

BOOK REVIEW

Adam Mayer. *Naija Marxisms: Revolutionary Thought in Nigeria*. London: Pluto Press, 2016. xii + 244 pp. Acknowledgements. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$27.00. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-7453-3657-2.

In the aftermath of Mikhail Gorbachev's twin policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe (including Hungary) in 1989 was closely followed by the dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 31, 1991. Fidel Castro's Cuba clung to its socialist ideology, but the Soviet Union's withdrawal of economic assistance in August 1989 shook Socialist Cuba to its foundation. The disintegration of the Soviet Union resulted in Cuba's complete loss of aid from its former benefactor and exposed the dependency socialism of Castro's Cuba, which had resorted to neo-capitalist and neo-socialist measures to minimize the continuing effects of the U.S. embargo on the Cuban society, economy, and politics. Given these monumental shifts in the ideological map of the world since the 1990s, one would be tempted to write off Marxist-Leninist Socialism as a viable ideology of development.

However, in *Naija Marxisms: Revolutionary Thought in Nigeria*, Hungarian scholar Adam Mayer presents evidence to the contrary. Mayer, who spent his "formative years in socialist Hungary" (9), makes a robust case for a Marxist socialist solution to Nigeria's various socio-political and economic crises. He specifically recommends a Castro-type revolution, given the lingering rot in the oil-rich, OPEC-member, capitalist Nigeria. He is guided in his conviction by two factors. First, "the ever present socialist, and often openly Marxian, thread in the history" of Nigeria's "multifaceted struggles for emancipation" (37) makes socialism a viable alternative to the country's sham, bourgeois democracy. This socialist alternative is bolstered by the fact that the previous struggles in Nigeria were anchored in the labor movement.

Second, his research on Nigerian Marxist thinkers, based on original sources in Nigeria and the United Kingdom, proves that there is an astounding coherence in Nigerian Marxism as an intellectual movement that has sought and provided answers to Nigeria's structural "existential questions" (186) since the late 1940s. Dissatisfied with the historical study of the

phenomenon in defense of the status quo by Nigerian historians of the hue of Hakeem Tijani, Adam Mayer has intervened decisively to set the record straight with *Naija* (“simply another word for Nigeria” [5]) *Marxisms*. This work grew out of his PhD dissertation in the Department of Contemporary International History at Budapest University.

Adam Mayer’s *Naija Marxisms* is of great importance for pioneering the historiography of the previously neglected Nigerian Left, whose voices resonate with the Nigerian condition through their publications. Adam Mayer uses such publications as the source material for this book on the Nigerian socialist movement. He thereby lends credence to Wale Adebaniwi’s view that not only are the works of African writers useful for analyzing social thought and constructing social theory in Africa, but they also establish African creative writers themselves as social thinkers. In an era in which eminent, hardcore Marxist scholars, including Biodun Jeyifo, have adopted euphemisms to refer to Marx or have avoided any direct reference to him, Adam Mayer charts a direct course of action that is unique to his analytical approach. He expresses dissatisfaction with Jeyifo’s edited, two-volume compendium on African political thought for two reasons. First, it includes entries on non-communists such as Awolowo and Azikiwe, who are well known for their pro-Western variety of African Socialism. Second, it recognizes and has listings on communists such as Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Ngugi wa Thiongo, and Amilcar Cabral, “who retain popularity in the West for other reasons” (7). Even so, true to the title of the book, Adam Mayer identifies diverse strands of Marxisms that seem to justify Jeyifo’s deliberate omission of some otherwise hallowed members of the Nigerian radical Left from his book. Among them could be mentioned Mokwugo Okoye, Ikenna Nzimiro, Edwin Madunagu, Yusufu Bala Usman, Tunji Otegbeye, and Ola Oni. Indeed, despite his grouse with Jeyifo’s deliberate omission of notable members of the Nigerian Left, Mayer, in turn, proceeds to identify with Niyi Oniororo. The latter, a high-ranking member of the Nigerian Left, had, like Jeyifo, questioned the credentials of some Nigerian Marxist intellectuals among whom he identified careerists, opportunists, reformists, and revisionists.

To be sure, Adam Mayer provides an impressive list of Nigerian Marxists, but he segregates them into activists, historiographers, political thinkers, political economists, and Marxian feminists (further differentiating the progressive feminists). He thereby places much emphasis on the diverse personalities, approaches, orientations, contradictions, backgrounds, and interpretations, including heterodoxies, that characterized Marxism-Leninism in Nigeria. He elaborates upon these in chapters five through seven of the eight-chapter, concisely written book. Not given to “cheerleading” (8), Adam Mayer shares Edwin Madunagu’s contention that “Today Nigerian leftism and leftists are not consciously and explicitly anti-capitalist” (82) even as they parade themselves as anti-imperialist, anti-globalist, and anti-neoliberal leftists.

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For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

Castellote, Jess, and Tobenna Okwuosa. 2020. "Lagos Art World: The Emergence of an Artistic Hub on the Global Art Periphery." *African Studies Review* 63 (1): 170–96. doi:[10.1017/asr.2019.24](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2019.24).

Ottaway, Marina. 1987. "Afrocommunism Ten Years After: Crippled But Alive." *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 16 (1): 11–17. doi:[10.1017/S0047160700008854](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047160700008854).

Thurston, Alexander. 2018. "The Politics of Technocracy in Fourth Republic Nigeria." *African Studies Review* 61 (1): 215–38. doi:[10.1017/asr.2017.99](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.99).