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PETER H. KOEHN  
*University of Montana*

**Nation as Grand Narrative: The Nigerian Press and the Politics of Meaning**  
 by WALE ADEBANWI

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In this important account of the role of the Nigerian press in the shaping of the Nigerian polity, Wale Adebani argues that 'understanding Nigeria involves understanding the print media, which represent the most critical and powerful contending forces in the polity, seeking to dominate or fight against the domination of the political economic and social orders that compose and constitute Nigeria'. Hence, 'grand narrative' seeks to 'establish an overarching interpretive lens through which past, present, and future events and identities in society and state are encountered and analyzed' (p. 5). The author admits that the press does not represent all there is about Nigeria; however, they 'constitute cardinal perspectives in accounting for the political formation that is called Nigeria' and reflect 'the struggle for collective identity'. Thus, this book sets out to analyse the relationship between the nation and the media, by highlighting the tension between them especially between 1950 and 1953, and demonstrating how the press construct, deconstruct and reconstruct the idea of nation and national unity.

The book is divided into four parts. Each part comprises two chapters except for Part three which is made up of three chapters. Each chapter is further divided into subsections. For instance, Chapter 1 (i.e. Nation as narrative), which falls under the broad topic 'Contextual and Conceptual perspectives' is discussed in subsections. Here the author views post-colonial African nations as 'densely corporeal', while most African post-colonial context is 'elusively spectral'. These two characteristics promote conditions, where different nations and ethnic nationalities are forced to live together. In Nigeria for example, narratives about nation state are tied to the question of ethnic identity, where identity is viewed in term of its power to promote freedom and socio-cultural cohesion. In other words, a true nation may never be realised where ethnic identity is deliberately ignored by national governments. Here, the important role of the media comes to the fore. For instance, they educate the citizens about their nation, and become the primary means of bringing people together who speak different languages (as in Nigeria), with different value systems,

different religious backgrounds and different cultural orientations. But the post-colonial state has consistently failed to bring people altogether, because (as the author argues), many attempts to ignore or overcome cultural factors have been largely unsuccessful. These are the core issues discussed in Chapter 1 of the book.

In Chapter 2, the author introduces and discusses the interpretive theory or hermeneutics and how this captures the ideology of meaning that is relevant to the study of media narratives in the study. In Chapter 3, the author describes and discusses the tension between rival political parties in the pre-independence Nigeria, and how the regional newspapers that represented the various ethnic political parties ferociously fought against each other in the struggle for regional interests. The struggle for supremacy among the regional political blocs inspired by different ideological perspectives alongside internal party conflicts actually slowed the process of political independence. The newspapers representing these factions also became formidable blocs that weathered the political storm and were used by their founders as weapons of war against each other, also serving as a reflection of party politics rather than as neutral organs of liberation for the people. However, the author argues that despite the 'fractionalization and otherness' in the rival ethno-regional newspapers, 'each side represented a true spirit of nation in its narratives' and that 'the true spirit of the nation had triumphed, or would triumph in the end, given the collective and true aspiration of the people of Nigeria to create a grand nation' (p. 80).

Chapter 4 examines the controversy surrounding the political and cultural status of Lagos, which was then the political capital of the colonial administration. The tension and rivalry about who owns the land, involved the Yorubas represented by Chief Awolowo and his AG – the assumed historical 'owners' of Lagos, and the 'immigrant' Igbos represented by Dr Azikiwe and his NCNC, and the newspapers that represented their interests – the *Daily Service* and the *West African Pilot* respectively.

In Chapter 5, the author discusses and analyses the 'narratives of nationhood and federalism in pre-war Nigeria'. The author blamed the Nigerian press for the roles in 'creating' and 'exacerbating' the Nigerian civil war. Describing the Nigerian press as 'paper soldiers', the author argues that 'the press not only articulated the bases for the crises that eventually led to the war but it also aggravated tension in the country and helped mobilise public opinion in crucial ways before the first shots were fired by professional soldiers' (p. 108). And when the war began in July 1967, the newspapers became even more critical as ideological soldiers for the seceding 'Republic of Biafra' and Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Chapter 6 examines 'electoral crisis and the collapse of the third republic', where the author shows that the Nigerian press indeed represented ethnic, ethno-regional and religious interests, rather than national interests. Thus, democracy and freedom then stood for the liberation of Nigerian multicultural identities. The author argues that 'those who insisted that democratic freedom be tied to the fundamental interests of the constituent ethnic or ethno-regional groups in Nigeria ...' risked the disintegration of the country (p. 147).

Chapter 7 analyses (paraphrasing the author's own words) democratic and identity narratives that reflect the usual antagonisms and competing claims in

the Nigeria politics and the dangers these pose to the development of democracy in Nigeria. The author illustrates this from the activities of the Nigerian press, which had been criticised as being highly 'sectional', reflecting in their roles in the annulment of the controversial 12 June general elections, referred to as the aborted 'fought republic'. The author argues that although the press was 'fully embroiled in the struggle to free Nigeria from this history of violence', it did not exercise 'restraint' in their coverage of the religious and inter-ethnic clashes.

Chapter 8 further discusses the intractable problem of ethnicity and space in Nigeria. In this chapter, Dr Adebani, in what he calls 'discursive territoriality', analyses the majority-minority question with a focus on the space and ethnic struggle between the Hausa and the Fulani and the subsequent Zango-Kataf crisis in Northern Nigeria. The author's discursive territoriality explains 'the process of amplifying particular forms of sameness and difference' and who is entitled to certain economic resources, and of course the tension that results. The majority/minority question in Nigeria and the evolution of the word 'marginalisation' that expresses a sense of alienation, especially from natural and state resources was amplified with the emergence of the ethnic militias in the Niger Delta crisis. This tension has not yet been resolved. The author views the role of the press as the utilisation of the 'structural context in which these relations are located as resources in the mobilisation of identity and the struggle to gain primacy in the territorial struggle, particularly with an eye on the political, economic, social and cultural implications of such victory' (p. 255).

The Niger Delta and the 'marginal identities' question is explored in full in Chapter 9. In particular, the author describes the rise of ethnic consciousness and struggle with the emergence of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) founded and led by the Late activist and environmentalist, Ken Saro-Wiwa. The chapter gives a detailed account and analysis of the Ogoni struggle and the role of the Nigerian press, which is described as the 'pivot on which civil society rotates in Nigeria'. Here, interestingly the author views the Nigerian press (especially the south-western or Lagos press), as 'supportive' and their activities were generally viewed as an 'intervention', especially in the 'battles by marginal identities against the Nigerian state, majority ethnic nationalities, hegemony, domination and exploitation' (p. 261).

In the concluding section, the author expresses his personal doubts and hope about the future of Nigeria, especially with the surprising victory of the All Progressive Congress (APC) in the 2015 general elections forming a central government that comprises a coalition of northern Hausa-Fulani conservatives and the Yoruba political elite. The author however, expresses optimism for the potential of stability of power at the federal level, which is likely to auger well with Nigeria's developing democracy. According to the author, this book has illustrated that ideology not only functions as a type of 'social cement' for competing ethno-national interests, but also shows that in the Nigerian situation, it can be a 'tool for dividing people into separate communities of shared values and norms' (p. 287). In the end, the author recommends further studies on how the Nigerian press narrates the idea of Nigerian nation in peace times; this will most likely give an insightful understanding of what is 'repressed when there is no narrative crisis in Nigeria' or elsewhere.

The book has indeed made an impressive contribution to research on media analysis and literature in the context of development democracy in Africa, and giving the general dearth of literature in Africa on the nation-media interface, it makes a significant contribution to literature in this field. Although not particularly easy to read due to its language complexity and also because of the author's philosophical tones and numerous theoretical quotations, it is a brilliant combination of the analysis of political history and the mass media in pre- and post-colonial Nigeria. The book will be suitable as resource material for students, scholars and practitioners of political science, history, mass media and discourse analysis.

INNOCENT CHILUWA  
*Covenant University*

**Naija Marxisms: Revolutionary Thought in Nigeria** by ADAM MAYER

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It is generally assumed that Marxist-inspired ideas and movements experienced significant decline in Nigeria by the early 1990s as a result of the debilitating political, social and economic effects of the neoliberal policies that were introduced in 1986 and the repressive military regimes of Presidents Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. In this book, Adam Mayer conducts a history of socialist and leftist thought in Nigeria and argues that thinkers and activists influenced by Marxist ideas have provided radical critiques and analyses of Nigeria's politics, economy and society, while consistently championing opposition to conservative policies enacted by the ruling class. Mayer notes that although the labour movement right from the colonial period constituted the most important arena for espousing Marxist-inspired ideas, Nigerian Marxisms 'as coherent schools of thought' went beyond the labour movement and flourished in intellectual circles in the universities, in newspapers, NGO sectors, and among various clandestine organisations (p. 16). Mayer concentrates on works that examine political, economic, feminist and historical theory while stating that the analysis of Marxist-inspired literary works is a task that can be better conducted by a literary critic.

Although there are works that have examined aspects of the leftist movement in Nigeria, especially the labour movement, this book is the first to conduct an elaborate study of Marxist-inspired works by Nigerian authors. This is therefore a significant study that contributes to filling an important lacuna especially in view of the influential but understudied roles that leftist and Marxist-inspired ideas have played in the analyses of Nigeria's political economy and in fostering activism against repressive and oppressive policies. Mayer undertook a challenging task given the fact that many Marxist-inspired works were not published by mainstream publishers and therefore not readily available in libraries and other repositories. The diligent research that Mayer conducted to access these works is commendable and helps to enrich the analyses by focusing on specific themes and the thoughts of selected individuals such as radical, militant and leftist leaning trade unions, progressive feminists, grassroots revolutionary organisations, socialist leaning