

A MARXIST HERMENEUTICAL CRITIQUE OF AFRICAN SOCIALISM AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF COLONIAL AND HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE¹

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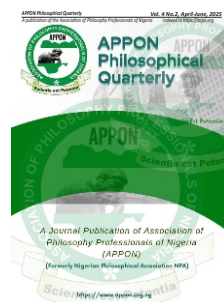
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ABSTRACT

The history of socialism in Africa has been a subject of great debate since the middle of the twentieth century. The end of the Second World War ushered in the era of independence and foundational movements to overthrow European colonialism on the African continent. It is a history of material and spiritual struggles shaped by theorists like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Obafemi Awolowo, to mention a few. Historically, most political and economic theories have roots in classical scholarship. Socialism, Communism, or Anarchism is no different. Some scholars of political science and political philosophy trace the history of socialism to pre-historic polities. Thus, the point that is illumined here is that Socialism is a universal idea for liberation that needs little particularisation, and that it is unnecessary to assign to it a racial or regional category such as prefixing it with “Black” or “Africa” just as Nkrumah argued in *African Socialism Revisited*.² Consequently, an argument is going to be made for World Communism, and the discussion concludes that Socialism or Communism is feasible in Africa. However, this feasibility depends on the original theoretical foundation posited by Marx and Engels that Socialism cannot be achieved in one country and that the proletarian revolution must begin in the advanced capitalist economies. Thus, Socialism, Communism, and Anarchy will be used interchangeably to denote a classless, stateless, moneyless society. Furthermore, the term Ideology will be used in its original materialist conception as False Consciousness.³ This paper combines the qualitative methodology and the historical materialist theoretical framework to espouse our position.

Keywords: Anarchism; African Socialism; Communism; Socialism; Capitalocene

¹ This paper is a re-evaluation of an article published on the same topic earlier. Some of the points raised in the first study now require clarification. The concerns are addressed in this revised paper due to the need to establish some essential ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in line with the subject of discourse. Nevertheless, we are looking at the same issue with changes that reflect the authors’ real ideas.

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Introduction

To write about African Socialism, one must acknowledge the historicity and ontology of the subject. The conception of Socialism or Communism as a theory for the revolutionary organisation of society has been a political project for the past one hundred and fifty years. Therefore, it should not be surprising for there to be problems in spirit and matter, that is, of theory and praxis. In *Africa and her Writers*, Achebe points to an obscurantism that surrounded Socialism and argued that the deliberate vagueness was ontologically bourgeois reactionism frozen in the fear that Socialism brings with it a just redistribution of wealth that threatens the licentious accumulation of socially produced wealth as profit by the rich in Africa; thus, the refrain of the indigenous aristocrat and bourgeois was that Socialism was un-African.⁴ This brings us to the nomenclature of “African Socialism” which directs us towards the racial and colonial questions at the heart of the ontology and historicity of this discourse. Invariably, this is also the substance of the problem of theory and praxis concerning the political philosophy of Socialism and its scientific foundation.

Classical theoreticians of Socialism based their arguments for Socialism on the philosophical and scientific method of “the materialist conception of history”, more infamously known as Marxism, developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as a refinement of Hegel’s philosophical method. This method applies the dialectical method of reasoning to historical man rooted in real material relations in the

material world as opposed to Hegel’s method rooted in metaphysical idealism, to interpret historical events. Dialectic was a Grecogenous way of philosophising, popularised within the classical Platonic dialogues with Socrates as the main character engaged in discussion with others aimed at the collective discovery of truth. However, it was through the idealist philosophers of the Early Modern Period namely, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel that Dialectic developed into a systematic method – by way of the philosophical contribution and influence of Fichte’s famous triad: *Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis*, and Hegel’s World-Historical analyses.⁵ Marx’s and Engels’ contributions to the dialectical method via its application to materialism as an active force in real-world relations have been the most influential usage yet – with its application to the various branches of science – from the natural sciences to the social sciences.⁶

In *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels described the method as follows:

The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders, is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products

³ Tom Bottomore, ed., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 247–52.

⁴ Chinua Achebe, “Africa and Her Writers.” *Massachusetts Review* 14 (1973): 617–629.

⁵ Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G. W. F. Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 1–29.

⁶ Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (Paris: Foreign Languages Press, 2020), 65. Originally published 1880.

are exchanged. From this point of view the final causes of all. Social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in man's better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought, not in the philosophy, but in the economics of each particular epoch.⁷

These are the core features of the materialist dialectic and throughout the independence and foundational struggles in the 19th century, the likes of Nkrumah, Senghor, and Nyerere employed many of its tendencies with some modifications in theory and praxis situated within the political economy, history, culture, and geography of the diverse groups of people on the continent of Africa.

African Socialism and the Problem of Theory

Senghor postulated that the materialistic dialectic and the socialism of Marx and Engels should not be imposed monolithically on the African continent because Africa had peculiar realities that were different from European realities; referencing the fact that Marx himself wrote that his theory of capital was only applicable to Western Europe's political economy, and this was a viewpoint shared by many of the proponents of African Socialism at the time.

Furthermore, Senghor denied the existence of classes in Africa prior to European colonisation.⁸ By contrast, in Kwame Nkrumah's critique of African Socialism in *African Socialism Revisited*, he labelled the view that pre-colonial Africa was a classless society as a *facile simplification* on the basis that no historical or anthropological evidence could support the claim and pointed out that slave and feudal relations existed in Africa before European colonisation of the continent.⁹ Thus, the problem of theory is also a problem of history, and the problems of African Socialism begin with the contradiction of race.

The Problem of Race

In a 2016 interview, Kwame Anthony Appiah, the acclaimed British American philosopher of Ghanaian descent, proclaimed that racial identity was a biological nonsense used to create fatal conflicts.¹⁰ The view that race is a social construct has been around for over a century. Jonathan M. Marks wrote about it in *Human Biodiversity: Genes, Race, and History*.¹¹ The ideation of race based on skin pigmentation is often universally accepted as a natural product of climate and biology. However, the history of the word race shows that it was used for something more antagonistic than merely as a mode of classification.

Audrey Smedley points out that the term race made an entrance into European languages between the fifteenth and

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⁸ Leopold Sedar Senghor, *Prose and Poetry*, trans. Jan Reed and C. Wake (London: Oxford University Press, 1965): 57–62.

⁹ Kwame Nkrumah, "African Socialism Revisited," in *Africa: National and Social Revolution: Collection of Papers Read at the Cairo Seminar* (Prague: Peace and Socialism Publishers, 1967): 88.

¹⁰ Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "Racial Identity Is a Biological Nonsense, Says Reith Lecturer," *The Guardian*, October 18, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/oct/18/racial-identity-is-a-biological-nonsense-says-reith-lecturer>.

¹¹ Jonathan Marks, *Human Biodiversity: Genes, Race, and History* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1995): 99–113.

sixteenth centuries around the same period that the so-called Scientific Revolution and The Age of Discovery, all of which occurred simultaneously with the birth of the capitalist mode of production and distribution, the triangular slave trade, European aristocratic-bourgeois imperialism and the colonialization of Africa, Asia, and The Americas in The Early Modern Period.¹² The race problem cannot be merely looked at as a physical category. It is easy to point out that people have different skin colours, hair texture etc. The question that needs to be answered is: why do these things matter? And this question can be best answered as a question of ideology. Thus, to problematise race as ideology would be to examine the base on which it was constructed to expose why it came into being and who benefits from it.

John Locke, the so-called philosopher of liberty invested £600 in the transatlantic slave trade, through his dealings with the English slave-trading Royal Africa Company whose main station in Africa was in Cape Coast.¹³ However, the father of liberalism did more than just invest capital in the business. In *Philosophical Tales*, Cohen writes that Locke applied his hypocritical philosophy to the administration of the Carolina colony by assisting in the drafting of an authoritarian constitution under which

hereditary nobility, including his patron, the First Earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, would exercise absolute control over Negro slaves. Other than Locke, David Hume was another philosopher who expressed racist views.¹⁴ Hume wrote in a footnote that blacks were inferior to whites, and that this was natural as even the most inferior of the whites were skilled in some form of human endeavour.¹⁵ Thus, Hume invested £400 in the business of racial slavery and advised his patron, Lord Hertford to buy a slave plantation.¹⁶

On the origins of race and racism, Nkrumah postulated that:

Before slavery was practised in the New World, there was no special denigration of Africans. Travellers to this continent described the inhabitants in their records with natural curiosity and examination to be expected of individuals coming from different environments. It was when slave trade and slavery began to develop ghastly proportions that made them the base of that capital accumulation which assisted the rise of Western industrialism that a new attitude towards Africans emerged.¹⁷

¹² Audrey Smedley and Brian D. Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*, 4th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2012): 11–70.

¹³ Hilary McDonald Beckles, *Slave Voyages: The Transatlantic Trade in Enslaved Africans* (Paris: UNESCO, 2002): 123.

¹⁴ Martin Cohen, *Philosophical Tales: Being an Alternative History Revealing the Characters, the Plots, and the Hidden Scenes That Make up the True Story of Philosophy*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008): 99–106.

¹⁵ David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, revised ed., ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987): 208.

¹⁶ Gianamar Giovannetti-Singh, “Racial Capitalism in Voltaire's Enlightenment,” *History Workshop Journal* 94 (2022): 22–41.

¹⁷ Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1963): 1.

Snowden writes in *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman experience* that throughout history, the many tribes and ethnic groups that occupied the land mass now known as Europe interacted with peoples with differing physical characteristics. For example, the people of the ancient Greco-Roman civilisations interacted with individuals from Africa and Asia, and some of the works of classical Greco-Roman luminaries show that these exchanges were mutual. Both Herodotus' *Histories* and Homer's *Iliad* exhibit this.¹⁸ Thus, skin colour identification was not meant to create a racial hierarchy as was done at the start of the Modern Era. It is clear from the historical material that wars, colonisation, and ethnocentrism existed, and people may have been identified by skin colour and so on, however, it was not used as justification for colonisation, enslavement, and dehumanisation.¹⁹

Marx writes about the relations of racial slavery, modern colonialism, and capitalism in the following passage:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist

production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.²⁰

In *Anarchism and the Black Revolution*, Lorenzo K'ombo Ervin points out that in the early colonial period (1619–1776), the European underclass which was trapped within indentured servitude had been exploited together with African slaves in The Americas. As a result, exploited Europeans joined the Africans in revolting against the capitalists, and the response of the capitalist slavers was to create the “whiteness” as a constituent of the ruling apparatus. Thus, lower-class Europeans were raised to the category of ‘white citizens’, which came with incentives such as better living conditions than those of the African slaves, but still fell short of the living standards of the capitalist slavers.²¹

Never lose sight of the fact the capitalists didn't want white labour united with Blacks or other oppressed non-white peoples against their rule and the system of exploitation of labour. The invention of the “white race” was just a scam to facilitate this exploitation. White workers were bought off to allow their own wage slavery and Africans' super-exploitation; they struck a deal with the devil, which has hampered all efforts at class unity for the last four centuries.²²

¹⁸ Frank M. Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970).

¹⁹ Frank M. Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

²⁰ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1990): 915.

²¹ Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, *Anarchism and The Black Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2021): 79–91.

²² Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, *Anarchism and The Black Revolution*, p. 81

The problem of race is historical; however, it has created ontological effects. These ontological effects must still be confronted radically, that is, at the roots and as history shows, race is a contradiction invented by capitalists to keep the capitalist mode of production and distribution from the indignation of a class-conscious global proletariat. Thus, Nkrumah postulates in *Class Struggle in Africa* that:

A non-racial society can only be achieved by socialist revolutionary action of the masses. It will never come as a gift from the minority ruling class. For, it is impossible to separate race relations from the capitalist class relationships in which they have their roots.²³

This brings us to another problem: the problem of theory and praxis within the various tendencies aimed at a classless society. This problem demands that capitalism itself be properly problematised.

The Problem of Theory: What is Capitalism?

Contrary to popular opinion, economic liberalism or capitalism does not simply mean markets. Considerably, markets have existed much longer than money itself. The capitalist system is defined by three main features: private property, wage labour, and profit or surplus value – and all these features are undergirded by money and markets. The market facilitates commercial activity, that is, the exchange of goods and services and money is the universal medium used in this exchange. However, human labour is also ‘commodified’ within the

market. The market or sphere of circulation implies competition for profit and wages.²⁴ This ‘commodification’ of human labour was made possible by the Enclosure of The Commons which ‘proletarianized’ a self-sufficient population of commoners. The centuries-long Enclosures supported by Enclosure Acts ‘commodified’ both the material world and human labour, and thus, the creation of private property or what is now known as the private sector put a price on nature. The Enclosures privatised land, the chief means of production into the hands of a minority thereby creating the bourgeois, i.e., the employer class. Simultaneously, this privatisation dispossessed the majority of commoners leading to the historical creation of the modern proletariat, i.e., the employee class. Thus, the employer class or bourgeois and the employee class or proletariat are both a product of private property. This is the original sin of capitalism, and when this history is told the ‘ahistorical’ logical justification for profit loses its moral grounds. The capitalist mode of production and distribution established new forms of class characterisation in society, and thus, new social relations with the brutal and coercive power of the Political State. Whether absolute or constitutional monarchies, or republics, these polities accommodated the new social relations through legislation. The brutal expansionism and imperialism of capital is historically verifiable via the enclosure of the commons, the triangular slave trade, and the modern colonisation of The Americas, Africa, and Asia by Spain, Portugal, Holland, France, and England. Consequently, the competition for resources and markets gave birth to the earliest World

²³ Kwame Nkrumah, *Class Struggle in Africa* (New York: International Publishers, 1972): 28–29.

²⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1990): 125–306.

Wars.²⁵ Wherever oppression and exploitation become jurisprudence there is resistance and struggle; thus, these Enclosures resulted in resistance movements in Europe and the Colonies beginning with Levellers and the Diggers.²⁶

Exploitation is a historical feature in our daily lives within liberalism's jurisprudence undergirding the oppressive relations of employment. The sale of labour-power to the employer gives the employer power over the employee; this enables capitalists to control what is produced, how it is produced, and distribution. The dictatorial conditions within capitalist relations of production are the conditions in which employer exploitation of employees occurs. During the working period, whether a day, week, or month, employees create more value or a surplus for the employer than the employer will pay them in wages, and the employer appropriates this surplus value as his or her profit. The appropriation of surplus value as profit by the bourgeois or employer class is what accounts for the exploitation of labour by capital. Thus, Marx described capitalist profit as the unpaid labour or the unpaid wages of the working class.²⁷

The unequal exchange that exists within the capital-labour dialectic is responsible for many of the material and spiritual problems of the modern world. Exploitation and unemployment lead to poverty, and poverty leads to many social ills - from the mental health crises and substance abuse to the many forms of violent behaviour.²⁸ The laws of profit and capital accumulation demand the exploitation of not just labour, but nature

as well; thus, the current discourse about climate change is incomplete without an objective understanding of the capitalist mode of production and distribution as a world engine that transforms global ecology; hence, Capitalocene.²⁹

The Problem of Theory and Praxis: Anarchism, Socialism, Communism - What is Socialism/Communism?

Socialism or Communism can be defined as the dialectical processes and conditions that create a society within which private property is replaced with common property; thus, negating classes and class rule, oppression, exploitation. This creates an association of associations which enables every able member of society to democratically participate in economic, political, and social activities in their immediate community without imposing the will of one individual on society or the will of society on individuals regardless of any identity marker.

Theory and Praxis

The terms Communism and Socialism have historically been shrouded in a plethora of misconceptions. One can state several causes for these misunderstandings, but generally, they fall under two reasons. The first is a general lack of curiosity which is itself a historical product of the bourgeois propaganda that passes for education and culture within this bourgeois hellscape manufacturing the consent needed for the continuation of the capitalist order of things.³⁰ The second reason is that many of the self-described Marxists' scholars

²⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes, 644-761.

²⁶ Ian Angus, *The War Against the Commons: Dispossession and Resistance in the Making of Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2023).

²⁷ Ian Angus, *The War Against the Commons*, 874-940

²⁸ Ian Angus, *The War Against the Commons*, 799

²⁹ Jason W. Moore, ed., *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland: PM Press, 2016).

³⁰ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998):, 67-68.

misread Marx and Engels. Two of the most widely repeated misconceptions are founded in the misreading of a short theoretical framework from Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program*, in which he states that:

Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.³¹

This extract is possibly one of the most misunderstood revolutionary frameworks in political philosophy and modern history. The first misconception is that communism means dictatorship. This misunderstanding is the reason for the earlier statement that to understand socialist theory one must understand classical history. The term 'dictator' is of classical Roman origin, the title of an official appointed by Roman Consuls, who was mandated to manage crisis periods, and resign when the crisis was over. The original view was that Consuls appointed these dictators to rule for six months even though some officials stayed in office after the six months elapsed. However, Wilson recently challenged the widely accepted six-month notion in his book *Dictator: The Evolution of the Roman Dictatorship*.³² Nevertheless, the widely accepted notion in Marx's time was that the dictatorship was originally meant to be a temporary and brief political office appointed in times of crisis. Thus, it was within this context that Marx theorised the

polity of the Revolutionary Dictatorship of the Proletariat. The critical differences between the classical Roman Dictatorship and the Marxian Dictatorship of the Proletariat are that the former was meant to maintain the *status quo* of class rule in the Roman Republic; and the latter was theorised to guide the abolition of classes and class rule. Thus, while the Roman office of Dictatorship was meant to be occupied by one man as Dictator, Marx theorised the Dictatorship of the Proletariat as the dictatorship of the proletariat as a class, and since the proletariats are the immense majority of the world, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat is in reality a Democracy.

The second misconception is that Socialism and Communism are two different political philosophies. In *The State and Revolution*, Lenin falsely claimed that there was a scientific distinction between Socialism and Communism and went on to narrate what this supposed distinction was in an unnecessary explanation of the phases of Communist Society described by Marx in *Critique of the Gotha Program*. According to Lenin, Socialism is the first phase of Communism and would be defined by the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. On the other hand, Communism is when the State is no longer necessary, and thus, withers away.³³

As stated earlier, Marx and Engels used the terms Socialism and Communism interchangeably, and thus, this makes Lenin's reading of Marx misleading. Regretfully, this is one of the most perplexing misconceptions about Socialism or Communism that is still brought up in scholarly debates concerning Marx's stages of Communism. And many of the proponents of African Socialism used

³¹ Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, trans. Kevin B. Anderson and Karel Ludenhoff (Oakland: PM Press, 2023): 68–69.

³² Mark B. Wilson, *Dictator: The Evolution of the Roman Dictatorship* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021).

³³ Vladimir Ilich Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, trans. Robert Service (London: Penguin Books, 1992): 82–92.

Lenin's misreading of Marx.

Another problem of theory that needs to be addressed is the notion many people have of democracy as a polity. The ancient Athenian democracy was contradictory because Athenian social relations were rooted in patriarchy and slavery. The modern problems of democracy are not only the contradictions of class, patriarchy, and race; but that the tendency of representative democracy is the negation of true democracy for a form of tyranny via universal suffrage.³⁴ Marx was clear on this issue when he wrote the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* in 1843. He pointed out that democracy resolves every constitutional dilemma because in actual democracy the constitution, i.e., jurisprudence is promulgated by the people. This means that in actual democracy legislation becomes the duty of every human being, and thus, real democracy is direct and participatory.³⁵ Furthermore, he argues that: In true democracy the political State disappears.³⁶

In other words, the State is constituted as the political apparatus of society with functions that comprise the so-called arms of government, namely, legislature, judiciary, and executive. Society and State are two different entities. The State is a product of the class character of society, and class is rooted in hierarchical property relations just as property is the foundation of economics. The verticality of property relations means that some members of society become propertied and others 'propertyless.' The propertied classes have

always been the minority in diametric opposition to the 'propertyless' majority. Thus, the minority has historically held power over the majority, from antiquity, the medieval period, to the modern period. These property relations are the foundations of the State. Thus, the fact that the supreme function of society, that is, legislation is limited to a minority of society's population makes it undemocratic, and it matters little if the minority promulgates legislation in the interest of the majority. In so far as the legislative function is performed by a minority, the institution of the State negates Democracy as people's power. Thus, the monarchy or Republic State is the fundamental force of political and economic alienation. However, Lenin seemed unclear about democracy and wrote that: Democracy is a form of the state, one of its varieties.³⁷ Marx was clear on the origins of The State and Capitalism when he wrote in 1844 that The State and slavery are dialectically fused, and this is historically true for The State in the classical period and the modern era. However, in the modern period, slavery has been replaced with capitalism.³⁸

Another problem of theory and praxis that has bedevilled the socialist movement is leadership. Marx maintained that the proletariat as a class was materially and spiritually capable of leading itself as a body of individuals and as a collective through the revolutionary period. In 1864, he wrote that: the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves, that the struggle for the

³⁴ Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*, revised ed. (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991): 37.

³⁵ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 19–32.

³⁶ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, 31

³⁷ Vladimir Ilich Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, 81

³⁸ Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1992): 411–12.

emancipation of the working classes means not a struggle for class privileges and monopolies, but for equal rights and duties, and the abolition of all class rule.³⁹ Thus, Marx thought of leadership as a collective function, i.e., true democracy instead of the function of a few. The question of where to start the revolution was also answered in the catechism written before the *Manifesto* when Engels postulated that it was prudent for the communist revolution to begin in advanced capitalist countries such as England, France, Germany, and the United States of America, citing the fact that these countries had a more organised proletariat, technology, and a more advanced polity.⁴⁰

The problem with the Russian project was that Imperial Russia in 1917 was not an advanced capitalist country. The proletariat was outnumbered by the peasants; thus, the political orientation crucial for a communist revolution was inadequate, and this lacuna created a problem in theory and praxis. Thus, Lenin advocated 'vanguardism.'⁴¹ This contradicted Marx's 'theory of revolutionary leadership' as the function of the majority, resulting in the distortion of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Since many of the proponents of African Socialism followed the Leninist distortion of Marx, their projects turned into one-party dictatorships far from Marx's theory.

Indeed, Rosa Luxemburg challenged Lenin's distortion of Marx thirteen years before the 1917 revolution in a 1904 article titled *Organisational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy*, later published with the title *Leninism or Marxism*.⁴² The revolutionary anarchist, Emma Goldman declared in 1935 that the Russian project was the worst form of State capitalism in the article "There Is No Communism in Russia."⁴³ Finally, Leon Trotsky pointed out that the revolution had failed and more or less predicted its doom in *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and Where is it Going?*⁴⁴

In addition, Bastani contends that the technology prerequisite for a socialist revolution was utterly lacking in the countries falsely associated with communism.⁴⁵ However, according to historical accounts in Jonathan Haslam's *Spectre of War: International Communism and the Origins of World War II*, the destabilising effects of the First World War led to political and economic crisis; thus, fearing communist revolutions, a conservative-liberal alliance of bourgeois and aristocratic elements in Europe and America financed fascist activities as a counter-revolution to stabilise the crises-ridden capitalist status quo and prevent socialist revolutions.⁴⁶ Thus, other than

³⁹ International Workingmen's Association. *Documents of The First International 1866-1868*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1964, 265–66.

⁴⁰ Frederick Engels, *Principles of Communism* (Paris: Foreign Languages Press, 2021): 10–20.

⁴¹ Vladimir Ilich Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, pp. 25–79

⁴² Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1961).

⁴³ Emma Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd ed. (New York: Humanity Books, 1998), 405–20.

⁴⁴ Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and Where is it Going?* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1983).

⁴⁵ Aaron Bastani, *Fully Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2019), 50.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Haslam, *Spectre of War: International Communism and the Origins of World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

problems in theory and praxis, fascist-imperialist machinations and wars during the twentieth-century *interbellum* did not augur well for communism.

On Feasibility: World Communism and African Socialism

In 1965, Nkrumah argued in the conclusion to *Neo-Colonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism* that the modern world possessed the material resources to create a society devoid of the class antagonisms between the rich and poor.⁴⁷ Indeed, in Aaron Bastani's *Fully Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto*, he argues that with the scientific and technological advances of the twenty-first century, we can negate the bourgeois-proletariat dialectic and liberate humanity from scarcity and work itself with the aid of automation and artificial intelligence.⁴⁸ However, a new study by Hickel and Sullivan points to achievable goals that can immediately end global poverty without the endless growth ideology that dominates mainstream political economy. The study shows that living standards can be improved within ecological limits by decreasing the production of unnecessary goods in developed countries and moving away from producing for private profit to producing for human needs via 'decommodification.' According to the study when these things are done, the world needs only 30% of current resources and energy to satisfy the needs of 8.5 billion people, most importantly to focus

on the 80% of the global population in dire need. The authors point out advances in science and technology can help improve manufacturing, promote autonomy, and centre production on the needs of developing countries.⁴⁹

The Problem of Human Nature

An absurd attack aimed at Socialists or Anarchists by the defenders of Capitalism is that Socialism is at odds with a certain notion of human nature. This conception of human nature is the fabled Hobbesian idea that human beings are greedy and competitive. Firstly, it is unscientific to claim that a newborn baby is greedy and competitive. Indeed, in *Born to be Good*, Dacher Keltner, a Professor of Psychology, and points out that we are hard-wired to be kind as opposed to the Hobbesian conception of human nature.⁵⁰ Thus, the question is: how do we come to accept that we are greedy and competitive? Since human behaviour can lead one to conclude that we are an ensemble of these negative attributes the very conception of human nature demands that we analyse these attributes with more depth. Human nature and behaviour constitute a dialectical whole and what is often left out is that these attributes are social relations. A materialist conception of human nature can thus, be posited as a historical development subject to evolution. As such greed and competition are laws derived from the class character of society with its ideals rooted in hierarchy.

⁴⁷ Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1966), 258.

⁴⁸ Bastani, *Fully Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto*, 61-181

⁴⁹ Jason Hickel and Dylan Sullivan, "How Much Growth Is Required to Achieve Good Lives for All? Insights from Needs-Based Analysis," *World Development Perspectives* 35, no. 100612 (2024): 100612, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wdp.2024.100612>.

⁵⁰ Dacher Keltner, *Born to Be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009).

Consequently, within capitalism the object of greed is profit, and this only applies to the propertied classes, namely the aristocrats and bourgeois. The proletariat as a class cannot be greedy because it does not have the power to do so. Concerning competition Peter Kropotkin observed in *Mutual Aid: a Factor of Evolution* that the human species could not have survived without cooperation. Generally, we are social beings and much of what we have is achieved through cooperation.⁵¹ Competition is only reserved for the market, and this is what negates the sociality of the human experience.

Conclusion

The sole purpose of this study is to expose the contradictions within theory and praxis that resulted from the misreading of Marx and Engels by those who claimed to be their most ardent students. Two contradictions were revealed in *The State and Revolution*. The first was Lenin's false claim that the first phase of Communism was Socialism, and Communism the second phase with the withering away of the State. The second was 'vanguardism' and the fact that Russia was not ready for a Socialist revolution in 1917. These contradictions together with fascism and imperialism contributed immensely to the collapse of many of the socialistic experiments of the twentieth century.

In conclusion, Socialism is possible in Africa and anywhere on the planet, and this is possible because of the great advances in science and technology. However, socialism is not going to establish itself. The fate of the International Proletariat is to develop class consciousness and struggle to transcend the capital-state order. Socialism cannot be established in one country because Capital is international. Thus, the revolution must

begin in the advanced capitalist countries to avoid imperial and fascist sabotage. This conclusion is derived from the historical developments of the struggles for socialism in the 20th century and the imperialist and fascist powers that prevented the realisation of a Socialist Society in the twentieth century. The purpose of Socialism, as Albert Einstein put it, was for humanity to transcend the inhuman conditions of capitalism.⁵²

African Socialism was theorised as a negation of European ideological hegemony. However, many of its metaphysical categories such as Negritude and the notion of an African Personality meant to perform this function of ideological negation have been reduced to reactionary modes of cultural activity. Thus, it is imperative to change course. As Nkrumah noted, these problems can only be dialectically dealt with by socialist action towards World Communism. The current political, economic and climate crises demand that we urgently find an International Communist solution to the problems of the Age of Capital, i.e., to end the 'Capitalocene.'

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⁵¹ Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Simplified Factor of Evolution* (Oakland: PM Press, 2021).

⁵² Albert Einstein, "Why Socialism?," *Monthly Review* 61, no. 1 (2009): 55, https://doi.org/10.14452/mr-061-01-2009-05_7.

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