin-American context, feudal exploitation and imperial invasion were the major agitations. For Che Guevara, as long as there is prevalent exploitation and rising revolutionary fervour, all other pre-revolutionary conditions can be instigated (Bearman, 1984 cited in Das, 2022). Inversely, African societies have experienced similar pre-revolutionary conditions: feudal-capitalist exploitations, particularly during colonial domination, and rising revolutionary consciousness in a rentier-capitalist economic system. Thus, there were hardly any Marxist revolutionary formations in readiness for the armed dictatorship of the proletariat, essentially because revolutionary consciousness among workers was feeble. Individual vanguards like Muammer Ghaddafi, Julius Nyerere, and Kwame Nkrumah, among others, only tried to stir up a people’s (cultural) revolution (Bearman, 1984; Sanga, 2020). This study then upholds that a true revolution must involve the generality of the masses to realize systemic changes that have great sociopolitical transformations on an entire civilization.

### **Marxist-Leninist Theoretical Approach**

Karl Marx studied the social relations prevalent in capitalist societies and observed the anomalies inherent in them. His observations spawned several theoretical postulations, including capitalist accumulation, historical and dialectical materialism, and alienation theories. The study adopts a fluid eclecticism of these theories, though

it focuses predominantly on the theory of alienation. According to Karl Marx, capitalism is the main driving force of world economic relations. And in capitalist societies, “there is a constant class struggle between the haves (bourgeoisies) and the have-nots (proletariats)” (Marx and Engels, 1848, p. 1). In his study of the exploitative conditions of workers in the relations of production, he realized capitalism was built on a logic that would ultimately result in contradiction—dialectical materialism, a crisis that would inevitably lead to the collapse of capitalism. Thus, he predicted, “a specter is haunting Europe, the specter of communism” (Marx and Engels, 1848; Ryan-Lloyd, 2023).

One significant aspect of Marx’s thought is his writing on alienation in capitalist societies. The Marxian theory of alienation sought to explain how individuals in capitalist societies have lost their understanding and control of the world around them and, in the process, have been “stunted and perverted into something less than a full human being” (Ogbeide, 2007, p. 130). Thus, he argued that the source of all alienation lies in the process of labour. To Marx, alienation means that individuals no longer have an immediate relationship with their environment. They have been “specialized and sorted, made into the most wretched of commodities, divorced from the product they produced, slipped into the roles of mental workers and manual workers, town people and rural people, divided into dominant and subordinate classes, thrown into selfish competition with one another” (Ogbeide, 2007, p. 128).

The result of alienation, therefore, is the loss of personal identity and the transference of individual essential powers to others and things, even to commodities. Alienation, Marx contends, is the negation of mass productivity, the elimination of one’s power (Meszaros, 1970). Marx saw human beings in capitalist societies as alienated not only from the products of their labour but also from others and from themselves. This implies that workers in a capitalist system lose control over their products, are pitted against their fellow workers, and are stripped of their most essential rights. Workers, in their alienated state, believe that power resides outside of them in the product they have actually fashioned, thus almost destroying themselves before the commodity world. In the same way, a religious person might fashion a wooden idol with his own hands, kneel before it, transfer his own power to it, and thus reduce himself to less than a full human being in his manifold alienated state. Thus, people lose their inner-selves and become passive. They allow themselves to be directed by outside powers that they neither control nor want to control. They subject themselves willingly to manipulation; they have a sense of powerlessness and, thus, cannot act effectively (Ogbeide, 2007; Nwosu, 1984).

At first, Karl Marx did not believe that capitalism was the original cause of alienation, because alienation existed before capitalism, but under capitalism,



alienation in all its forms is maximized (Nwosu, 1984). This explains the fact that there was alienation in the old Greek city-states; between citizens and slaves; within the feudal societies; and between the lords and serfs (Marx and Engels, 1848, 13). However, the alienation characterized by the proletariat and bourgeois can be said to be the worst form of alienation. As a result, the bourgeois see alienation as a symbol of their own power, whereas the proletariat feels destroyed in this helpless web of alienation. The bourgeoisie, according to Meszaros (1970) and Ogbeide (2007), do not want this fact revealed, but the proletariat has a special interest in discovering the truth, which would be critical in developing a true revolutionary consciousness against it.

At this progressive juncture, it is important to emphasize Marx's analysis of the reserved army of labour. They are an essential component of capitalism – a relatively redundant population that expands and contracts in response to the demands of the system (Collins, 1984; Das, 2022). They are wage labour that is continually replenished and available for work at wage levels. Marx and Engel (1848), opined that the reserved-army-of-labour dilemma is responsible for the urbanization of the means of production; “a heaping together of the labourers within a given space.” So, “the swifter the capitalistic accumulation, the more miserable are the dwellings of the working people” (Marx and Engels, 1848:458, cited in Das, 2022)

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known as Lenin, significantly extended Marx's ideas. He never met Karl Marx in person, but was an ardent reader, scholar, and student of Marx. He was born in Russia and engaged in revolutionary activities for which he spent time in prison and exile in Siberia. He spent over a decade abroad before returning to Russia in 1917 to lead the first Soviet government after the Bolshevik Revolution. Lenin sought to assess how the capitalist mode of production had remained resilient to the crisis predicted by Marx. His most popular work is “In Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism” (1916) (Cullenberg, 2015 cited in Lane, 2020).

Lenin specifically elaborated on Marx's concepts of capitalist accumulation and dialectical materialism, wherein he buttressed that imperialism and conflict were endemic to capitalism. He argued that as capitalism's profits (surplus values) accumulated in the most advanced states, the drive for new and more profits and markets would lead capitalists to export capital abroad. And so, governments, through imperialism and the extension of empires, result in rivalry and conflict between states over potential colonial territories. Lenin agreed with Marx that capitalism had inherent contradictions, but that imperialism was another stage of historical development necessary before its downfall. Thus, Lenin extended Marx's thoughts beyond

nationalism and into the frontiers of international political economy (Vladimir Lenin, 1917, Das, 2022).

As accounted for by Emile Burns (1939), Lenin asserted that imperialism is a policy of expansionism, the pursuit of wealth beyond one's confines or territory. Although various (western) writers have argued that imperialism was a movement purposely in search of food, security, land, and other essentials, to that end, Lenin reiterated that capitalists and their evils are what make people leave their countries in the first place, that the capitalists' and capitalist nations' monopoly on capital had grown so much that it could no longer be controlled within their home-economies and had to be invested in other economies (cited in Ogbeide, 2007).

Prior to the transnationalization of capitalism, there were many small-scale industries that produced basic handcrafts, but Britain, being the first country in the world industrialize, started steel production, steamships, railways, and the like. Then smaller industries folded up, while others were absorbed by these emerging industries, which soon took over production as demand for sophisticated products increased. This marked the beginning of industrial expansion. The few industrial giants consolidate their monopoly of the means of production by instituting trade links, price fixing, and other means to ensure their monopolistic hold remains unthreatened. Lenin's extension of Marx's thoughts explains how colonial rule in Africa led to the rise of capitalism (Lane, 2020).

Towing the Leninist line of thought, Nigerian scholar and Neo-Marxist, Uyi-Ekpen Ogbeide, contended that capitalist exploitation in Nigeria began with the British colonialists, who handed over the baton of administrative exploitation and repression to compradors—politically empowered opportunists who accumulate wealth without producing, pretending to be farmers themselves but expropriating the wealth of the nation. Ogbeide posited that there is no other country in Africa where such a large number of rural populations are subjected to so much social deprivation as in Nigeria. He argued that the Nigerian state, which should ameliorate or even eliminate the pathetic socioeconomic conditions of the peasantry, has ironically been responsible for generating these conditions.

Since the coming of the British some one hundred years ago, and the imposition of an omnipotent state, life has never been the same again for the Nigerian peasants. The state under the tight control of a small ruling class, has virtually turned the peasants into endangered species by not only systematically disposing them of their most fertile lands, but also intentionally setting the prices of their produce – food and export crops – at mere subsistent levels. Through fraudulent treaties, ordinances, bills



and decrees, the Nigerian state and its operators turned farmlands of the peasants into unproductive estates plantations, farm settlements, international conference halls and amusement parks (Ogbeide, 2007, p. 137).

Ogbeide's assertion buttresses the far-reaching impact of British colonial rule and the post-colonial state's complicity in perpetuating peasant subjugation. The imposition of an all-powerful state, controlled by a narrow ruling elite, systematically undermined the economic emancipation of the peasantry. This analysis situates peasant marginalisation within the broader framework of capitalist accumulation, reinforcing the Marxist-Leninist critique of the post-colonial state as an apparatus of class domination.

Taking a bend to neo-Marxism, Igwe Stanley Chinedu (2012), in his work "How Africa Underdevelops Africa," asked the fundamental question, "Is it Africa rather than Europe that underdevelops Africa?" Igwe described the phenomena of corruption, the distorting of the law, the weakening of institutions, the lack of freedom of speech, poverty, and the rise of ethnic conflicts throughout the continent. He further predicted the fall of some African leaders who have held office for far too long because "no one is questioning them as to why they are still in power" and the wind of revolution is blowing across North Africa (Igwe, 2012, p. 91).

Nevertheless, these brilliant and expository theoretical postulations have received rousing counterarguments from other thinkers of political economy. Schmidt, Ingo (2018), insisted that many Marxist scholars enthusiastically articulated socialism or even communism in general terms without making any political commitments to its establishment. He insists that this abstinence from political engagement coincided with the rise of neoliberal capitalism across Europe and, ultimately, most parts of the world. He contended that all of these socialisms had been defeated or had suffered self-inflicted failures. As a result, numerous Marxist ideologies were born out of these setbacks and failures.

Therefore, taking a cue from profound pacifist-Marxist scholars like Oloruntoba Alabi, who decries the "lamentation scholarship" of African neo-Marxists (Alabi, May 21, 2021), it is imperative to move to more proactive vanguard scholarship. What is the history of exploitation in Nigeria? What are the factors impeding revolutionary consciousness among Nigerian workers? How about a kinetic role for the military in support of a dictatorship of the proletariat in Nigeria? First, some background on the history of capitalist exploitation in Nigeria.

## Colonialism and the Birth of Capitalist Exploitation in Nigeria

The British government took power from the Royal Niger Company and took over the entire economic activities in the Niger-Delta region, and amalgamated the northern and southern regions. Thus, Nigeria emerged. The colonialists forced the peasants to begin cash crop production—large-scale farming—for exportation purposes. According to Walter Rodney, the colonialists prompted the production of groundnut, cocoa, oil palm, rubber, and cotton. They also introduced cassava, potato, and maize, to name a few, because Africa's lands were very fertile for Britain's ambitious surplus production (Rodney, 1972, p. 109). The marauding colonialists also introduced the (poll) tax system, taxing the profits of farmers from the cash crops they produced. Since each household had its own fictitiously calculated tax to pay, peasants had to choose between migrating to cities to work as labourers in the old mines of British companies or remaining in villages to endlessly produce cash crops for massive accumulation and exportation by the imperial powers (Shaibu and Ogoh, 2015).

It is important to note that the cash crops in the first place were not meant for Nigerian consumers; rather, they were exported to feed the Europeans, yet taxes were demanded from the poor farmers. The colonialists introduced the currency pattern in replacement of the existing trade by batter exchange, using the sterling exchange standard and, infrequently, cowries. This marked another frustrating economic trend for peasants, not forgetting the introduced land tenure systems— the Public Land Acquisition Ordinance and the Crown Land Ordinance (Ogbeide, 2007). All these exploitative policies were achieved through fraudulent treaties and deceit, and any opposition or resistance from traditional rulers or peasant groups was repressively and brutally silenced. For example, in Abeokuta, peasants revolted against exorbitant colonial taxation, forced labour, and other exploitative fees during the Egba uprising. The revolt was met with brute force; British soldiers were deployed to viciously suppress the uprising. As a result, 598 Egba peasants were killed, and 70 of their chiefs were imprisoned (Adebowale, November 25, 2020).

Other such examples were the Bussa rebellion in 1915 and the Aba women's riot in 1929. Rather than withdraw these inhumane policies of exploitation, the imperialists officially ratified the policies in the 1946 Richard Constitution. The profits the colonialists made off of the peasants were exported back to their colonial home base capital, and a fraction was used for certain infrastructural development, basically to provide comfortable residences for the English imperialists and to ease the transportation of cash crops and crude oil overseas (Adebowale, November 25, 2020; Ogbeide, 2007).

Nigerian peasants were forbidden from fixing prices, distributing, or selling their own sweat-produced crops. Instead, marketing boards were established for each and every cash crop. For example, the Cocoa Marketing Board was created in 1947, the Nigerian Groundnut Marketing Board was established in 1949, as were the Nigeria Oil Palm Marketing Board and the Nigeria Cotton Marketing Board (Ogbeide, 2007; Shaibu & Ogoh, 2015). All products were thus bought off the marketing boards at ridiculously cheap prices and sold out to the international market at outrageously higher prices (Ogbeide, 2007). This was the beginning of capital exploitation against Nigerian peasants. Nigeria's ruling elites, who had become wealthy through their slavish relationship with the imperial bourgeoisies, joined forces with urban workers to demand independence. Once they got it, they left the rural peasants to their alienated and decapitated fates: cropless, cashless, and voiceless.

### **Post-Colonialism and the Emergence of Nigerian Compradors**

Upon attaining independence, one would expect that Nigeria's nationalists, who saw the exploitation of their fellow brothers in the rural communities, would redistribute land ownership and ensure economic equality. Rather, in a bid to gain control of landed properties and factories, the nationalists, in partnership with the urban labourers, "ganged up" against the rural peasants and continued from where the foreign invaders had stopped. Utilizing the existing colonial land tenure system, all lands were taken over by the federal government. These lands were illegitimately shared amongst the (new) comprador bourgeois farmers and foreign investors (Nwosu, 1984, Dimonye & Nwagba, 2025). The national government, rather than wiping out all colonialist policies and institutions, instead latched onto those exploitative policies, putting more pressure on the rural people to produce crops for urban and foreign consumption. They left the peasants with taxes and controlled the market through the marketing boards in their reformed names. In 1968-1969, in Ibadan and the entire former western region, there was a peasant revolt called "Agbekoya" (meaning farmers reject injustice) (Kehinde, February 6, 2021).

The farmers protested against forced government taxes and several other injustices. However, they were crushed down by the military government, just like their teachers, the colonialists, did. In retaliation, the revolvers invaded Nigerian bourgeoisie farms, destroyed several government buildings, including courtrooms and prisons, and freed many of their imprisoned members, among other rebellious actions (Kehinde, February 6, 2021). The revolt resulted in some government concessions. However, the nationalists were encumbered with industrializing and reconstructing after the civil war. Thus, they systematically exploited the agricultural sector to build an (imaginary) industrial paradise. Various policies were formulated by various government regimes. First was the Land Settlement Scheme, which had peasants occupying communal

lands to evacuate those lands for government projects; many peasants were displaced, and large plantations became housing units. Thousands of young school leavers were “dumped” on such large plantations to produce cash crops. Soon after, ironically, those same farm sites were co-opted for urban projects (Ogbeide, 2007). These estate plantations introduced modern farming, loans, fertilizers, and aids, amongst others. However, most of these facilities and aids were hijacked by the comprador farmers, politicians, and local government leaders who rarely lived in their rural homes and instead squandered such resources on expensive mansions, cars, and other luxuries at the expense of rural peasants (Michael Todaro, 1989; Agagu and Omotoso, 2007).

The government, realizing a shortage in food availability and supply and a perception that starvation was imminent among the urbanites, recalled the rural peasantry and made a grand finale of Operation Feed the Nation in 1976, under the Obasanjo regime. In a similar vein, Shagari’s Green Revolution and Babangida’s Directorate of Food, Road, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) followed and failed (Ojo and Adebayo, 2012). These policies failed essentially because rural peasants were not involved in the policy-making process and because of the embezzlement and irresponsibility of some government brokers and politicians. Consequently, Ogbeide lamented that the government often acted as if it were interested in the rural sector as much as it was in the oil sector. To this, he retorted that “all shall be well, but that day when crude oil will turn its back on Nigeria, what will become of her economy?” (Ogbeide, 2007:198). In Dudley Seers’ analysis of development, he posited that development should be measured by asking:

what has been happening to poverty, unemployment and inequality? If two out of these or three are worsening, then it would be strange to call it development, even if per-capital income had doubled (Seers, 1969, pp. 3-4).

Hence, accumulating per-capital income is not an index of economic development but merely growth in figures, as peasants are still the largest class in the Nigerian socio-economy and still need urgent attention from the government. At this point, it is important to examine the presence or otherwise of revolutionary consciousness among the peasants or working class in Nigeria, to ascertain their awareness and readiness for their “predestined” role—to rise up and expropriate their expropriators—a dictatorship of the proletariat.

### **Workers’ Revolutionary Consciousness and the Nigerian Dynamics**

In Nigeria, there is no clearly identifiable class of disposed peasantry as there was in England during the Industrial Revolution, where the alienating conditions of the earth

were clearly visible in their feudal predicament. It is not farfetched that the rich, including chiefs, politicians, top technocrats, and even foreign expatriates, have seized land from farmers by using loans, kickbacks, and public funds, as the case may be, to acquire entire corporate parcels of land in rural areas. Many farmers have invariably resorted to scouting for menial jobs in urban areas due to the abandonment of rural farming, and even when they find such jobs, they are very poorly remunerated (Nwosu, 1985). Thus, the serious neglect of the Nigerian farmers by the compradors and the indirect exploitation of their labour power via the exploitative pricing policy constantly impoverished them. This is coupled with the forces of the existing traditional institutions, which give the farmers a false sense of independence of action and a bloated sense of ownership of land. This made it improbable for them to become revolutionary, even though they were fully exposed to the scourges of urban and international capitalism.

The consequent dilemma facing the Nigerian workers' revolutionary fervour is that, after the colonial influx of capitalism, the ownership of the means of production was not revolutionized. That is, the articulate consciousness of farmers, public servants, and all workers in general to adhere to the principles of modern organization, technical know-how, empowerment, and a general sense of control over the forces of labour. While the general attitude of the peasantry in Nigeria is that of "a dry morsel taken with peace of mind," a common Yoruba proverb used in expressing the choice of unsavory contentment over satisfaction, there have, however, been pockets of class uprisings. The most coordinated mass uprising in recent times was the Occupy Nigeria Fuel Subsidy Removal protest in January 2012, which lasted one week, and saw tens of thousands of Nigerians protest the removal of fuel subsidies as the government's blatant insensitivity to the economic plight of the people (Adebowale, November 25, 2020). The protest, however, resulted in a reduction in fuel prices from N141 to N97 per liter, a whimsical victory (Akinwotu, November 1, 2021).

Also close to a class uprising was the October 2020 nationwide EndSARS protest by Nigerian youths, who took to the streets in peaceful, passionate protests. They demanded the disbanding of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a police unit that had a long record of extortion, ill-treatment, torture, and extra-judicial killings. Shortly after, the protest hashtags evolved into "End bad governance now." The demonstration lasted two weeks after it was brought to a bloody and violent end, and it realized an incomprehensible victory of a ban on SARS and yet a continued brutal modus operandi of the police. The question still arises, "who ordered the shooting of the EndSARS protesters?" (Akinwotu, November 1, 2021).

### *Co-operative Societies and Workers' Alienation*

Co-operatives (“Osusun” in local slang) are merely ephemeral buffers against the harshness of Nigeria’s alienating capitalist economic system. It is a propaganda stunt designed to divert attention from the massive profits amassed by national and foreign looters from the sweat of labouring farmers, public servants, oil workers, and indeed all workers in this pathetic exploitative system. Co-operatives ought to be a major instrument of national social and economic organization, a weapon of all workers, including farmers, to retrieve control of the means of production from the indolent few who have confiscated the national treasury. By implication, the existing colonial model of co-operatives, which was introduced in 1935, should give way to a modern, articulate, and revolutionary-oriented system, which will lay emphasis on mass participation for the purpose of overturning the exploitative status quo of all workers.

There are over 300,000 cooperatives in Nigeria today, with a membership of over 31 million, they have a general objective of promoting the social, economic, and political interests of their members (Nzor, November 11, 2021). However, in their alienated state, they do not see, and even when they do, they do not react to, the exploitative labour relations they are caught in. Rather than channel the frustrations of their deplorable economic conditions against the government, they have been co-opted as agents of national development themselves. Worse, the government is empowered to wantonly interfere in cooperative affairs—the height of peasant alienation. There have been numerous reports that government officials and their cronies from the cooperatives steal, seize, and borrow the cooperative’s money without due accountability to the members who laboured to make those contributions (Asaba Metro, September 25, 2019; Sahara Reporters, April 6, 2022).

### *Ethnicism, Nepotism, and Paternalism*

Ethnicism, nepotism, and paternalism are also anti-revolutionary factors stampeding against a socialist revolution within the Nigerian space. It is a system in which any bourgeoisie around one’s home constituency is regarded as one’s kin, from whom one expects to receive some handouts (Agagu & Omotoso, 2007). The continued existence of this phenomenon is fueled by the same existing perverse capitalist and paternalistic socioeconomic system. The extended family system works in the fashion of tribal loyalties but in some microcosmic contexts. However, it affects the total national life. This is because any threat to the capitalist bourgeoisie of the family or clan is reacted upon by the wretched, lowly, and battered people around him as a threat to their crumbs of survival. In their myopia, they do not see that by removing them, their condition would be better off. Instead, the kinsmen are prepared to rise in their defense, even against fellow proletariats. Several examples support this line of thought:



James Ibori, Lucky Igbenedion, Bode George, and Dipreye Alamesiegba are just a few examples of illegal compradors whose people defended them and gave them a hero's welcome from prison.

Workers and farmers (including intellectuals and students) would still be found merely seeking to keep body and soul together by scrounging around the nearest new bourgeoisie for survival crumbs. They would rather work as thugs and political songbirds for such sons-of-the-soil politicians than come together on the basis of common economic interests, to dislodge their exploiters and expropriate their expropriators. All these have happened all too often and have become a hindrance to the consciousness of a socialist revolution among the Nigerian peasantry.

Though equal opportunities and even development may reduce tribal loyalties and rivalries, it is pertinent to state that the existing perverse mode of production, which the socialist strategy intends to overthrow, can hardly ever bring about satisfactory measures of equal opportunity that would assign control of the means of production to the working class. In other words, there cannot be sustainable socioeconomic equality and development as long as the means of production remain brazenly exploitative. Thus, these existing alienating and exploitative production relations will inherently continue to exacerbate tribal rivalries. Given the situation, there is no hope for decades to come that there will emerge an autonomous and self-propelled revolutionary class of workers among the multifarious ethnic groups of the country.

### *The N-Power Example and the Reserved Army of Labour*

Nigeria has an estimated 20.9 million unemployed youths—a situation that, if not well cushioned, could cascade into political uprisings. Thus, the N-Power program was half-heartedly implemented as a cushion response to this looming problem. The programme pays a N30,000 monthly stipend to 200,000 unemployed youths across the country. N-Power is a component of President Buhari's National Social Investment Scheme (NSIP). It is a job creation and youth empowerment programme with several other sub-components aimed at instilling work expertise in youths between the ages of 18 and 34, both graduates and non-graduates (Nnorom & Adegbesan, 2019; FGN, 2020). There have been different welfare programmes introduced by successive administrations—the National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP), the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P), to mention a few—that were ambitiously fashioned to pacify the number of unemployed people in the country. All of these initiatives, including the on-going National Social Investment Program (N-SIP) (N-Power), have failed. The reason for these failures is not far-fetched. The political compradors are not truly interested in the plight of the

peasantry, so they would rather beat about the bush than the bush itself. These ambitious but half-hearted welfare policies are perhaps an exploitative logic for maintaining an army of reserved labour.

The average Nigerian worker is constantly advised to “appreciate” the meager wages they earn as a result of the state’s generosity, and is constantly reminded of the backlog of unemployed people with whom they can be replaced at the snap of a finger should they breathe any air of insurrection. Furthermore, youths have been socio-culturally co-opted into a get-rich-quick mentality and general complacency. In their manifold alienated conditions, they trudge along with their oppressors in order to accumulate nonproductive wealth and become compradors themselves.

### *The Military Factor and State Repression*

The organic origin of the Nigerian army takes its roots from British colonial domination, oppression, and repression. Has it changed over time? Abdulrahman (2017) studied the pattern of cohesion in the history of the Nigerian army and found that the colonial masters used differential and deferred methods of wage payment to keep the men loyal without a choice. Even if they wanted to object to the derogations and vulgarities of their intimidating masters, they dared not, because they had deferred wages to collect at the end of their entire service. Even after the British West Africa Frontier Force was Nigerianized, birthing the Nigerian Army and, subsequently, the Navy and Air force, the Nigerian military was disheveled by intra-competitions for superiority (Sandhurst-trained versus locally trained), both bidding for hegemony as progressive leaders of the force. Even in contemporary times, rancours and disparities continue to exist. Has the Nigerian military changed over time?

For a long time, there was a pattern of incessant military incursion into politics in Nigeria and indeed, throughout Africa. And military interventions can have varying ideological colourations. There have been very oppressive and repressive regimes that tend to support and even intensify the exploitative and degenerate status quo, while there are others that are simply reformist. Regardless, there were few dictators who attempted genuine revolutionary changes in the course of their regime. After all, military men and women are flesh and blood like other Nigerians and also experience the torments of expropriations by the bourgeoisie class.

It is therefore uncertain that the Nigerian military, with their firepower, will support or sustain any insurrection of workers. For example, while it is true that Murtala Muhammed intervened in 1973 on the side of the long-suffering masses, it is equally true that the degenerate, arbitrary, and oppressive regime that he overthrew was also military (Nwosu, 1985, p. 17). Not ignoring the fact that some military officers

have been co-opted into the bourgeois fraternity themselves, the masses have no means to counter the destructive weaponry of the Nigerian military, should the military decide to descend upon them. Unless, and this seems unlikely, the military joins the workers' socialist revolution. This situation certainly continues to circumscribe the already feeble consciousness of the defenseless Nigerian proletariat and instills in them a greater sense of resignation to their increasingly dehumanizing conditions.

### **The Military and Prospects for a Socialist Revolution**

It may be argued that Marx did not foresee that the organisation of workers into a class and, consequently, into a political party, would not proceed smoothly without being upset from time to time by competition and rivalry among the workers themselves. It is quite evident that the Nigerian proletariat class is still in its infancy. This implies that it will someday grow and perhaps become revolutionary in outlook. There are also a lot of uncertainties about how the military will likely respond to any workers' insurrection, especially since Marx lays down the pattern of their attacks as not against the instruments of production themselves but rather (imported) wares that compete with their labour; smashing up machineries and setting factories ablaze, among other things, in an attempt to forcefully restore the up-turned status of workers (Callinicos, 2010). Will the local military at such a time see such a revolution through the eyes of the bourgeoisie as the wanton vandalism of disgruntled elements? Or will the military itself possess sufficient revolutionary instincts that would lead it to support the impending revolution? As long as people are flesh and blood, these are critical questions.

There is also a possibility that the imperial powers, facing the imminent demolition of their economic hegemony over a third-world country, will have no qualms backing the military and the internal oligarchs, (especially if the leadership of the local military is on their side) to obliterate any nation-wide insurrection, even if it means waging a genocidal war against a mass of insufficiently armed and hungry workers. After all, in a somewhat similar context, Biafran agitators, especially after the "Ahiara Promulgation," which had a clearly socialist flavour, experienced the obliterating disposition and capability of the Nigerian state, backed by its imperial masters. A revolutionary movement can therefore not exist or be sufficiently launched without the cooperation of the military, whether in the form of indifference or outright support. Following Marxist-Leninist postulations on the reactions of the bourgeoisie in the scheme of events leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat, they predicted that the bourgeoisie could overtly or covertly "bribe" labour leaders and the upper stratum of labour aristocracy (middle class) (Nwosu, 1984). It is not clear, though, if they predicted that the modern bourgeoisie, having learned some lessons from

Marxist ideologies and predictions, would become more treacherous and craftier in the art of exploitation.

It is therefore imperative at this point to extol the categorical success of Cuba, whose military outfit was an anvil upon which Cuba's revolution rested. The Cuban military was a vanguard in the struggle to sustain the people's faith in themselves. This was a necessary precondition for firing the people's revolutionary zeal (Nwosu, 1984; Castro, 1983). The bourgeoisie now has sophisticated propaganda machinery aimed at subtly "educating" and indoctrinating workers and farmers in order to divert their attention away from their interests and consciousness. This further alienates them from mental emancipation. They also "dangle carrots" in front of the impoverished masses, described as "welfare programs." They toss out handouts in the form of bonuses, shorter hours of work, overtime pay, leaves of absence with pay, and other dubious distractions from revolutionary consciousness. These canny yet subtle methods have had a bamboozling and hypnotic effect on workers.

Based on observation, it can be said that an overwhelming number of the Nigerian peasantry are grossly ignorant and uninformed about what socialism really is and what it can do for them. While others who are informed are too cowardly to vanguard a mass consciousness for fear of losing their lives or their meager wages of labour. They have been victims of the vile propaganda and the vicious tactical maneuvers of the looting oligarchy. Worse still, according to Nwosu (1984), a bloated version of the story of the repression of individual liberties during the formative years of Stalinist-socialism in Russia has been deviously used by the forces of imperialism to misrepresent the ideal of socialism and socialist development, to cover their own atrocities that cry to the highest heavens for retribution.

## Conclusion

Having examined the revolutionary fervour of Nigeria's peasantry, the inherent impediments to a workers' dictatorship, and the possibility of military neutrality or participation in a workers' insurrection. The study found that the history of capitalist exploitation in Nigeria is a history of colonialism, further entrenched by successive local political predators. It found that the revolutionary fervor among Nigerian workers is feeble due to inherent cultural and structural impediments. It did, however, leave open the question of whether or not the Nigerian armed forces would support a socialist revolution due to the organic nature of colonial dominance and repression of the civilian populace by the Nigerian armed forces. Hitherto, it became evident that socialism in Nigeria, while desirable, required elements that the Marxist models did not readily proffer. That is, like in Russia, Cuba, and Libya, among other examples, there may be a need to consciously create the conditions for the articulation of class

power in ways that the state and workers' modes and circumstances now forbid, rather than waiting for Marx's preconditions of a socialist revolution to fully occur; however, unlike Russia, Cuba, and Libya, the peasantry themselves must be fully articulated and intentional for a successful socialist revolution to occur.

As a result, it makes a lot of sense to vest the ideological machinery in a civilian revolutionary group of intellectual vanguards and back them up as a matter of necessity by a revolutionary military, or better yet, a thoroughly revolutionary military government that can consciously and effectively act upon the degenerate Nigerian political economy. In reiteration, their attacks would not be directed at the instruments of production but at the conditions under which production takes place. Though many democracy-apologists, especially Euro-centric scholars, have been brainwashed into thinking that any form of military rule is an "aberration," however, it is clear that only a deeply involved revolutionary military government or at least a revolutionary stand by the military can help initiate and sustain a successful socialist revolution in Nigeria.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### Notes on contributors

*Praise Fisayo Duyile* is a lecturer in the department of Political Science, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna. Her general interests are in the areas of Comparative Politics, Development, and Security. Other than academic activities, she partakes in rural and children outreaches, and enjoys listening to music and tending to plants.

*Nenpomingyi S.G Adelabu* is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Science, University of Jos. She has a bachelor's degree in Political Science, Master's degrees in Political Economy and Gender Studies, and a Doctoral degree in Political Science. She is a social science researcher with a focus on Anti-corruption, Gender Security, and Peacebuilding. Dr. Adelabu is also the Founder of Brighter Base Support Foundation, a non-profit organization that provides educational support to young people in rural and conflict-affected zones of North-Central Nigeria, through mentoring, funding networks, and provision of educational materials. She is also a youth mentor with several years of volunteerism in non-governmental organisations.

## References

- Adebowale, A. (November 25, 2020). History of Protests in Nigeria: Reactions and Consequences. *Guardian*. <https://guardian.ng/life/history-of-protests-in-nigeria-reactions-and-consequences-2>.
- Abdulrahman, S. O. (2017). The Nigerian Army as a Product of its Colonial History: Problems of Re-Building Cohesion for an Army in Transition. *International Affairs and Global Strategy*, 53, 21-31.
- Agagu, A. and Omotoso, F. (2007). *Selected Issues in African Political Thought*. Port Novo. Republic of Benin.
- Akinwotu, E. (November 1, 2021). “The Lights Went Out and the Shooting Started’: #EndSars Protesters Find no Justice One Year On”. *The Guardian*.
- Alabi, T. (May 21, 2021). “Lamentation Scholarship: The Coronavirus Pandemic and Madagascar Thesis.” *International Relations and Political Science Scholars*. Facebook.
- Appadorai, A. A. (2004). *The substance of Politics*. Reprinted. Oxford University Press.
- Bearman, J. (1984). Libya – the Development of the Qadhafi (Gaddafi) Regime. *International Socialism Journal*, 2(24), 101-124.
- Cammack, P., Pool, D. and Tordoff, W. (1993). *Third World Politics: A Comparative Introduction*. The John Hopkins University Press. Baltimore.
- Asaba Metro. (September 25, 2019). “How Delta State Govt. Officials and Cooperative EXCO Embezzled N2.5b Savings of Health Workers.” <https://www.asabametro.com/how-delta-state-govt-officials-and-cooperative-exco-embezzled-n2-5b-savings-of-health-workers>.
- Callinicos, A. (2010). *The Revolutionary Ideas of Karl Marx*. Bloomsbury. London.
- Castro, F. (1983). *The World Economic and Social Crisis: its Impact on the Underdeveloped Countries, its Somber Prospects and the Need to Struggle if we are to Survive. Report to the Seventh Summit Conference of Non-Aligned Countries*. Publishing Office of the Council of State, Havana.
- Chakrabarti, A. and Cullenberg, S. (2015). *Peasantry*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279201946>.



- Collins, Jock. (1984). Marx's reserve army: still relevant 100 years on. *Journal of Australian Political Economy*. Issue 16, 51-65.  
<https://www.ppesydney.net/content/uploads/2020/04/Marxs-reserve-army-still-relevant-100-years-on.pdf>.
- Das, R. J. (2022). Capital, Capitalism and Health. *Critical Sociology*, 49(3), 395-414.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205221083503> (Original work published 2023)
- Dimonye, S., C. and Nwagba, B., C. (2025). A Philosophical Evaluation of Contemporary Nigerian Political Economy from the Lens of Obafemi Awolowo's Democratic Socialism. *OWIJOPPA*, 9(1), 2630 – 7049.
- FGN. (2020). *About N-Power*. <https://www.npower.gov.ng>.
- Gurr, T.R. (2011). *Why Men Rebel* (1st ed.). Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315631073>
- Kehinde, F. (February 6, 2021). “Agbekoya and the Yoruba Armoury”. *Premium Times*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/440884-agbekoya-and-the-yoruba-armoury-by-femi-kehinde.html>.
- Lane, D. (2020). V.I. Lenin’s Theory of Socialist Revolution. *Critical Sociology*. 47(3): 1-19. DOI:[10.1177/0896920520958451](https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920520958451).
- Huntington, S.P. (1961). *Political Order in Changing Societies*. Yale University Press. New Haven.
- Igwe, S. C. (2012). *How Africa Underdevelops Africa*. iUniverse Books.
- Johari, J. C. (2012). *Contemporary Political Theory: New Dimensions, Basic Concepts and Major Trends*. Sterling Publishers Private Limited. New Delhi.
- Kozlov, G.A. (1977). *Political Economy: Socialism*. Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic.
- Lenin, V.I. (1917). *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. A Popular Outline. International Relations and Security Network. Primary Resources in International Affairs (PRIA). ISN ETH Zurich.
- Marx, K. and Engel, F. (1848). *Manifesto of the Communist party*. Selected works. Volume one. Progress Publishers. Moscow.
- Meszaros, I. (1970). *Marx’s Theory of Alienation*. 5, Illustrated, Reprint 2005. Merlin.

- Moreno, H. (2016). *Two Methods for the Latin-American Revolution*. First English Edition. CEHuS Centro de Estudios Humanos y Sociales.
- Moore, W. (1963). *Social Change*. Prentice Hall.
- Nnorom, N. and Adegbesan E. (December 20, 2018). *Unemployed Nigerians Increase by 3.3m to 20.9m - NBS*. [www.vanguardngr.com/cdn.amproject.org/v/s/www.vanguardngr.com/2018/12/unemployed-nigerians-increase](http://www.vanguardngr.com/cdn.amproject.org/v/s/www.vanguardngr.com/2018/12/unemployed-nigerians-increase).
- Nwosu, E. (1984). *Marxism as Obstacle to Social Development in Nigeria*. University of Jos Press.
- Ogbeide, U.E. (2007). *Public Policy Making and Evaluation in Nigeria: Theories, Strategies and Techniques*. Amfitop Books. Ibadan.
- Ojo, E. O., and Adebayo, P. F. (2014). Food Security in Nigeria: and Overview. *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, (1)2, 199-222.
- Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Panaf Press Reprint. Nigeria.
- Ryan-Lloyd, M. (2023). Marxist-Leninism: An Exploration of Ideological Adoption and Influence. *On Politics*, 16(1), 60-72. Retrieved from <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/onpolitics/article/view/21480>
- Sahara Reporters. (April 6, 2022). "Exclusive: Governor Okowa-Led Delta Government Enmeshed in N2billion Alleged Fraud in State Hospital Cooperative Society." <https://saharareporters.com/2022/04/06/exclusive-governor-okowa-led-delta-government-enmeshed-n2billion-alleged-fraud-state>.
- Schmidt, I. (2018). Towards a Critique of Marxist Political Economy: Views from the Imperialist Centre. *World Review of Political Economy*, 9(3), 364. DOI:10.13169/worlrevipoliecon.9.3.0364.
- Seers, D. (1969). *The Meaning of Development*. Eleventh World Conference of the Society for International Development. New Delhi.
- Shaibu, M. T and Ogoh, A. G. (2015). The Strategic Features of Colonial Politico-Economic, Changes and Continuities: The Nigerian Experience. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, 2(3), 116-125. <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijhsse/v2-i3/13.pdf>.

Shanin, T. (ed). (1971). *Peasants and Peasant Societies*. Penguin.

Todaro M.P., (1989): *Economic Development in the Third World*. Fourth Edition. Longman.

Wolff, E, (1966). *Peasants*. Prentice-Hall.

Yenicirak, H. (2021). On Revolution: What is Revolution? What are the Differences that Distinguish Revolution from Other Forms of Political Violent? *The Journal of Social Sciences Institute*, 1(50), 329-342.