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Adam Mayer, *Naija Marxisms: Revolutionary Thought in Nigeria* (London: Pluto Press: 2016). pp. 241.

Samuel Oyewole

Adam Mayer's, *Naija Marxism*, may come as a surprise to many readers, especially those in Nigeria. This Hungarian author intelligently examines the under-explored areas of Nigeria's socio-political and economic development, while refreshing the fading memory of leftist, Marxist-Leninist revolutionary thoughts and movements in Nigerian history. The ideas he offers, provides a lens to understand and address many of the present predicaments that confront the country. Mayer's work is a turn from the dominant narrative of Nigerian affairs and historical development locally and internationally. A narrative that to a large extent is liberal, at least by an African standard, with a record of progress in economic liberalism in the last three decades, and two decades of democratisation and pro-West foreign policy since independence. Although, these values do not appear to be under imminent threats from leftist revolutionary forces, Mayer provides a unique approach in light of and in spite of this record.

Naija Marxisms is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter provides the readers with a broad background knowledge of African affairs with a zoomed focus on Nigeria, the connection and disconnection between Afrocentricism and Marxism as well as specific instances of men and women who have contributed to the development of an African brand of Marxism. Within this, Mayer gives special emphasis to Nigerian leftists. The second chapter of the book highlights Nigerian affairs, covering pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras, all of which the author presented in a concise manner. This extensive chapter spans the history of the slave trade, colonialism and imprints of underdevelopment, nationalist movements, military intervention in politics, civil war, oil exploration, structural adjustment programme (SAP) and economic liberalisation, transition politics and civil rules, ethnicity and politicisation of religion, among other issues like poverty, inequalities, labour unionism, crimes and civil resistance with special attention on subsidy protest and the Boko Haram insurgency.

The third chapter dives into Mayer's interest by systematically reviewing leftist movements and activities in Nigeria since the early 20th century. Although none of the Nigerian movements

were driven by communism, leftists arose during the struggles against colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, male chauvinism, feudalism and tyranny of transnational corporations.¹ The 1929-30 Aba Riots demonstrates Nigeria's labour struggles, only preceded by the Nigerian first strike in 1921, seventeen years before trade unions became legal. The volume further covers the formative years of Nigerian trade unions (1912-45), the nationalist movement (1923-45), progressive unions/parties (1946-66), progressive feminists (from 1940s), militant unionism (1945-50), Soviet support for ideological Marxism and Leninism, and militant labour and political party activity that ultimately led to an increasing criminalisation of leftists in late colonial Nigeria.

Further, this foundational chapter covers the post-colonial experience of Naija Marxisms. The Nigeria's First Republic witnessed the emergence of the Socialist Workers and Farmers Party (SWAFP), 1963-66, which was succeeded by the People's Redemption Party (PRP) in 1978. The 1968-69 Farmers Revolt (Agbekoya riots) in Western Nigeria, which took place during the civil war, set the precedent for the government crackdown on labour unionism between 1970 and 1999. In this process, student radicalism emerged between the 1970s and 80s, as a Marxist held sway in Nigerian universities at the time. Remarkably, some Nigerian socialist forces established an experimental rural commune, which was illegally operated in Osun State between 1980 and 1999. At the same time, many Nigerian leftists participated in a series of struggles for democracy in Nigeria between 1980 and 1999. Yet, virtually all the labour unions and civil society groups became less ideological since Nigeria's return to civil rule in 1999.

Mayer's fourth chapter analyzes the international relations of Nigeria's left. Nigeria has maintained a pro-West stance in foreign relations since independence. Nigeria and the Soviet Union were briefly on the same side, or at least had favourable and beneficial relations. During Nigeria's civil war, the USSR became the major arm supplier amidst the Western arm embargo. Later in 1975, the Murtala/Obasanjo regime in Nigeria supported the Soviet-backed revolutionary government of Angola against the interests of Apartheid-South Africa and the West.² Further, this chapter highlighted Soviet development and security support for Nigeria, leftist liberation movements, and labour unions across Africa, along with the view of the Nigerian Marxists on these. Extending

beyond Nigerian borders, Mayer surveyed the interests and strategies of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and Communist China in Africa, and paid close attention to pro-socialist regimes in Africa, including Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Angola, and Ethiopia.

Chapter Five centers on the activities and historiographies of Nigerian political thinkers with a Marxist-Lenin learning. The volume discusses the academic contributions and political mobilisation of Niyi Oniororo, Ikenna Nzimiro, Yusufu Bala Usman, Mkwugo Okoye, Eskor Toyo, and Edwin Madunagu. The sixth chapter covers political economists like Bade Onimode, Adebayo Olukoshi and co., Okwudiba Nnoli and co., and those associated with the Review of African Political Economy (ROAPE) like Abdul Raufu, Mustapha, Yusuf Bangura, Usman A. Tar, Segun Osoba, and Dafe Osobo. The subsequent chapter examines Marxian feminisms with a focus on Marxist views on gender alongside the female overtone of the Aba Riots of 1929-30. Mayer also analyzes the world-view and contributions of eminent feminists like Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti (referred to as the female Che Guevara), Gambo Sawaba, Bene Madunagwe, Molaria Ogundipe-Laslie, and recently Amina Mama—all of whom contributed to a Naija-brand of Marxist philosophy.

Against this background, Mayer's book shows that Nigerian Marxism is a coherent intellectual movement, which provides important answers to the existential questions troubling Nigeria and Africa, from the late 1940s up to now.³ The Nigerian Marxists are not attempting to mirror the Eastern European-style dictatorship of the proletariat but rather a participatory democracy where the people are truly in control. The book attempts to tap into the mind of the Nigerian Marxist, highlighting contributions and key players. It did not deeply engage in independent theorisation or historicity, save for some of the ideas that were extrapolated with current affairs.

In some occasions, the author displayed insufficient knowledge, to perhaps questionably justify the continuous relevance of Marxism in the light of unfolding developments in Nigeria. The book glossed over the greed, plunder, and accumulative tendency of the Niger Delta militancy by merely describing it as a quasi-socialist struggle.⁴ It was also argued that 2013 marked the first time, since 1967, that the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) bombed home territory.⁵ Yet, it is known that the NAF was involved in the

Nigerian military campaigns against Biafra (1967-70), Maitatsine (1980-85), Niger Delta militants (since 2003), and Boko Haram (since 2011).⁶ Despite these and other shortcomings, this volume nonetheless is an important contribution to African Political Thought, Marxism-Leninism, Nigerian Affairs, Political Economy of Africa, History, and Development Studies.

Notes

¹ Adam Mayer, *Naija Marxisms: Revolutionary Thought in Nigeria* (London: Pluto Press, 2016), 37-9.

² *Ibid.*, 83.

³ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3& 35.

⁶ Samuel Oyewole, "Flying and Bombing: The Contributions of Air Power to Security and Crisis Management in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," *Defence Studies*, 18(4), (2018): 514-537; Samuel Oyewole, "Making the sky relevant to battle strategy: Counterinsurgency and the prospects of Air Power in Nigeria," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40(3), (2017): 211-231.