

Chapter Four

Three Myths About the Formation of Nigeria

But it is not just the realities of Nigerian politics which are misrepresented in this campaign, even the actual realities of the country's geography and history, are twisted and distorted to create a picture of the country and its people, which are quite different from what they really are. The extent of this misrepresentation, particularly over the last decade, has been such that many people living outside Nigeria, Nigerians and foreigners alike, who follow its affairs on the media, wonder why the country has not yet disintegrated and plunged into a bloody civil war, or, civil wars.

It is only when they hear from, or, read, those who actually live and work in Nigeria, and who have a stake in it, that they begin to realize that there is a big gap, in most of the domestic and foreign media coverage of the country, between, what is actually happening in it, and what is reported about it. This gap is not just a result of sensational reporting, important as that factor is. It is also not just the result of ignorance, important as that is also. It has deeper roots in a distinct outlook on Nigeria and Nigerians.

This outlook arises from the powerful position which three myths about Nigeria and Nigerians have acquired in the minds of those reporting on Nigerian affairs, and even of some of those participating in them. These are, firstly the myth about what happened in 1914; the myth that Nigeria is an arbitrary creation of the British; and the myth about Nigeria international boundaries. The myth about 1914 is the basis of a number of assumptions. Firstly, the existence of a fundamental dichotomy between **the North** and **the South** of Nigeria supposedly rooted in the nature of the 1914 amalgamation. Secondly, the inevitability of competition and conflicts between supposedly monolithic and distinctive ethnic, groups, which are said to have existed as distinct racial entities for millennia, and which are said to be the constituent

units of the country. And, thirdly the supposedly inherent antagonism between the Muslims and the Christians of Nigeria.

The misrepresentation of Nigeria in the campaign being conducted against its corporate existence is born out of this misleading outlook on the country, built on these types of false assumptions. This outlook is made up of concepts, which are seen as fixed and immutable like the North and the South; the Muslims and the Christians and the Igbo and the Yoruba, for example. These categories, by the very way they are conceived in this outlook, obscure the mosaic plurality of Nigeria and Nigerians and the processes of fusions, diffusions, intermeshing, formations and transformations, which have marked the history of the peoples of the Nigerian area for millennia, before, and since the country's formation, and right up to today

We shall now seek to show how these assumptions are false, starting with the myth of 1914, one of the most twisted bits of Nigerian history, which forms a key part of the gross oversimplification and extreme generalization of Nigerian realities, known as the North-South dichotomy.

The Myth of 1914

The North-South dichotomy has to be understood clearly, in order to grasp its significance in this outlook informing this campaign against the corporate existence of Nigeria. What it is, and what it is not, has to be very clear.

It is not being argued here, that this conception is false, because there is no northern part of Nigeria and no southern part of Nigeria. In every space on the surface of the earth, there is a northern part and a southern part, simply because of the fact of the longitude. We even have the compass to show us which is the north and which is the south, in any room.

It is also not being proposed here that, there has not emerged, since about the 1930s, within Nigeria, the sub-national identities of northerners and southerners, in Nigeria, whatever varied, and conflicting, cultural and political contents, different

northerners and different southerners, ascribe to these identities at different times, at different places and for different purposes.

The North-South dichotomy goes far beyond these facts of geography and of emerging sub-national political and cultural identities. The North-South dichotomy is the assumption that, the Federal Republic of Nigeria is an amalgam of two, distinct geographical, cultural, economic, social and political entities, namely **the North** and **the South**. These distinct entities, have been, according to this conception, brought together by the British, for their own reasons, in the 1914 amalgamation of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. But, again, according to this conceptions these two amalgamated entities have never fused, or, merged into one, but have remained an amalgam of two distinct, and often antagonistic entities, in terms of their background, interests and aspirations.

This conception of Nigeria is false, because the amalgamation of 1914 did not amalgamate two distinct entities, standing apart from one another and having some cohesion on their own. The Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria was, in 1914, a variegated collection of distinct colonial entities, which, except for Lagos, had just been conquered by the British and were, at that time, being brought under effective colonial military occupation. This entity, which is falsely presented as constituting the South, standing distinct and cohesive apart from the North, at the time of the 1914 amalgamation, was itself produced by a series of amalgamations going back to 1893. In that year the Oil Rivers Protectorate was amalgamated with other territories nearby, which the British had subjugated, to form the Niger Coast Protectorate. This Niger Coast Protectorate, which, only in 1897, came to include the conquered Kingdom of Benin, for example, was, in 1900, amalgamated with a series of protectorates the British had imposed in the immediate hinterland of the Colony of Lagos, to form the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, administered separately from the Colony of Lagos.

Six years later, in 1906, the Colony of Lagos was amalgamated with this Protectorate of Southern Nigeria to form the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, which far from being some cohesive colonial entity, was, largely, a sphere of influence, from which the British kept out other European colonial powers. The military expeditions for colonial occupation, here in fact, continued, right up to 1914, and beyond.

The Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, proclaimed in 1900, was also just a sphere of influence claimed by the British. It did not exist as a distinct entity, which could be termed, the North, up to 1914, and beyond, when military expeditions to establish it continued. It was a variegated collection of the subjugated, hitherto, largely, autonomous, emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate, the subjugated Sheikdom of Borno, the Igala and Jukun Kingdoms and numerous independent polities, which by the time of the 1914 amalgamation cannot be said to have constituted a distinct entity standing on its own, as the North, distinct from the South.

This is why, the fairy tale that the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria was amalgamated with the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria because the North was not economically viable, which is so widely disseminated by those who claim to be able to show the historical origins of the North-South dichotomy, is farcical, and only shows ignorance of the actual historical evidence of that process of colonial administrative reorganization. For, in the first place, the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria was largely a British sphere of influence, which was, only at that very time being occupied by the British- therefore, most of the expenditure by the British was on their military expeditions to establish this protectorate.

As that traveller and keen observer of African colonial affairs, E.D. Morel, pointed out in his book **Nigeria its People and its Problems**, published in 1911, out of a total annual expenditure of £305,000 by the colonial administration in the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, in the years 1906-1909, the sum of £260,000,

that is 85% of the annual expenditure, was military expenditure. This military expenditure was on the Royal West African Frontier Force, whose imperial military responsibilities extended far beyond the protectorate, as its name makes quiet clear. E.D. Morel states categorically that:

To say, therefore, that Northern Nigeria is costing the British taxpayer a quarter of a million a year or more is to make a statement which is not in accordance with the fact....let this grant [to Northern Nigeria] under this amalgamation be cancelled and let the imperial government on the other hand foot the bill for the military expenditure" [pp.208-209].

E.D. Morel also dismissed the widespread fabrication that the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria was merged with the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria because the budget of the former was in deficit, as it was poorer and, therefore, had a lower revenue and had to be bailed out by the richer southern colony and protectorate. He pointed out that this situation of budget deficit had an obvious cause. The southern colony and protectorate extended to the coast and its administration collected all the custom dues on the sea-borne export and import trade of the two protectorates. He said that the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria was

A vast protectorate shut off from the seaboard by another less than four times its size having no coastline, and the custom dues on whose trade are collected by the latter (p.190)

In fact, as various academic studies have shown, the economic and the fiscal policies of the British, before 1914, and after, were driven by the knowledge that the two protectorates formed a largely compact entity, which could not be profitably ruled and exploited in British's strategic interests, if they were not brought together. The imperatives of economic and political geography which led to the amalgamation of 1893, which created

the Niger Coast Protectorate; followed by that in 1900 which created the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria; followed by that of 1906 which created the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, was what also led to the amalgamation of 1914, which created the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria.

It is in order to deny these imperatives of economic and political geography, which led to the formation of Nigeria that these series of amalgamations culminating in 1914 are ignored and a huge myth built around 1914. The fabrication of this myth of 1914 goes back to the time when setting northerners against southerners became one of the cardinal political strategies of the British, particularly in order to contain and scatter the Nigerian nationalist movement led by the NCNC, which in 1944-1950 got massive nationwide support for its campaign for independence and for "*One Nigeria*", to the great discomfort of the British.

It is, therefore, not true that Nigeria is an amalgam of two distinct entities, the North and the South thrown together by the British in 1914, largely because the North had poorer revenue and had to be bailed out.

The Myth of Nigeria's Arbitrary Creation

J.F.Ade Ajayi, Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Ibadan and E.J.Alagoa, Professor of History at the University of Port Harcourt draw attention to the geographical compactness of Nigeria. It was this compactness, which in the light of Britain's economic and strategic interest made these series of amalgamations, ending up with Nigeria in 1914, imperative. The two distinguished scholars also bring out facts which lead to the conclusions that, like all countries in the world, Nigeria is indeed a geographical expression, and at that crucial geographical level of human existence, it is not an arbitrary creation, for there were sound geographical factors favouring its formation. In their joint chapter in the book, **Groundwork of Nigerian History**, published by Heinemann for the Historical Society of Nigeria, in 1980, and edited by Obaro Ikime, they pointed out that:

Nigeria is not a self-contained geographical unit...In spite of the openness of its borders, however, there is a compactness about the Nigerian geographical environment which encouraged greater movement and interaction of peoples within it than with people outside it. The compactness comes principally from two factors. The first is the complementarity of the Sudan Belt and the Forest Zone with the intervening transitional Middle Belt dominated by the Jos Plateau." (pp224-225)

And, that:

The second factor engendering compactness has been the essential unity of the river systems. Nigeria is really the basin of the lower Niger south of the Bussa rapids with the Benue, their tributaries and the enormous delta spreading out into several creeks and lagoons. The unity of these waterways encouraged a network of relationship within the basin. The river networks provided routes of contact between people cutting across the north and south axis and supplementing it. Accordingly, one must recognize east and west movements of peoples and ideas as well as the north and south movement already suggested by the vegetation zones. It is because of this compactness that despite the fortuitous manner in which the political unity of Nigeria came to be achieved, culturally and economically Nigeria was not really an arbitrary creation (pp.224-225).

The Myths about Nigeria's Boundaries

In fact, it is not only that Nigeria is not an arbitrary creation, as Ajayi and Alagoa cogently make clear, but, its international boundaries are also, largely, not arbitrary, as they are often misrepresented to be. As the late J.C.Anene, Professor of

History at the University of Ibadan, when that university was leading the rest of the world in breaking new paths in the study of history, the boundaries of Nigeria were, like all political boundaries, all over the world, and throughout history, artificial, but they were not arbitrary. Anene explained that, all political boundaries are artificial, because they are political demarcations of territory made by political authorities for political purposes, and not by natural, or, cultural processes, even if some may coincide with some geographical feature, or, patterns of cultural geography. In his perceptive and meticulous study, **The International Boundaries of Nigeria, 1885-1900: The Framework of An Emergent Nation**, published in 1970, Anene concluded that:

....no objective criticism of the boundaries of Nigeria should leave out of account the realities of political and economic conditions which prevailed in the boundary zones at the time the boundaries emerged...If the results of the negotiations are viewed against the background of these conditions one cannot escape the conclusion that the boundaries represented, to a suprising degree, the realities which existed at that time.

Those who are attacking the basis of the corporate existence of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, refuse to face up to the solid evidence in the writings of Nigerian scholars of world renown, such as Anene, Ajayi and Alagoa, which bring out clearly the rational foundations on which the Nigerian nation-state exists. Instead, they disseminate a culture of irrationality, of the evasion of the truth, of compound ignorance and intellectual mediocrity, with which no sustained political stability, or, economic and social development can be attained.