Sociological Investigation of the Use of Casual Workers in Selected Asian Firms in Lagos, Nigeria

Emeka E. Okafor
Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

The influx of Asian firms into Nigeria over the last one decade has exacerbated the use of casual workers in the production process. Little or no attempt has been made by scholars to understand the plights of this category of workers and to give them a voice. This study examined the working conditions of casual workers in three Asian firms in Lagos. The study utilized both neo-liberalism and Social Action Theory as theoretical framework. The sample was made up of 195 casual workers, selected through the triangulation of simple and purposive sampling techniques. Quantitative and qualitative data for the study were collected through the use of questionnaires and in-depth oral interviews. The result showed that most casuals described their working conditions as poor and their work as indecent. Also, most casuals rated their job satisfaction and work commitment as low, respectively. The paper argues that the prevalent use of casuals in Nigerian work organizations is predicated upon the general unemployment and poverty ions created by the weak economy. Under this precarious situation, workers no longer perceive work as a natural phenomenon to be enjoyed, but a compulsion needed to survive.

Key words: Asian firms, casualization, job satisfaction, work commitment, decent work.

Introduction

Since the turn of the new century, most African countries have turned their attention to the Asian countries, such as China, India and South Korea for business and economic cooperation. As a result, trade and economic relations have soared. For instance, Africa's share of its export to Asia (mainly to China and India), up from 14% in 2005 and three times the amount in 1990. Oil and natural gas make up 47% of the export, the remainder of the export being made up of raw materials, minerals, timber and cotton (Umunna, 2006; Oya, 2008).

There are over 800 Asian firms operating in Africa, employing more than 600,000 Africans, and producing a wide range of goods and services, such as canned foods, plastics, footwears and textiles, clearing and forwarding, and other household products. Nigeria, the continent’s second leading economy after South Africa, besieged by rising youth unemployment, has also benefited from these Asian firms, by getting some youths employed in these firms. Despite this, there are growing concerns that the influx of cheap Asian products in Africa has led to the closing down of local factories, thereby exacerbating the unemployment situation on one hand and, on the other, the promotion of precarious work conditions in the Asian firms in Africa (Umunna, 2006; Oya, 2008).

In Nigeria, there is growing concern that the use of local casual workers in Asian firms is on the rise, with a host of negative consequences for those who are compelled by unemployment and poverty to take such employment. The working conditions of such casual workers are not only debilitating, but also precarious. Scholars are of the view that the use of casual workers in these firms not only promotes indecent work, but also violates established labour standards in Nigeria (Uvieghara, 2000; Okougbo, 2004; Onyeonoru; 2004; Okafor, 2007; Adewumi, 2008).
The Problem
Casual workers have always been and will continue to be an essential and accepted component of the workforce. It will always be necessary to replace temporary or short-term employee absences resulting from illness, as well as vacation, maternity or other types of leave. Workers who may be called in to substitute for part-time or full-time employees, therefore, have a vital and continuing role to play in both the private and public sectors. In the public sector, the hiring of casual workers ensures uninterrupted provision of important and even essential services to the citizens. For some individuals, casual work may be the means of entering or re-entering the workforce, a stepping-stone to more stable employment or a desired short-term employment opportunity.

Casuals are disadvantaged in a number of ways, as compared to full-time and, even, part-time employees. Casu als often work on an on-call basis, rather than having fixed hours of work and periods of employment. For some, this may mean working for only a few hours each week, making it impossible to earn a decent living. Similarly, casual staff in the firms may be called in for periods as short as several weeks, or up to 6 months, so that they too may not attain employee status (Bramble and Barchiesi, 2003; Barchiesi, 2007). Casual workers perform the same duties as regular employees, yet they are paid less and do not have access to benefits such as pension plans and sick leave, enjoyed by other workers. For casuals, limited earnings and lack of benefits mean a generally lower quality of life, financial insecurity, inability to plan for the future and often severe emotional and psychological stress (Buchler, Haynes and Baxter, 2009). These glaring inequities are closely-linked to the precarious labour force status of the casual worker. Casuals, therefore, do not have the right to bargain collectively or to join a union and are denied any protection. Deprived of the basic rights long fought for by labour unions, casuals find themselves at the mercy of their employers. These workers cannot negotiate the terms and conditions of employment. Moreover, casuals can be fired, disciplined and, otherwise, mistreated, but cannot file a grievance or otherwise defend themselves (CUPE, 1999; 2000; Jenkins, 2004; Okougbo, 2004).

However, despite the usefulness of the casual workers in the production process, in both local and foreign firms operating in Nigeria, as well as the challenges facing them, little or no attempt has been made to empirically study these workers. Against this background, this study addresses two broad questions. First, how do the casuals in the selected Asian firms perceive their working conditions? And second, what are their levels of job satisfaction and work commitment?

Brief review of literature
Casualization refers to the systematic replacement of full-time and part-time staff with staff employed on an ad hoc basis. Regular work is not provided, but the casual worker is expected to be available when required. Theoretically, casualization leads to the reduction of an organization’s operational costs, by increasing the ease with which workers can be included and excluded from the workforce (Richardson and Allen, 2001).

Casualization of workers is a worldwide phenomenon. Studies done in New Brunswick, United States (CUPE, 1999, 2000; Lebreton, 1997, 2000), Canada (Tilly, 1991; Friss, 1994; Baumann and Underwood, 2002; Baumann and Blythe, 2003), South Africa (Mosoetsa, 2001; Altman, 2003; Bhorat, 2003; Bramble and Barchiesi, 2003; Barchiesi, 2007), India (Jenkins, 2004) and Australia (Buchler, Haynes and Baxter, 2009), showed that casualization of workers is a worldwide phenomenon that cuts across various genders and professions.

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1 Casualization as used in this study refers to working arrangement that is not permanent in nature and does not fall within the traditional standard employment relationship. Workers in this arrangement usually do not have a permanent job status, they do not get the same pay and benefits as their regular permanent counterparts doing the same job and working the same hours. In this study, these workers are referred to as 'the casuals'.
In Nigeria, the problem of casualization is common. However, it has been a long outstanding issue in the oil/gas industry and multinational corporations. In some companies in Nigeria, it is possible for one to get workers as many as 2000 in an industry, out of which about 1500 (three quarters) may be contract workers. In some local industries, in the informal sector, it is possible to get situations whereby virtually all the employees are casual/contract staff. The casual/contract workers have either profession or administrative skills (Okougbo, 2004; Ademugba, 2006; Okafor, 2007).

Data on casual/contract workers is quite alarming. In the oil and gas sub-sector alone, there are over 1000 contract/casual workers, who are unionized against the wishes of management and, also, being discriminated against by management. Specifically, in 2001, there were an estimated 14,559 casual/contract workers, as against 23,065 junior workers on permanent job positions in the oil industry. Most of the casual workers have various qualifications that would warrant permanent jobs – certificates, diplomas and degrees in such areas as engineering, computer science, telecommunication and accounting. Some of the permanent jobs where casual workers were being utilized in the industry include clerical jobs, plant operations, computer services, rig drilling operations, maintenance services, transportation, flow station operations, flow station guards, deck-hands, forklift operators, typists and fire service men (Ademugba, 2006).

The scope of the problem can be seen from the fact that in 1980, Mobil Oil Nigeria Limited (Marketing Unit) had 195 permanent junior employees. By 1991, however, there were only 28 of them. Mobil Producing Nigeria (Production Section) had over 400 permanent junior employees in 1980. This figure declined to 80 by 1991, with most of the jobs being undertaken by casual workers. In the Western Division (i.e. Warri Area) of Shell operations alone, there were 310 labour contractors in 1991, employing 1,329 casual workers. By 2002, there was no single junior staff, who was a direct employee of Mobil Oil Plc. These were in violation of existing labour laws (Uvieghara, 2000; Okougbo, 2004; Onyeonoru, 2004; Ademugba, 2006; Okafor, 2007).

**Theoretical Context**

In this study, the prevalence of casualization of workers by the Asian firms is anchored on neo-liberalism, while workers’ perception of their working conditions is anchored on Social Action Theory. Conceptually, neo-liberalism refers to the desire to intensify and expand the market, by increasing the number, frequency, repeatability, and formalization of transactions. The ultimate (unreachable) goal of neo-liberalism is a universe where every action of every being is a market transaction, conducted in competition with every other being, and influencing every other transaction. Neo-liberalism seeks to transfer part of the control of the economy from the public to the private sector, under the belief that it will produce a more efficient government, and improve the economic indicators of the nation. The neo-liberal theory sees the nation primarily as a business firm. The nation-firm is selling itself as an investment location, rather than simply selling export goods. A neo-liberal government pursues policies designed to make the nation more attractive as an investment location. These policies are generally pro-business.

The main features of neo-liberalism include:

1. The rule of the market;
2. Cutting public expenditure for social services;
3. Deregulation;
4. Privatization;
5. Eliminating the concept of "the public good" or "community".

Neo-liberalism assumes that higher economic freedom has a strong correlation with higher living standards; higher economic freedom leads to increased investment, technology transfer, innovation, and responsiveness to consumer demand (Martinez and García, 2000). Neo-liberalism believes staunchly on the freedom of contract. Freedom of
contract is the right to choose one's contracting parties and to trade or work with them on any terms and conditions one sees fit. Contracts permit individuals to create their own enforceable legal rules, adapted to their unique situations. Parties decide whether contracts are profitable or fair, but once a contract is made, they are obliged to fulfill its terms, even if they are going to sustain losses by doing so. Through making binding promises, people are free to pursue their own interests. For neoliberalism, it is a moral duty of human beings to arrange their lives to maximize their advantages in the labour market. According to Harvey (2005), corporations operating in a typical neo-liberal economic environment prefer short-term contract of employment, which in effect, forces workers to apply and re-apply for the same job over and over again. This kind of flexibilization reduces cost of production, boosts profit but, at the same time, minimizes or cheapens workers' quality of working lives (Buchler, Haynes and Baxter, 2009).

On the other hand, Social Action according to Weber (1964): “includes all human behaviour when and insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning attached to it by the individual. It takes account of the behaviour of others and thereby oriented in its course.” Based on this assertion, individuals act in accordance with their own definition of the situation. This includes, willingness, or otherwise to act and active or passive acquiescence, and may be oriented to the past, present or expected future behaviour of others (Coser and Rosenberg, 1976). For Weber (1964), all human behaviour does not amount to action, neither is every human action 'social'. Behaviour should be deliberate to qualify as 'action'. Action in turn must be interpreted in terms of its subjectively-intended meaning to the actor, including the effect the actor wants the action to have on others.

Parsons (1951) and Cohen (1968) have identified some features of social action to include:

1. The actor has some set of goals to achieve and his action is geared towards achieving these goals;
2. Action involves selection of various means towards the achievement of goals;
3. The actor always makes some assumptions concerning the nature of his goals and the possibility of achieving them; and
4. The pursuit of goals and the selection of the means occur within the situation which influence the course of action.

What social action theory postulates is that any instance of action (or unit of act) stems from the ends that the actor is concerned to attain, the definition of the situation. These include the range of alternative actions that are perceived to be available and the choice of means that are likely to be effective, bearing in mind what the action will achieve, as well as the reactions of others. The meaning on which the actor grounds the interpretation and definitions of the situation is derived from his or her experience in the wider society. When applied to casual workers, this theory takes into consideration external factors in addition to internal factors in explaining casual workers’ perception of working conditions as well as their behaviours in the workplace (Menzies, 1982).

Methods
The study was conducted in Lagos, southwestern Nigeria. Lagos State was created on May 27, 1967, by virtue of State (Creation and Transitional Provisions) Decree No. 14 of 1967, which restructured Nigeria’s Federation into 12 States. The state took off as an administrative entity on April 11, 1968, with Lagos Island serving the dual role of being the state and federal capital. However, with the creation of the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja in 1976, Lagos Island ceased to be the capital of the state, which was moved to Ikeja. With the formal relocation of the seat of the federal government to Abuja on 12th December, 1991, Lagos ceased to be Nigeria’s political capital. Nevertheless, Lagos remains the nation’s economic and commercial capital.

The core population of Lagos is Yoruba, one of the largest ethno-linguistic groups in Africa, but its population has always been ethnically-mixed. By
virtue of its cosmopolitan nature, there are ethnic and class varieties. Lagos is Nigeria’s financial, commercial and industrial nerve centre, with over 2,000 manufacturing industries and over 200 financial institutions, including the nation’s premier stock exchange, the Nigeria Stock Exchange. The state alone harbours 60% of the federation’s total industrial investments and foreign trade, while also attracting 65% of Nigeria’s commercial activities. It also accounts for more than 40% of all labour emoluments paid in the country. Indeed, the headquarters of notable multinational conglomerates like UAC, Unilever, John Holts, BEWAC/VYB, Leventis, Churchgate, Chevron, Shell, Exxonmobil and the nation’s giant public enterprises are all located within the state. However, Lagos State is not industrially-saturated (Obono, 2007).

The study was conducted in three Asian firms in Lagos, namely: Firm “X”, Firm “Y” and Firm “Z”. Firm “X” is a plastic producing firm. It produces varieties of plastics. The firm is located in Amuwo-Odofin Industrial Layout, Apapa-Oshodi Expressway. As at the time of conducting this study, the firm had a total of 875 staff, out of which 214 were casual staff. The firm is owned by the South Koreans. Firm “Y” is in the food industry and produces assorted types of biscuits. The firm is located in Ikeja Industrial Estate. The firm had 1,203 staff, out of which 236 were casual staff. The firm is owned by the Indians. The third firm, Firm “Z”, engages in packaging. The firm is located around Marketing Junction, Ogba, Lagos. The firm had 715 staff, out of which 198 were casual staff. The firm is owned by the Chinese.

The three firms were all incorporated as private companies in Nigeria at various times, and by virtue of this, are empowered to carry out legitimate businesses. It is important to note that the selection of these firms for study was purely purposive. Diversification of the study to cover various firms and access to vital information were the main criteria for their selection.

The research design for the study was a combination of survey and exploratory designs. A total sample size of 60 casual workers was selected from each of the three firms, totalling 180, for quantitative study through a simple random sampling technique. Five casual workers were selected from each of the three firms, totalling fifteen workers, for qualitative study. Three members of management staff (one from each firm) were also selected for qualitative study. Consequently, a triangulation of quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (in-depth interviews (IDI)) instruments were used to obtain quantitative and qualitative data. Moreover, the analysis of data was based on the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The former involved mainly descriptive analysis, while the latter (qualitative method) involved content analysis and verbatim quotations.

Results
Socio-economic and Demographic Characteristics
The result for the study as presented on table 1 showed that 60% of the casuals were males, while 40% were females. This may be due to the fact that men are expected to be breadwinners in the family. Again, the type of work done in these firms may have required vitality, hence the preference for males over female casuals by the management. Also, most casuals (38.3%) fell within the age category of 25-31 years, while the least (16.1%) fell within the age category of 39 years and above. Moreover, 42.2% and 57.8% of the casuals were married and single, respectively. This seems to suggest that most casuals were young people, with little or no family responsibilities.

Furthermore, a majority of the sample population were fairly literate, as most of the casuals (44.4%), that cut across the three firms possessed high school certificates. Also, very few (11.1%) possessed university degrees. This goes further to confirm the observations of Okougbo (2004) and Adenugba (2006) that some casual workers in Nigeria had university degrees and other higher qualifications that would have enabled them get permanent jobs.

2 Pseudonyms (X, Y, Z) have been assigned to these three firms to conceal their real identities and maintain confidentiality of information obtained as required by the ethical consideration.
However, the presence of a large number of casuals without university degrees may have been informed by the type of jobs these workers were doing, which may be considered as menial, and does not require a university degree. In relation to this, the result further showed that most casuals (46.1%) were earning a relatively meagre monthly income. However, only (16.1%) claimed that they were earning less than N20,000 monthly. By every standard, this amount is meagre, considering the cost of living in Nigeria.

Also, 53.8% of the casuals had spent less than three years in their present job, while 40.6% had spent three years and above. This shows the level of circumvention of the law by these firms, because the law stipulates that nobody can be engaged as a casual worker continuously for more than 90 days without his/her employment being regularized. In terms of religious affiliation, the casuals were either Christians (57.2%) or Muslims (42.8%). The role of religion in the construction of social reality among workers has been well-documented (Weber, 1930). Although
Lagos is a cosmopolitan city and a melting pot of all ethnic groups in Nigeria, yet, the Yorubas (51.7%) in whose territory these firms were located, dominated the sample population. However, the Igbos, another dominant and highly-migrant ethnic group in Nigeria, constituted 24.4%, while others like the Ijaw, Bini, Tiv and Hausa constituted the remaining 23.9%.

Present Conditions of Work

Table 2 shows the respondents' views on the various aspects of their work in the firms. The result showed that an overwhelming number (83.9%) of the respondents described their present condition of work as "poor", while only 10% described it as "good". Investigating this issue further, in the course of in-depth interviews (IDIs) with some selected casual workers, most of the respondents described their conditions of work as "poor". For instance, Mr. Jide, a 26-year old worker from Firm "Y" said:

Most of us are casual workers... only about two per cent who are loyalist to management are supervisors. Although, when the establishment started some years ago, I was told that people were given permanent employment. But that is not true and the welfare package here is just too bad. It is just to keep body and soul together (IDI/Male/Casual/Firm Y/2008)

Furthermore, Ajala who has been in the employment of Firm "X" for over two years, said:

It is sad that there is no security in this job. I have served this company for over two years. By now, I thought my appointment with the company would have been regularized, but to no avail. Whenever the issue of confirmation comes up, the management would sack all the workers and recruit new set of casuals. I have been surviving all these... management is doing this because they know that thousands of people are willing to accept such offer because of the high unemployment rate in the country, particularly among the youths (IDI/Male/Casual/Firm X/2008)

Also confirming the poor working condition in the firms, Chukwuma, a 31-year old casual worker from Firm "Z", said:

...casual workers in this company put in a minimum of 12 hours everyday, including Saturdays and Sunday. They use us anyhow, and when we complain, they threaten to lay us off. Nobody has been given an employment letter. This is contrary to the agreement we had at the point of entry, as workers were told that their appointment would be confirmed after three months, but they have always reneged on such promises. We are called staff by words, not in paper. The implication is that if you are sacked or you resigned, you will only be entitled to a month salary. Apart from poor pay, casual workers are exposed to dangerous chemicals without safety gears, ...provision for gears were only hurriedly make available whenever regulatory agents were around for inspection. So if the officials do not come in three years, safety gears will not be given (IDI/Male/Casual/Firm Z/2008)

Table 2 also revealed that when the respondents were asked if their present work was the kind of job they would aspire to do throughout their lifetime, most of the respondents (86.7%) said no, while only very few (7.2%) said yes, and 6.1% did not respond. The implication here is that most of these casual workers could be described as transitional workers, who are either working in these firms out of necessity or bidding their time for something better, so as to move on with their lives. Probing this further in the course of IDIs, Atoyebi, a 23-old year school certificate holder, who works with Firm "X", said:

5 Pseudonyms have been assigned to both the casual workers and the representatives of the management for easy identification of their responses.
If I tell you that this is the kind of work I will do throughout my life time, then I’m cursing myself. There is nothing here that is interesting... the pay, the security... nothing. Workers are exposed to highly-active chemicals. I’m doing this job to save enough money to go back to school. I wrote the last entrance examination and when the result comes out and it’s good, I will move...

(IDI/Male/Casual/FirmX/2008)

Corroborating the above statement, another casual worker, Okon, from Firm “Z”, said:

No... if anyone tells you this is his or her dream job, forget it. As for me, it is not my dream job. Assuming it is a dream job, why do the workers leave in droves and why does the management recruit all the time. This company normally recruits workers every Tuesdays and Thursdays. This is because most workers hardly return after the first day experience. People gather in their hundreds at the gate waiting to be employed as casuals every week. Some people after the first day experience don’t come back, while some will work up to a week before leaving without collecting their money... forget what you see from outside. It is pure war inside... There is no break time not to talk of eating. Although we run shifts, all the same, what goes on here is pure slavery. Workers usually end up more miserable at the end of every day’s job than when they were without a job. This is because the pay is very poor and the little we earn most times is not enough to treat ailments and injuries sustained on the job, not to talk of meeting our needs

(IDI/Male/Casual/Firm Z/2008)

Table 2. Distribution of Casual Workers’ Views on the Various Aspects of Their Work by Firms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Firm “X” (N=60)</th>
<th>Firm “Y” (N=60)</th>
<th>Firm “Z” (N=60)</th>
<th>Total (N = 180)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a casual worker, how would you describe your present condition of work?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t tell</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is this the kind of work you aspire to do throughout your lifetime?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>81.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a casual worker, do you consider your present work a decent work?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>81.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t say</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also, reliving his own personal experience, Abudlkareem, a 26-year old casual from Firm “Y”, said:

"I was excited when I first secured this employment with the company. I thought it signalled the end of a long gruesome wait for employment and a step towards getting admission into a higher institution. I was exceptionally glad because I saw it as an avenue to keep body and soul together after several attempts to secure admission into the higher institution proved abortive. I passed my WAEC well, but post-UME examination wouldn’t let me go and my parents were already getting fed up with the funding of all my needs, considering my position in the family of five as the first. For now, I can consider this job as my dream job even though it does not offer me much. It has been helping me to get my daily bread. There is this adage which says: ‘a bird in the hand worths more than a million birds in the bush.’ Until I get another job, it remains my dream job for now."

(IDI/Male/Casual/FirmY/2008)

In attempting to debunk the assertion that Firm “Z” recruits all the time, (Mr. Z), the personnel manager of the firm said:

"No, no. It’s not true. In fact, it is an exaggeration to say that our company recruits all the time, precisely on Tuesdays and Thursdays. You see, we engage primarily young secondary school leavers and by the time they get their results and want to further their education, nobody disturbs them. That is why it looks as if we employ every time. However, I think people should appreciate the fact that we are contributing our quota in reducing unemployment in this country, especially among the youths who ordinarily should have gone into all sorts of social vices and crimes."

(IDI/Male/Manager /FirmZ/2008)

From the responses above, it is evident that most casual workers in these firms never considered their present work as a lifetime career, but as a stepping stone to other futuristic activities. There is a high incidence of labour turnover among the casual workers in these firms. Obviously, an unstable workforce has a lot of implications for workers’ performance and productivity in any work organization (Ogunbameru, 2004).

On whether or not these workers considered their work as decent work, the result showed that only 3.3% thought that their present work could be considered as such, while 86.7% thought otherwise, and 10% could not say. From all indications, most casual workers in these firms did not consider their work as decent work. Confirming this in the course of the IDIs, Femi, who in the past had worked for two companies owned by the Asians and now works with Firm “Z”, said rather emotionally:

"Far from it! Far from it!!... Here, people work because they do not have any choice. People are frustrated and therefore can afford to take any kind of job just to survive, get their daily bread and keep living. What we have is a situation whereby our factories are mere shadow of themselves. Some of these factories are slave camps with an unfriendly atmosphere, especially those owned by the Indians, Chinese, Japanese. As you can see, the gates are usually very high so that people will not know what is going on in the factories. They have no regards for ILO conventions and the Nigerian labour laws. So this work does not in anyway qualify as a decent work."

(IDI/Male/Casual/FirmZ/2008)

4 Decent work as used in this context entails jobs that must provide security, dignity, respect for freedom of choice and the capacity of the job owner to participate on the job such as working conditions and the environment in which the job is done (Levin, 2003).
Corroborating this view on the decent work, and rather going historically, Okoro, who is in his mid-30s, and works with Firm “Y”, said:

...remember that in June 2003, within the confines of the Standard Industrial Development Company Limited, SIDCL, one Niyi Ojelabi, lost his life when he was compelled to carry out a repair on a roof after complaining that he was feeling dizzy. Again, remember that earlier in September 2002, over 100 workers who were on night duty at a Chinese factory in Ikorodu, a suburb of Lagos, got burnt. None of the workers came out alive as everywhere was under lock and key in pretense that the management did not want them to steal the company property. None of these companies has been brought to book. Our government is not interested in decent work. Government continues to shield and tolerate these abuses of these companies in the name of foreign investors. The situation here is terrible. The level of insecurity is very high... As casual workers, we cannot unionize and what permanent workers (who are unionized) can do for us is very little, because you are not their members. In fact the permanent and unionized workers see us a threat to their jobs.

(IDI/Male/Casual/FirmX/2008)

Also, Bisi, a female casual with Firm “Y” said:

The owners of most multinational organizations import their foreign brothers into the country to take up full-time employment, with all the stipulated benefits attached. They, however, find it more rewarding to place Nigerian workers on contract, in order to deny them the benefits attached to the job... carting huge profits to their countries of origin from Nigeria, even while treating the citizen with disdain.

(IDI/Female/Casual/FirmY/2008)

From the above responses, it is evident that most casuals do not consider their work in these firms as decent work by any standard.

Job Satisfaction and Work Commitment

Table 3 presents the perceived levels of job satisfaction and work commitment. The result shows that 82.2% of the respondents that cut across the three firms rated their job satisfaction as low, 11.1% rated it as moderate, while 7.8% rated it as high. As regards their level of work commitment, 85.6% rated it low, 10.6% rated it moderate, and 3.9% rated it high. The implication here is that most casual workers were deriving low job satisfaction from their jobs and, as such, are poorly-committed to their work. This may be attributed largely to their conditions of work in the firm, which most of them had described as poor. This aspect of work was probed further in the course of IDIs. Yemi, a 23-year old female casual, who has been working in the production department of Firm “X” for one year, said:
Table 3. Distribution of the Casuals’ Levels of Job Satisfaction and Work Commitment by Firms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
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<td></td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>As a casual worker, how would you rate the level of satisfaction you derive from your present work?</td>
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<td>Low</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>85.0</td>
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<td>High</td>
<td>04</td>
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<td>As a casual worker, how would you rate the level of commitment to your present work?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>78.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>08</td>
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<td>02</td>
<td>3.3</td>
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I’m not satisfied with my job at all. When I joined the company about a year ago, we were paid ₦450.00 per day. But these days, new intakes collect ₦430.00, and after three months, they will increase it by ₦20.00. The amount I receive, even though it has been increased to ₦600 daily, is still like a drop in the ocean, because the transportation cost to this place from where am coming from is very high... working in the production department, almost everyday I see workers’ fingers cut off and other terrible accidents in the company. On each day, to get back home from work unhurt is an extraordinary grace. The company does not take liability for injuries...

(IDI/Female/Casual/FirmX/2008)

Oral Interviews with the Managers

Reacting to some of the issues raised by the casual workers, Mr. Y, the personnel manager of Firm “Y” said:

Firm “Y” is a corporate organization that was established over 10 years ago and is registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) to do legal business in Nigeria. We produce various brands of biscuits, hence it engages workers to do the job in line with the Nigerian labour law. I do not understand what people actually mean by saying Firm “Y” is operating a slave camp, when we are no longer in the era of colonialism. I’m aware of all the operations of our company and I can tell everyone who cares to listen that we are not operating a slave camp...

(IDI/Male/Manager/FirmY /2008)

On the number of shifts the firm runs and other related matters, he said:

We operate three shifts in the factories, in line with labour laws. We are a well-unionized organization, that is fully registered. As a well-unionized organization, if we operate a slave camp, the union will cry out. That is the essence of belonging to a union. The Ministry of Labour comes to inspect our factories thrice a year. Our firm produces biscuits and, definitely, the operating system and environment is different from where cold food is produced. Of course, the casual workers by virtue of their work do not belong to a union, but we are doing everything possible to make their working conditions better...

(IDI/Male/Manager/FirmY /2008)
Mr. Z, the personnel manager of Firm “Z” said thus:

Let's not deceive ourselves. The concept of decent work is ideal and not reality. It is a standard which the ILO would want every country to attain progressively. You cannot separate decent work from the economic environment in which a firm is operating. As a matter of fact, this company needs commendation and not condemnation. Here is a company providing jobs for the teeming unemployed and unemployable people in this country, yet people are crucifying us by talking about decent work. No work is absolutely decent in the real sense of the word. We will get there, we are not yet there.

(IDI/Male/Manager/Firm Z/2008)

On some of the obnoxious policies of the firm that borders on hire-and-fire, he said:

Again, there may be one or two areas of the work in this company that may not be good, but were are trying to tackle that. What the management will not allow is the situation whereby some disgruntled individuals in the name of trade union will come and run down this company just like they ran down public enterprises in this country in the past. Management has to enforce certain work standard and discipline which casual workers may not like. We will continue to work to improve their working conditions within the context of our operating environment.

(IDI/Male/Manager/Firm Z/2008)

In his own contributions, Mr. X, the human resource manager of Firm “X” said:

This company has not violated any aspect of Labour Law by engaging the services of casual workers. Go and read the Nigeria Labour Law properly, the conditions of their service are well spelt out. As a matter of fact, our company, though a foreign company, is not the only company that uses casual workers. Other indigenous companies do the same. Are the conditions of service of casual workers in those indigenous companies better than what we have here? The answer is no. The officials of the Ministry of Labour come from time to time, and they have not indicted us in any way. As regards decent work, it depends on what you mean by decent work. The ILO has set a standard which every country, every company is trying to meet. Because of the situation of work in various countries, especially in the developing countries like ours, we are striving to meet those standards. Some countries or even companies may meet these standards earlier before others because they are at different stages of development.

(IDI/Male/Manager/Firm X/2008)

Continuing and also justifying his argument that a job is not necessarily indecent, because of its status, and citing the ILO as an example, he said:

... mind you, a job is not necessarily indecent work simply because it is casual or contract work. If you go to the ILO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland today, some workers are there as either casual workers or contract staff. They contract certain duties out. If you go to Australia, Britain and even the US, casual work strives there. All these are developed countries. So the point I'm trying to make is that casual or contract work is a global trend. Nobody has condemned ILO and these developed countries. Again, that a job is a permanent job does not make it a decent job, if certain criteria of decent work are not there.... Here, we do not discriminate on the basis of gender, ethnicity or religion in our employment. The moment a worker presents himself for employment and he is able to demonstrate that he has the strength to do the kind of work we do here, and someone can surety that he is not of dubious character and that he has fine conduct...
and can obey reasonable instructions from the supervisors, we’ll recruit him...

(IDI/Male/Manager/Firm X /2008)

From the above submissions by the managers, it is evident that these mangers had put up spirited efforts in their attempts to defend and justify the positions of their firms as they relate to recruitment, working conditions, decent work and other associated matters.

Discussion
The forces of economic globalization have marginalized Nigeria in many fundamental ways. As a result, the neo-liberal economy in Nigeria is based on a very weak foundation (Mazrui, 2001; Offiong, 2001; Okafor, 2005). Besides this, years of massive corruption and looting, misrule and mismanagement of the economy by the political class have hindered economic growth of the country, despite the fact that Nigeria is endowed with diverse and infinite resources, both human and material. Also, several years of negligence, adverse and faulty economic policies have led to the underutilization of these resources. The forces of economic globalization have marginalized Nigeria in many fundamental ways. As a result, the neo-liberal economy in Nigeria is based on a very weak foundation (Mazrui, 2001; Offiong, 2001; Okafor, 2005). Besides this, years of massive corruption and looting, misrule and mismanagement of the economy by the political class have hindered economic growth of the country, despite the fact that Nigeria is endowed with diverse and infinite resources, both human and material. Also, several years of negligence, adverse and faulty economic policies have led to the underutilization of these resources. The resources have not been effectively utilized to yield maximum economic and social benefits to the people. The directionlessness of the successive administrations (both military and civilian) in Nigeria, characterized by the collapsed infrastructure and total paralysis of the health, education and other key sectors of economy, have resulted into all kinds of social problems, such as crime, general insecurity, prostitution, mass unemployment and poverty (Adegbamigbe, 2008; Odunlami, 2008).

Unemployment and poverty are among the most critical problems Nigeria is facing and, they are in fact, predisposing people to pick up jobs as casual workers in order to survive (Okafor, 2007). Available data from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) indicate that the unemployment rate in Nigeria, in the age bracket of 15 to 64 years, stood at 5.30% at the end of 2006, an improvement over the 11.90% recorded in 2005. The CBN data showed that youth employment, in the age bracket of 15 to 24 years, was 14% in 2006, while under-employment rate for below 15 and above 64 years was 20.2%. Furthermore, the secondary-school graduates make up the majority of the unemployed, accounting for about 35% to 50%. The rate of unemployment within the age group of 20 to 24 years is 40% and 31% for those between 15 to 19 years (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2007). With regards to poverty, the African Development Bank (ADP) indicates that 70% of Nigerians live on less than $1 per day. In 2005, Nigeria was rated the 26th poorest nation in the world, and 146 out of 162 on the United Nations’ Human Development Index. The World Bank rated Nigeria amongst the 57 countries with low income in 2006, while the Human Index for 2006 ranked the country 159 out of 171 countries. This means in terms of life expectancy, educational attainment and real income, Nigeria is amongst those with the lowest human development (Yishua, 2007; Morphy, 2008).

The general mismanagement and decadence in the economy have exacerbated crisis in the Nigerian labour market (Onyeonoru, 2008). The economy is so weak and paralysed to the extent that it is unable to absorb the large chunk of graduates being turned out every year from numerous tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This evidently has resulted in a large number of “reserved army of labour” (Marx, 1959), as most youths who are able to work could not find jobs to do. The direct fallout of persistent unemployment and abject poverty, which most Nigerians have been subjected to, is the desperate quest for survival, in which most unemployed youths pick up menial jobs as casual labourers in both the local and foreign firms. According to a recent study by the Campaign for Democratic and Workers’ Rights in Nigeria (CDWRN), the number of casual workers in Nigeria is about 45% of the entire working population. This means that in a factory of 20 workers, nine of them are casual workers (Mohammed, 2010).

The issue of casual workers, especially in emerging neo-liberal economies like Nigeria, has attracted the attention of the international community, to the extent that the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1998, declared in Philadelphia
that its members must "respect, promote and realize in good faith" the principles concerning the fundamental rights at work. This declaration on fundamental rights at work, although not binding in international law, underscores that all member countries have an obligation to respect, to promote and to realize, in good faith, the fundamental principles involved, whether or not they have ratified the relevant ILO conventions. Nigeria has ratified the ILO's conventions, but it has not considered it obligatory to uphold them. Also, the African Charter, which was enacted as an Act of the National Assembly, provides in Article 15 that: "Every individual shall have the right to work under equitable and satisfactory conditions and shall receive equal pay for equal work." It is implied, therefore, that since it enjoins the state parties to ensure that its citizens have the right to work, and are entitled to equal pay for equal work, that there should not be any form of discrimination in employment between standard workers and nonstandard workers.

In this study, most casuals rated their working conditions as "poor" and their work as indecent; hence, they are deriving low job satisfaction and, by extension, are not committed to work in these firms. Section 7 (1) of the Labour Act, Cap 198, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990, provides that: "Not later than three months after the beginning of a worker’s period of employment with an employer, the employer shall give to the worker a written statement specifying: the terms and conditions of employment, which include the nature of the employment and if the contract is for a fixed-term, and the date when the contract expires." Also, in spite of the provision in Section 17(e) of the Constitution, which guarantees "equal pay for equal work without discrimination on account of sex, or any other ground whatsoever," the discrimination in pay between permanent and casual employees still persists. Although, the Act recognizes casual employment, it does not define the term nor does it make provisions for the regulation of this form of employment, like it did for standard employment. As a result, many casual employees do not have letters of employment, and many companies do not have records of their casual employees, in order to evade the law. The management of the sampled firms appeared to have understood the situation to be so, and therefore, are not committed to developing any stable work group, since the labour market is saturated and volatile (Onyeonoru, 2008).

That these firms recruit all the time is a clear indication of the precarious working conditions of the casuals. The greater their participation in the production process, the greater their dehumanization, exploitation and deprivation, which in some instances extend to job allowances, canteen services, transportation and leave entitlement. The casuals’ perception of their working conditions as well as their levels of job satisfaction and work commitment may differ from one person to another, and from one firm to another, but they all rest on the prevailing objective, and the social and economic conditions in which the casuals find themselves, both within and outside their places of work.

Conclusion
The prevalence of Asian firms in Nigeria is part of the general attempt by the global capitalistic system to reproduce itself, using indigenous cheap labour. The use of casuals by these firms to boost their profit and reduce overhead cost is an attempt at absolving themselves of any entitlements that are due to these workers, if their appointments are regularized. By using mostly casual workers in their operations, these firms are offering jobs to the teeming unemployed Nigerians, in the absence of any real alternative on one hand and, on the other, promoting indecent work, by taking advantage of the desperate Nigerians. The use of casuals is not the exclusive preserve of foreign firms in Nigeria, even local firms do engage in such obnoxious practice. Whether local or foreign, it is pertinent to note that treating a certain category of

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5 The labour law stipulates that casual staff can be employed by a firm if the contract will not exceed the three month agreement. If there is to be a continuation of the person in the position beyond the three month agreement, the employer is expected to give a contract letter to the individual stipulating the terms of employment.
workers as casuals is a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and several sections of chapter four in the 1999 Nigerian constitution, especially the respect to human dignity. In general, the pervasiveness of this situation is a reflection of the growing global capital encroachment of the Nigerian economy and a manifestation of the general crisis in the Nigerian labour market.

References

**Biographical Note**

Emeka Emmanuel Okafor (Ph.D.) is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He specializes in Industrial Sociology and Human Resource Management.