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## Adam Mayer. *Naija Marxisms: Revolutionary Thought in Nigeria*. London: Pluto Press, 2016.

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

The economic history of Nigeria is a reflection of its political development within the global atmospherics of entrenched capitalism, which portrays Nigeria as an enclave that has unilaterally accepted capitalist development as the only means to national development. Since Nigeria's colonial period, the forces of imperialism appear to have had a foothold on the country's political economy, a fact that is evident in the philosophical and ideological professions of its leading elite at different times over the country's historical evolution. But Adam Mayer's *Naija Marxisms* presents a rather different perspective by showcasing the vibrant intellectual repertoire of Nigerian leftists, whose alternative ideas are critical of the country's subsisting political economy as they call for the radical overthrow of the extant order or some form of revolutionary implantation of a new political economy based on the dictates of the body of ideas encapsulated in Marxism, a variant of socialist ideas.

This book is a product of Mayer's three years' sojourn at the American University of Nigeria, where he researched and taught on the history of Nigerian Marxism and Nigerian Marxist thinkers. In writing the book, his interest was to prove that "Nigerian Marxism has been a coherent intellectual movement that [has] provided important answers to the existential questions troubling Nigeria and West Africa, from the late 1940s up to date"(p.186). This book portrays the works of Nigerian Marxist thinkers as being richly aesthetic, descriptive, and analytical in providing relevant and profound explanations for many subjects of concern to Nigeria, Africa, and the world far beyond the day-to-day abstraction of their existential realities (p.6). In the work's introductory chapter, the author provides rationale for the focus of the book by highlighting the different schools of Marxism, their promoters, and ideologues while identifying the problems faced by each subset in popularizing their respective alternative perspectives on national development in a country that is patently a sworn and aspiring capitalist enclave. Chapter Two is a panoramic consideration of Nigeria's pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial political and economic histories, which together highlight the country's developmental challenges that birthed radical scholarship and advocacy in institutions of higher learning as well as hostile trade unionism seeking, at different times, the reversal of the oppressive policies of successive Nigerian governments. Chapter Three discusses the progression of leftist movements and their different strands in Nigeria in a chronological fashion while noting the severity of organized resistance by leftist elements in diverse Nigerian political organizations and associations against transnational corporate capital across different epochs in Nigerian history.

Chapter Four examines the international relations of the Nigerian left, focusing on Soviet, Eastern European, West African progressive, and communist South African links. After showing how hostile the Nigerian ruling elite was to the Soviet Union in Nigeria's pre- and post-independence years, the author nonetheless portrays in glowing terms the Soviet Union's undeterred interest in encouraging the popularization of Marxism in Nigeria with the expectation that what happened in Cuba could be replicated in other Third World countries, including Nigeria (p.95). Chapter Five chronicles the pragmatic views of some chosen Nigerian Marxists whose intellectual perspectives on the relevance of the socio-economic and political import of Marxism were critically assessed by the author. The author critically reviews the works of Niyi Oniororo (pp. 102-108), Ikenna Nzimiro, Yusufu Bala Usman, Tunji Otegbeye, Ola Oni, and others like them who were described as champions of ethnic causes (pp. 133-137). Within this review, the author's preference for Edwin Madunagu cannot be disguised as he highlights in

detail different aspects of Madunagu's discourses on Nigerian socio-economic and political situations (as reflected in several of Madunagu's publications, which are also positively reviewed by the author). The author describes Madunagu as "the single most revered voice in Nigerian leftist circles due to his organizational capabilities and his intellectual strengths" (pp. 137-146).

The sixth chapter discusses the works of some Nigerian scholars and their respective intellectual circles, many of whom wrote on Nigerian political economy from a Marxian perspective. The works of Bade Onimode, Adebayo Olukoshi, Okwudiba Nnoli, and their colleagues were analyzed by the author to show not just the strengths and relevance of their arguments but also the depth of their appreciation or understanding of the problems of Nigeria's development (pp. 147-164). The seventh chapter broadly discusses Marxian feminism and the question of the place of women in Marxism through the examination of how women are treated in Eastern European societies and the level of assertiveness demonstrated either individually or collectively by women in those societies in comparison with the women in question in sub-Saharan Africa and specifically in Nigeria. It is the belief of the author that the activism of Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Gambo Sawaba provided starting points for Nigerian feminist organizers and thinkers such as Bene Madunagu, Molarra Ogundipe-Leslie, and Amina Mama, among others (pp. 165- 183).

Concluding the book with Chapter Eight, Adam Mayer opines that with the well-established Nigerian proletariat and the presence of organized workers' resistance in the country, there is hope that the Nigerian proletariat can represent itself in articulate ways and is armed with its own Marxist theory. He expresses satisfaction that his book "[proves] Nigerian Marxists to be qualitatively different from the ridiculous, esoteric dead men that they are sometimes portrayed to be and that their work is as dazzling and relevant as ever."

A book of this nature is bound to elicit unbridled criticism from scholars and ideologues of opposing ideologies and perspectives. Aside from critiques of the work based on ideological or rhetorical opposition, the primary shortcoming of the text is that the author overstates the strength of any Nigerian Marxist movement and presupposes an epicenter of Marxist thought in Nigeria that simply does not exist; he erroneously believes in the existence of strong Marxist parties and allied institutions in Nigeria, among which he includes the Peoples' Redemption Party (PRP since 1978), the Democratic Socialist Movement and its Socialist Party of Nigeria (associated with the Committee for Workers' International under Segun Sango), the Socialist Workers' League (under Femi Aborishade and Baba Aye), the National Conscience Party, and two major newspapers *This Day* and *The Guardian*, which the author believes are sympathetic to the cause of the left (p.2). In reality, however, the membership strength of these so-called "diehard Marxist parties" is insufficient to make any appreciable impact on the country's political and electioneering landscape.<sup>1</sup>

The author's decision not to review the writings of Professor Claude Ake, whom Mayer himself identifies as a distinguished "Marxist Political Scientist of global reckoning," is a second major shortcoming of the work. Professor Ake, as Mayer would apparently agree, was a distinguished Marxist political scientist whose radical scholarship was incomparably potent and authoritative, having brought clarity to the arguments in the different strands of Marxism and having assessed the scientific utility and relevance of Marxism to the African and indeed Nigerian condition. Despite this, however, Mayer argues that because Claude Ake "ventured far from Marxism or rather utilized Marxist thought to show why revolution was irrelevant to Nigeria," (p.11 Mayer was "disinclined to deal with [Ake] in detail" in the book, thereby

drastically limiting the scope of Mayer's finished product. Therefore, the addition of Professor Ake's works to a future, revised edition of this book by Adam Mayer is desirable.

Another weakness lies in the selection of the work's title. The use of the term 'Naija' in the title—a term that colloquially refers to Nigeria itself and its citizens—conjures the imagery of a work of fiction. 'Naija' is a literary coinage that emanated from the home video industry in Nigeria. The official name of the country remains 'Nigeria' and the citizens are 'Nigerians,' and both should be referred to as such. The strength of a serious and authoritative publication, particularly one as unique and as radical as Mayer's, ought not to be undermined by the use of a colloquialism in its title. In addition, the word 'Marxisms' in the title of the book is misleading and confusing. The existence of different tendencies within the Marxist movement in Nigeria (what the author refers to as heterodoxies) should not mean that there are many Marxisms. Finally, the author did not broach the subject of the bleak future of Marxist movement in Nigeria despite the high mortality rate that the Nigerian Marxist camp had recorded. Of the thirteen Nigerian Marxists that the author discussed at length, eight have died,<sup>2</sup> thus, further weakening the viability of any modern or future Marxist movement in Nigeria.

Despite these shortcomings, the obvious strength of Adam Mayer's *Naija Marxisms*, in addition to its originality, is the boldness and courage with which the author interrogates the intellectual bases of Nigerian Marxist movement and the historicity of Marxist scholarship in Nigeria. In his concluding remarks, Adam Mayer takes a swipe at Western countries' governments for underwriting the rule of the Nigerian comprador bourgeoisie instead of supporting "the fight against the rotten Nigerian status quo and its brutal exploitation." He condemns Western countries' governments for selling arms to "a gang of ruthless criminals called the Nigerian government" and describes Nigeria's democracy as a bourgeois democracy and a sham (pp. 190-191). These vituperations are indicative of Adam Mayer's frustration with Nigeria's untenable status quo and, of course, his heartfelt desire for a change that he believes to be long overdue.

Overall, Adam Mayer has produced a pioneering work that aggregates and documents the intellectual history of Nigerian Marxists' eruditions in their collective quest to transform the country's political, economic, and social system through socialist revolution for the greater good of the greatest number of Nigerians. This book has indeed shown that Nigeria has original Marxist thinkers who can scientifically distill the ideological import of Marxism and apply its relevant substance to the Nigerian condition. Adam Mayer's *Naija Marxisms* should be read by all students and teachers of political economy and political philosophy.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Indeed, the complaint by the author that the publications of Nigerian Marxists could not be found in Nigerian public libraries (p.4) and his insinuation that Nigerian Marxist thinkers' works are often discarded (p.7) point to the seeming irrelevance of the Marxist school of thought in contemporary scholarship in Nigeria. This lack of available research should have alerted Mayer to his own faulty premise; instead he proposes that the living Marxist thinkers have become apathetic (how else can one explain the lack of availability of their publications in public libraries)?

<sup>2</sup>The list of deaths includes Niyi Oniororo (d. April 2005), Ikenna Nzimiro (d.2006), Yusufu Bala Usman (d. 2005), Mokwugo Okoye (d. 1998), Eskor Toyo (d.2015), Bade Onimode (d.2001), Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti (d. 1978), and Gambo Sawaba (d. 2001).