
A CRITIQUE OF SOME OF THE AVAILABLE SECONDARY SOURCES ON NIGERIAN HISTORY

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ABSTRACT: *Trained historians reconstruct past human actions with the aid of available pieces or fragments of evidence from available sources. These could be primary or secondary. While none is infallible or can stand on its own without recourse to the others, secondary sources are ubiquitous and more readily accessible than the others. Newspapers, journals, theses and dissertations, conference proceedings, seminar reports, books, etc are more readily available and accessible to the researcher and less cumbersome than ancillary and allied disciplines like numismatics (the collection and study of coins); epigraphy (the study and deciphering of old inscriptions); linguistics (the systematic and scientific study of language); dendrochronology (the use of tree growth rings for dating historical events and changes in the environment) and archaeology (the study of ancient cultures through remains). Although, oral information are also always almost readily available, there are instances where custodians of vital historical information, eye witnesses of or dramatis personae in events being reconstructed live hundreds of miles away from the researcher. This is not the case with secondary sources. However, just as secondary sources are prevalent so are they replete with erroneous submissions. It is for this purpose that this paper attempts to correct some of the erroneous submissions in some of the available secondary sources on Nigerian (particularly political) history. The method of data analysis employed in this paper is the historical method - simple descriptive collation and analysis of historical data.*

KEYWORDS: Secondary Sources, Nigerian History, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Today, there is no paucity of literature on any facet of Nigerian history – political, economic, social, cultural, intellectual, gender, etc. All of the above have received in-depth research attention by indigenous and foreign scholars in History, Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, Law, International Relations and other allied disciplines. The result is the availability of numerous books, journal articles, conference proceedings, seminar reports and theses/dissertations among others. For example, if one considers political development in Nigeria since about 1914, one would almost be confounded by the mass of available literature. Indeed, literature on political development in Nigeria could be grouped under five broad headings.

In the first group are those literatures that concern themselves with constitutional developments and nationalism in Nigeria. In this category are *A Constitutional History of Nigeria*¹ and *Nigeria's Presidential Constitution: The Second Experiment in Constitutional Democracy*;² *Constitutional Developments in Nigeria*³ and *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*,⁴ among others. In the second category are those studies whose focus is democracy and its travails.

Prominent among these are *Democracy in Plural Societies*;⁵ *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria. The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*;⁶ *Violence and Politics in Nigeria. The Tiv and Yoruba Experience*;⁷ *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*;⁸ *Structure and Conflict in Nigeria, 1960-1966*;⁹ *Crises and Conflict in Nigeria. A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1970*;¹⁰ *Party Politics and Foreign Policy. Nigeria Under the First Republic*¹¹ and *Nigeria: Internal Politics and Foreign Policy (1960-1966)*.¹² Literatures in the third category are those that deal with political parties and elections. Some of these are *Nigerian Political Parties. Power in an Emergent African Nation*;¹³ *Parties and Politics in Northern Nigeria*¹⁴ and *The Nigerian Federal Elections of 1959*.¹⁵ The fourth consist of multi-themed and general (edited) works. There are dozens of this category of literature but a few examples are *Groundwork of Nigerian History*;¹⁶ *The Politics and Administration of Nigerian Government*¹⁷ and *Government and Politics Under Military Rule, 1966- 1979*.¹⁸ The last category consists of the biographies and autobiographies of leading Nigerian leaders, technocrats and politicians. Some of these are *My Life. The Autobiography of Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sarkin of Sokoto*;¹⁹ *Awo, the Autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo*;²⁰ *My Odyssey: An Autobiography of Nnamdi Azikiwe*;²¹ *A Right Honourable Gentleman. The Life and Times of Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa*;²² *Dr. M.I. Okpara. A Biography*;²³ *My Lord, What a Morning. Autobiography of Moses Adekoyejo Majekodunmi*;²⁴ *Fugitive Offender*;²⁵ *The Politics of Mallam Aminu Kano: Documents From the Independence Struggles, 1950-1960*;²⁶ *The Life History of Herbert Macaulay*;²⁷ *Ahmadu Bello. Sarkin of Sokoto. Values and Leadership in Nigeria*²⁸; *Obasanjo and the World*;²⁹ and *Eye of Fire: A Biography of Chief Emeka Anyaoku*;³⁰ *Because I am Involved*³¹ and *My Command*.³²

It must be stressed that neither the list nor the categorisation above is anything more than arbitrary and conjectural. This is not only because there are several dozens of literatures under each broad category that are not mentioned, important reports of Commissions of enquiries – for example *Report of the Commission appointed to enquire into the fears of Minorities and the means of allying them*³³ – are not listed. Another important limitation of the above categorisation is that there is virtually none of these works that does not make one form of reference or the other to constitutional developments and nationalism in Nigeria; party politics and the electoral process; the travails of Nigerian democracy and the rule of law; the intervention of the military in the democratic process as well as other political, cultural and socio-economic issues. However, it must be conceded that apart from the biographies, autobiographies and general (edited) works, these works have their respective areas of focus. These areas of focus informed the above tenuous categorisation. Whatever may be their limitations, the above-mentioned works and others have shed ample light on the political history of Nigeria.

Let us take, for example, Walter Ofonagoro's chronicle on the 1979 elections entitled *The Story of Nigerian General Elections 1979*³⁴ - a commissioned book with a foreword by the serving Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Information and introduction by the serving Federal Director of Information. The book was written in a hurry and published in a flurry - just as the electorates were returning from the polling booths: the presidential election, which was the last in the five-legged elections, was held on 11th August 1979 while the book was ready before the end of September and published in the first week of October of the same year. The foreword, acknowledgements and introduction were dated 28th September, 17th October and 5th October

1979 respectively. The above notwithstanding, Ofonagoro's book is an indispensable work on the political history of Nigeria without which some aspects of our national life would have either been in obscurity or passed into total oblivion. This observation is also true of other categories of literature on virtually all aspects of Nigerian history.

However, more often than not, available evidence strongly contradict some of the views, submissions, inferences and conclusions in some of the available secondary sources on Nigerian history. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to correct and put in proper historical perspectives some of the erroneous submissions of earlier scholars and writers on issues relating to Nigerian (particularly political) history. In doing this, the author adopts the historical approach - simple descriptive collation and analysis of historical data. This method involves subjecting historical data to rigorous criticism with a view to determining their accuracy and authenticity. The method also involves determining the date, location, authorship, and the pre-existing material from which a particular submission or argument was derived and the evidential value of its contents.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

In his *Ghana and Nigeria, 1957-1970: A Study in Inter-African Discord*, Olajide Aluko dismissed the Premier of the defunct Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, as an ethnic jingoist who lived and died for the cause of Northern Nigeria. Aluko contended that throughout his stay on the Nigerian political scene, Sir Ahmadu Bello said and did nothing that could be interpreted as having a pan-Nigerian outlook and application. Indeed, Aluko argued that till his death in January 1966, Sir Ahmadu Bello refused to become a Nigerian.³⁵ Although, Aluko did not advance explicit reasons for the above position, a number of factors may have informed his contention and conclusion.

One, Sir Ahmadu's party, the Northern People's Congress, NPC, was launched in 1951 by northerners, for northerners to pursue northern goals. Indeed, unlike Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the national presidents of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC, National Council of Nigerian Citizens after 1959) and the Action Group respectively, Sir Ahmadu did not undertake any worthwhile political adventure outside Northern Nigeria. Although, he was the national president of his party, his deputy, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, led the Northern People's Congress at the federal level throughout its entire life. Sir Ahmadu may have shunned federal politics for three reasons. One, he probably found Lagos (the federal capital) very strange and alien to his idea of life. Indeed, as late as 1948, Ahmadu knew very little about Nigeria and nothing about the outside world. Two, he probably realized that with him at the helm of affairs in Lagos, his personality and aristocratic background would have made the politics of compromise difficult, if not altogether impossible. Three, he looked forward to becoming the Sultan of Sokoto (spiritual head of all Muslims in Nigeria), a position he considered superior to that of the president or prime minister of Nigeria.³⁶

The above were probably not the only reasons for Olajide Aluko's verdict. For the greater part of his political career, Sir Ahmadu appeared to have promoted the Northern Region above the Nigerian nation. For example, on the eve of independence, he declared that the consolidation of

the North was what was uppermost in his mind.³⁷ Indicative of the priority given by Sir Ahmadu to the Northern Region over the Nigerian nation is the fact that his autobiography written in 1961 and published in 1962 does not refer to national independence. He ends the book by saying ‘I think it fitting to bring my narrative to an end with the grant to us of our long-sought self-government’. The self-government to which Sir Ahmadu referred was that which was granted to Northern Nigeria in 1959 and not the national self-government of 1 October 1960.³⁸

It must be stressed however that Sir Ahmadu was not the only Nigerian political leader who was ‘guilty’ of promoting his region above the nation. The other leaders did same, at times, with greater intensity and vigour. For example, in 1948 Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa³⁹ even doubted and dismissed the possibility of a united Nigeria. He said:

Many Nigerians speak of ‘unity’. They are well too loose about it. Many of them deceive themselves by thinking that Nigeria is one. This is wrong, particularly some of the press people with chance of writing in papers to tell the whole world that this is one country. When they give lectures, they shout it out that Nigerians are one people. This is wrong. When I look around me in the Council, I see Honourable members of all parts of Nigeria ... sitting together and am bound to feel some presence of unity. But I am sorry to say that the presence of unity is artificial and it ends outside this Chamber⁴⁰

Indeed, in 1959, Alhaji Balewa said he was prepared to fight and die for the cause of Northern Nigeria.⁴¹ Building up his Igbo kith and kin a decade earlier, Dr. Azikiwe had said

It would appear the God of Africa has created the Ibo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of ages...The martial prowess of the Ibo nation at all stages of human history has enabled them not only to conquer others but also to adapt themselves to the role of preserver⁴²

Expectedly, the leader of the Yoruba, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, chided Azikiwe and eulogised the Yoruba for their sterling contribution to the Nigerian nation. Furthermore, when the Chief Awolowo-led Action Group was launched in April 1951, it was designated the Action Group of the Yoruba of Western Nigeria. Indeed, Chief Awolowo insisted that one would have to be tribalist before becoming a nationalist. These pronouncements were not less pointed than those of Sir Ahmadu that made the latter earn Olajide Aluko’s verdict. The verdict is an extreme one. Whatever qualified Sir Ahmadu for Aluko’s verdict qualified Dr. Azikiwe and Chief Awolowo for same. At any rate, Sir Ahmadu knew he was a Nigerian and acted as such on a number of occasions. For example, in a New Year Message, he admonished Nigerians to ‘think and act as Nigerians’ and insisted that ‘the interest of the state should and indeed must take precedence over those of the tribe or those of the political groupings’.⁴³

In an article entitled “Egbe Omo Oduduwa and the Action Group Party: The Origin and Problems of a Nigerian National Party, 1951-1965”,⁴⁴ Babatunde Sofela of the Department of History, University of Ibadan, south west Nigeria attempts a not-too-coherent analysis of the

attempt by the Action Group at forming alliances with some minority parties in the Northern Region and claims that the Chief Obafemi Awolowo, detested the formation of alliances. According to Sofela “the formation of alliances ran against the grain of the AG leadership”.⁴⁵ In the light of available evidence, this view is misleading. Indeed, nothing could be farther from the truth than Sofela’s claim that the fact that Chief Obafemi Awolowo emerged as Leader of Opposition in the Federal Parliament after the 1959 federal elections was a pointer to the fact that Chief Awolowo detested the formation of party alliances. On the contrary, available evidence strongly suggests that apart from the alliances between his party and northern minority parties notably the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), the Borno Youth Movement (BYM), and the Ilorin Talaka Parapo (ILP), Chief Awolowo did everything he could to effect an NCNC-AG alliance in the Nigerian central legislature after the 1959 federal elections. For reasons space cannot permit us to discuss here,⁴⁶ his efforts fell through and on 21 December 1959, Chief Awolowo said “I hereby declare to the general public of Nigeria that I did everything that was humanly possible [including conceding the prime ministership to Dr. Azikiwe] and compatible with honour to effect an Action Group-NCNC parliamentary coalition in the Federal Legislature”.⁴⁷ This was confirmed by Dr. Azikiwe. The latter told a meeting of his party’s National Executive Committee in Lagos that “the AG did everything that was humanly possible and compatible with honour to effect a coalition between the AG and the NCNC”⁴⁸ but that the NCNC declined. Contrary to Sofela’s claim, Chief Awolowo could not have chosen to be in opposition since he admitted that “...it is not a pleasant thing to be in the opposition”.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the Unity Party of Nigeria - the Second Republic re-incarnation of the Action Group⁵⁰ - made unsuccessful attempts at forming a Four-Party Alliance and a Progressive Parties Alliance (PPA) for the 1979 and 1983 general elections respectively.⁵¹

Another questionable submission in Sofela paper is his argument that the self-government motion moved by an Action Group back-bencher, Chief Anthony Enahoro, on the floor of the Federal House of Representatives emanated from the mover of the motion without the prior knowledge of the leadership of the Action Group. According to Sofela, “the motion was filed without the knowledge of the Leader or Deputy Leader and without prior submission to the AG’s Parliamentary Council for discussion”.⁵² He argues further that the Parliamentary Council and Executive Committee of the Action Group however concluded that the technical breach of the Party’s rule be overlooked since the motion reflected the aspiration of an overwhelming percentage of of the people of south western Nigeria e and that its withdrawal for whatever reasons might be interpreted as a betrayal of the nationalist cause. It would be recalled that the motion in question was moved on the floor of the newly constituted Federal House of Representatives on 31 March 1953 by Anthony Enahoro. The motion sought the attainment of self-government for Nigeria in 1956.⁵³

Obviously, Sofela’s argument was influenced by Richard Sklar who had earlier argued that Enahoro’s motion “was filed without the knowledge of the Leader or the Deputy Leader and without prior submission for the AG’s Parliamentary Council for discussion”.⁵⁴ The above submissions are entirely misleading. According to Chief Enahoro “...although, the self-government motion was moved by me, it was actually a motion of the Action Group...the Action Group was a thorough and disciplined party. I could not have moved a motion of such magnitude without the consent and approval of my party”.⁵⁵ It would be recalled that on 20

October 1951, the newly-elected AG members of the Western Nigeria House of Assembly met at Dr. Maja's residence in Lagos and considered a four-point agenda. The fourth item on the agenda was that the Action Group should, on the floor of the federal Parliament, move a motion for the attainment of self-government for Nigeria.⁵⁶ Available evidence suggests that Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Alhaji Ahmadu Bello discussed issues relating to the motion on three different occasions before it was eventually moved and opposed. In Ahmadu Bello's own words

...on behalf of Northern Members, I and another Minister approached the Leader of the AG and asked him to withdraw the motion before it was debated as Northern members required time to consult the people of the North on this point as no mandate had been given them by the people to discuss such a major question ... After lengthy discussion, the Leader of the Action Group replied that he could not ask the mover of the motion to withdraw, nor agree to any amendment.⁵⁷

In a rejoinder, Chief Awolowo confirmed that he and Alhaji Bello discussed the motion three times before it was moved in the Federal Parliament. According to the former, Ibrahim Imam discussed the possibility of deferring the motion with him on Friday proceeding the Tuesday the motion was moved, but that they could not reach a compromise.⁵⁸ Indeed, a scholar has pointed out that the 1953 self-government motion had already been adopted by the Action Group at the party's Annual Convention in December 1952.⁵⁹ Enahoro corroborated the above claims. According to him "...the motion was debated in party circles several times before it was moved...in actual fact, NPC leaders mounted a lot of pressure on the Leader of the Action Group to prevail on me not to move the motion".⁶⁰ Ahmadu Bello contends further that

When I saw Enahoro's notice of motion about self-government, I saw him and asked him to withdraw it, as it would be very embarrassing to us if it were to be debated. He replied that though it was in his name it was.. a Party motion and that it would be better if I would discuss it with his leader, Awolowo. Makaman Bida and I asked the latter to see us and he came alone. I said that on a matter of this importance it was essential that I should consult my people in the North before making any public statement He [Awolowo] said that he would have to consult his Party as they attached much store by it [sic].

The next day, Awolowo came again with a curious proposition. He said that his Party had agreed to put it off until the next meeting-the one likely to be held in August - provided that I would guarantee that at that meeting we, the NPC, would not oppose it...⁶¹

In the light of the above analysis, it is fairly clear that the argument that the self-government motion was moved by Chief Enahoro without the knowledge of the Leader or Deputy Leader and without prior submission to the Parliamentary Council of the Action Group for discussion does not hold water.

Quite a great deal of ethnic and partisan views had been expressed by scholars and authors on

the 1951-52 political manoeuvrings in the defunct Western Region which did not only prevent Dr. Azikiwe from becoming the Leader of Government Business in that region but which equally prevented him from being elected from that region to the central parliament. A brief background information to the crisis may be necessary. The first general elections under the McPherson Constitution were held in the Western Region between August and September 1951. Being a far older party, the NCNC had predicted that it would win fifty of the eighty seats at stake in the Western Nigeria House of Assembly.⁶² The result of the elections sparked off an unprecedented political row between the Action Group and the NCNC. As election results were announced, there were claims and counter-claims as to which of the parties won the largest number of parliamentary seats. While the pro-Action Group *Daily Service* announced that the party won 41 seats, NCNC 13, Independents 12 and Ibadan Peoples Party 6; the results published by the NCNC-controlled *West African Pilot* read: NCNC 32, AG 27, Independents 8 with 5 results being awaited.⁶³ This was followed by a great deal of confusion as to which party actually won the largest number of parliamentary seats in the election. This was the position until 7 January, 1952 when the newly constituted Western House of Assembly had its inaugural sitting.

Before the House met however, with the support of traditional rulers and the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*,⁶⁴ the AG did some behind-the-screen manoeuvrings by 'working' on many candidates who were successful in the election and who were probably not fully decided on which side of the House to belong. On 11 October 1951, the Action Group had published a copy of a pledge of loyalty and party membership supposedly signed by many of the newly-elected members of the Western House of Assembly. Probably, now confident of an overwhelming majority, a few days before the inaugural meeting of the House, the Action Group indicated that it was going to insist that sitting arrangement in the House should be on party basis so as to show which party actually had the majority.⁶⁵ When the House eventually had its inaugural meeting on 7 January 1952, the Governor wanted members of the Assembly to sit as they were pleased but Action Group Leader, Chief Awolowo, stood outside the Parliament Building and insisted that he and 'members' of his party would not enter the Building except sitting arrangement was on party basis. The Governor and the Civil Secretary capitulated and members of the Assembly who wore AG badges sat together as members of the majority party in the House. Consequently, Chief Awolowo emerged as the Leader of Government Business in the Western Region.

Since representation in the central legislature was based on the Electoral College system, the political party in power in each of the regions elected its own representatives from its base. This implied that only members of the majority party could be elected into the federal parliament. However, the federal capital (Lagos) had two seats in the federal parliament and the NCNC, the minority party in the Western House of Assembly, won all the five Lagos seats. This implied that the Action Group dominated Western House of Assembly had to send two NCNC members to represent Lagos in the central legislature. Three NCNC candidates - Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Adeleke Adedoyin and Dr. Ibiyinka Olorun-Nimbe - scrambled for the two Lagos seats. Although, Olorun-Nimbe was not nominated by the NCNC Executive Committee, he insisted on representing his party in Lagos. To make matters worse, both Olorun-Nimbe and Adedoyin bluntly refused to step down for Dr. Azikiwe, the National President of their party.⁶⁶ Since the NCNC could not get either of the other Lagos members to step down for Dr. Azikiwe, the party had no option than to send the names of all the five Lagos NCNC members (who won the Lagos

seats) to the Western House of Assembly so as to get two of them elected to the federal legislature. Predictably, when the votes were taken, Dr. Olorun-Nimbe and Adeleke Adedoyin (both Yoruba) were elected.⁶⁷ This shattered Dr. Azikiwe's ambition of becoming being elected to the federal parliament.

Many scholars have attributed the episode described above to ethnicity. Delivering his presidential address to the Annual Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria at Nsukka, Eastern Nigeria on 1 May 1985, Obaro Ikime (a professor of Nigerian history) said, *inter alia* "an Igbo man (Zik) resident in Lagos contested elections there and swept the polls. Ethnic chauvinism prevented him [from] being elected from the Western House of Assembly to the Federal House of Representatives".⁶⁸ In a similar reminiscent, K.O.

Mbadiwe wrote

Dr. Azikiwe and his party won the majority of seats in the Western House of Assembly. He was to be elected the leader of Government Business when overnight the A.G. introduced the notorious carpet-crossing. By this manipulation, members who won under the NCNC crossed over to the A.G. building it to become the majority party in the West. As a result of this, Chief Awolowo was elected leader of Government Business and Dr. Azikiwe had to resign⁶⁹

Indeed, Chinua Achebe (an Igbo and professor) accused Chief Awolowo of 'stealing' the government of Western Nigeria from Dr. Azikiwe in 1951.⁷⁰

A careful and objective analysis of the episodes discussed above would reveal that party indiscipline, rather than ethnicity, was responsible for the political travails of Dr. Azikiwe in the Western Region in 1951/52. Having won all the five Lagos seats, the NCNC should not have had problem with getting two of its five elected members to the central legislature. The party should have simply met and decided which two of its five would go to Lagos and thereby avoid the AG-controlled House choosing the two by ballot. Had the NCNC put its house in order and forwarded only two names to the Western House of Assembly, the latter would have had no choice than to send them to the House of Representatives. But, because of indiscipline, which was the hallmark of the NCNC, it played into the hands of the AG. Dr. Azikiwe himself realised this. In his presidential address to the third convention of the NCNC in Kano, Northern Nigeria, in September 1951, he admitted that his party had been crippled by inertial, internal factions, leadership tussles and the "problem of putting our house in order."⁷¹ He lamented that "it is a tragedy when you are made a prisoner by those that should defend you. The A.G. was not responsible for the tragedy".⁷² One more clarification/correction about the 1951 election may be necessary. The election was not conducted on party basis. Candidates contested and won elections on individual basis. Therefore, for any writer or author to claim that candidates contested and won elections on the ticket of any political party is erroneous. Although, in an attempt to minimise the claims and counter-claims by the NCNC and the AG as to which candidate belonged to which party, the Public Relations Officer of the Nigerian Government, Harold Cooper, requested all the parties contesting the elections to submit the lists of candidates who had what could at best be described as 'working relationship' with them.⁷³

Some Nigerian scholars have expressed the view that representative government, particularly adversarial democracy, is alien to African political culture. Let us attempt a summary of the submission of the representative of this school of thought - Adiele Afigbo (an Igbo professor of history). According to him, the proximate cause of the travails of Nigerian democracy is that it was foisted on Nigerians from outside and did not evolve on the basis of need. Afigbo contends further that western democracy in Nigeria is a plant of very recent growth and, by implication, of very tender age. According to him, democracy “has no ancestors or parents in indigenous Nigerian political culture. Its sponsors were the Western European bourgeoisie who introduced it in the first place and then retreated beyond the shores of Africa. The other sponsors are the local intelligentsia, men and women alienated from their people and society by their education, travels and tastes”.⁷⁴

While one may agree with Afigbo’s assertion that ‘western democracy in Nigeria is a plant of very recent growth and by implication of very tender age’; one finds it difficult to accept his view that democracy ‘has no ancestors or parents in indigenous Nigerian political culture’. Obviously, village or traditional democracy was the ancestor of modern/western/liberal democracy, not only in Africa but in the world at large: the Athenian and the Greek City States’ brands of democracy illustrate this point very clearly.⁷⁵ For example, in the Old Oyo Empire, ‘traditional democracy’ was unassailable. The principle of separation of power, aimed at ensuring that the chief executive did not arrogate too much power to himself (the same aim of western democracy), was sacrosanct and any *Alafin* (the head of the executive) who attempted to arrogate extra constitutional powers to himself did so to his peril as he would be asked to ‘sleep’ (die by committing suicide) by the *Basorun* (head of the kingmakers or *Oyomesi*). Thus, as a scholar has pointed out, the very existence of chiefs who advised and assisted the Yoruba sovereign provided a counterweight against monarchical absolutism.⁷⁶ In rejecting an offending *Alafin*, one of the pronouncements made by the *Basorun* is “...the people reject you”. This is in perfect agreement with the submission of Casely Hayford that

The office of the King is elective. No King that is to say, is born a King... It is the right of those who placed him there to put him off the stool for any just cause. But no other authority can rightly interfere with his position, if his people are satisfied with him⁷⁷

This is in tandem with liberal democracy’s provision for the removal of an unpopular, cruel, dictatorial and oppressive or corrupt leader and the retention of the humane, selfless, responsive and responsible ones. Indeed, in most traditional African societies, the concept of democracy carried the seal of the gods. This constantly kept the rulers in check since the pronouncement of the gods in rejecting a ruler was immediate, irreversible and final unlike in western democracy where conflicting pronouncements could emanate from court-rooms.

Closely related to the the above Euro-centric view of African history is the view expressed by a Nigerian political scientist, Akintunde Ayeni who expressed the view that prior to the coming of the British, there was no tradition of co-operation among the various Nigerian groups. He submitted that the pre-colonial history of Nigeria was a history of inter-tribal war and slave raids and that it took the presence of the British to put an end to this chaotic condition.⁷⁸ Today, however, it is incontrovertible that “African history, before the advent of the Europeans, redounded with great kingdoms and glittered with brilliant works of arts”.⁷⁹ The various ethnic

groups in Nigeria did not live in self-sufficient islands; apart from their interwoven legends of origins, the various ethnic groups co-existed and peacefully engaged in inter-ethnic commerce and did mutual and beneficial cultural borrowings. Today, no one except those Okon Uya refers to as the “hopelessly uninformed”⁸⁰ would attempt to justify the above Euro-centric view of African history.

In December 1959, the NPC and the NCNC formed a coalition government. Throughout its entire life (1959-64), that coalition was plagued by rancour and dissention. However, in his “Political Parties in Nigeria”, James O’Connell argued that it was only in the last years of its existence that the NPC/NCNC coalition showed “signs of internal tension and distress”.⁸¹ Also, the *Drum Magazine* expressed the view that the NCNC did everything possible “to do nothing that could be interpreted by its partner [NPC] as an unfriendly act”.⁸² These views are completely misleading. Available evidence demonstrates very clearly that the NPC/NCNC coalition was consistently and irredeemably plagued by internal schism and discord throughout its entire life. Moreover, the NCNC did so many things its alliance partner interpreted as unfriendly acts. Indeed, as the present author has pointed out elsewhere, the attitude of many NCNC leaders was more appropriate to that of an opposition than a government party.⁸³ It is therefore not surprising that the NCNC dismissed the coalition government as “a daft government without a sense of purpose”.⁸⁴

In 1953, after a protracted and unresolved controversy among Nigeria’s three major political parties (ethnic groups), the Colonial Office excised Lagos from the Western Region. Before the decision of the Colonial Office, the Yoruba-dominated Action Group had advanced quite a number of reasons why Lagos should remain part of the Western Region. Indeed, one of the reasons that informed the formation of a (secret?) pact between the Action Group and the NCNC was what the latter party probably initially saw as the plausibility of the argument of the former party for the retention of Lagos as part of the Western Region.⁸⁵ Contrary to the expectation and the argument of the Action Group however, the Colonial Office severed Lagos from the Western Region “in the wider interests of Nigeria as a whole”.⁸⁶ In his autobiography, Chief Obafemi Awolowo argued that Lagos was a financial liability to the Western Region and that its severance was in the Region’s interest.⁸⁷ This is not true. One of the reasons the AG wanted Lagos to be retained as part of Western Nigeria was the principle of derivation. As much as possible, revenues were returned to their regions of origin. Owing to the relatively large revenues derived from the export of cocoa grown mainly in the Western Region, the principle of derivation benefited Western Nigeria tremendously - over and above the other two regions.⁸⁸ Indeed, Arthur Hazlewood has estimated that the principle of derivation “brought to the West a financial gain of €3.8m and to the North €1.2m; to the East...a loss of between €0.1m and €2m”.⁸⁹ From the above figures, it is obvious that Chief Awolowo’s claim that Lagos was a financial liability to the Western Region was misleading.

Although, the right or wrong of the decision of the Colonial Office to sever Lagos from the Western Region is not the preoccupation of this paper; it must be pointed out however that Lagos was a Yoruba town. Let us take demography for example. A cursory glance at the population of Lagos from about 1893 supports the argument that Lagos was a Yoruba city. Out of a total population of 85,607 in 1893, there were 65,693 Yoruba-speaking people, 13,718 Popo-speaking

tribes and 150 Europeans.⁹⁰ In 1950, out of 230,000 inhabitants, 217,000 were Nigerians out of which 163,000 were Yoruba; Igbo 26,000; Edo 10,000 while no other group was represented by more than 5,000 people.⁹¹

The most outstanding feature of Nigerian federalism is probably its unevenness. Since the allocation of fifty percent federal parliamentary seats to Northern Nigeria at the 1950/51 Ibadan Constitutional Conference, Nigerian federalism has consistently remained uneven. At independence, while the Northern Region predominated with 79% of the total geographical area (compared with the Western Region's 8.5% and Eastern Region's 8.3%) and about 54% of the total population; the Eastern Region predominated in terms of appointments into federal establishments, including the military. Indeed, Chief Ladoke Akintola's Nigerian National Democratic Party accused the Igbo of accessing and capturing more than their fair share of 'juicy federal appointments'. Apparently, referring to the Igbo, the NNDP asserted that

The Federal Republic is, in a sense, a Commonwealth. Its resources must be accessible to all its citizens, regardless of creed, clan or tribe. It is a matter for regret that there are among leaders of a certain part of the federation...who do not share this view, and who appear to regard the Federal Government as a limited liability company of which only their kith and kin should be sole shareholders⁹²

In a number of publications and series of articles in the *West African Pilot*, *Daily Express* and to a lesser extent, the *Nigerian Tribune* particularly between August 1963 and October 1964 intended to counter what the Igbo referred to as 'the lies of Akintola's NNDP',⁹³ the NCNC claimed that the Igbo never obtained a disproportionate percentage of federal appointments. Available evidence rubbishes this claim. Available statistics show that the top echelons of many Nigerian federal establishments were virtually the exclusive preserve of the Igbo. A few instances would suffice. In the Nigerian Railway Corporation where an Igbo, Dr. Ikejiani, was Chairman of 431 members of staff, 270 were Igbo.⁹⁴ In the Nigerian Ports Authority, because an Igbo, Raymond Njoku, was Minister of Transport, 21 of the topmost offices were occupied by Igbos. Furthermore, out of a total of 104 other top positions, 73 were occupied by Igbos, 23 by Yorubas and only 8 by other ethnic groups.⁹⁵ Turning to the Yaba Technical Institute, one confronts the same picture: 21 of the 29 indigenous senior staff were Igbo. The same uneven statistics were alleged to have held for the Nigerian Airways and other federal institutions headed by Igbos. At the time of the publication of the NNDP's White Paper referred to above, there were 9 Igbo ambassadors while the figures for the Western, Northern and Mid-Western Regions were 3, 4 and 2 respectively.⁹⁶ The fairly large literature the NCNC-Igbo produced to counter the 'take-it-all' allegation levelled against it by the NNDP did not represent the reality.

The most casual acquaintance with the history of Nigeria from c. 1914 to c.1966 would reveal that ethnicity was the hallmark of Nigerian politics and the most important singular factor that wretched the First Republic. It would be recalled that in an attempt to perpetuate colonial rule, the British colonial administration promoted ethnic interests and consciousness above national interests. On the other hand, the leaders of the three main ethnic groups (and later, political

parties) engaged in a cut-throat competition for the control of the Structural Frame and the system of rewards. Thus, both on the part of the British colonial administration and Nigerian political leaders, no conscious or coordinated attempts were made at building a politically united Nigeria. Thus, from about 1953 (following Chief Anthony Enahoro's self-government motion), the nation moved perilously and almost irretrievably from one crisis to another including a thirty-month gruesome Civil War.

Oyeweso has downplayed the role of ethnicity and regional differences in the fall of Nigeria's First Republic and the outbreak of the Civil War. Adopting the political economy approach in his analysis of the Nigerian crises, particularly the collapse of the First Republic and outbreak of the Civil War, Oyeweso contends that the commitment to ethnic, regional and other superstructural explanation and rationalisations does not explain the complex character of the Nigerian crises.⁹⁷ Oyeweso argues further that the major cause of the Nigerian crises was "the cut-throat competition among the various factions of the ruling class for limited opportunities in business and politics".⁹⁸ It is however the view of the present author that the cut throat competition Oyeweso spoke about was always inter-ethnic and rarely intra-ethnic except, perhaps, in the Western Region between 1962 and 1965. Even here, the contest for political ascendancy was for a regional and not the central government. Oyeweso himself admits that "each faction (or fraction) of the ruling class wanted to control the central because it would thereby be able to monopolise the national wealth for the purpose of private accumulation".⁹⁹ However, more often than not, the contest for the control of the structural frame was done on the basis of ethnic affiliations and rarely on the basis of sub-ethnic affiliations. The point being stressed here is that the role of ethnicity cannot be downplayed in the chain of events that rocked the boat of the Nigerian First Republic.

CONCLUSION

It is often said that water is as pure as its source. The same is true of history. While no source of history is foolproof, historical accounts based on large-scale fallacies will not only misinform others, misrepresent people and confuse issues; it will ultimately replace authentic history with propaganda and falsehood. Since the importance of secondary sources in the reconstruction of Nigerian history cannot be over-emphasized, it is expedient that they are not subjected to deliberate or calculated mis-interpretation or mis-representation. Since sources are the foundations upon which the reconstruction of past human actions rest, it is imperative that historical sources are preserved and presented without monumental alterations and in a manner that guarantee the presentation and preservation of fair and useful historical accounts for posterity. This is what this paper has attempted to do.

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³⁹ Tafawa Balewa was the first and only Prime Minister of Nigeria (1954-1966). He was the Deputy Leader of the NPC

⁴⁰ Legislative Council Debates, 4 March 1948, p. 227.

⁴¹ *West African Pilot*, 10 January, 1959

⁴² Presidential Address to the Ibo State Union. Quoted from Remi Anifowose, *Violence and Politics in Nigeria. The Tiv and Yoruba Experience* (New York and Enugu: Nok Publishers, 1982), p.35

⁴³ *Daily Times*, 1 January, 1962.

⁴⁴ Adekunle Ajasin University: *African Studies Review*. Vol. 6, June, 2007.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 261.

⁴⁶ For a detailed analysis of these factors, see this author's "The Politics of the Formation of Alliance Governments in Multi-Ethnic States: A Case Study of the Nigerian First Alliance Government, 1954-1957", *Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire*, XLVI, autumn/automne, 2011, pp. 333-366.

⁴⁷ Quoted from *Daily Service*, 22 December, 1959.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 23 December, 1959.

⁴⁹ *Nigerian Tribune*, 15 February, 1983.

⁵⁰ Almost without exception, Nigerian political parties during the Second Republic (1 October 1979 to 31 December 1983) were the reincarnations of the political parties of the pre-military era: while the Nigerian People's Party was the reincarnation of the NCNC; the Unity Party of Nigeria was the offshoot of the AG; the People's Redemption Party succeeded the NEPU while northerners supported the National Party of Nigeria the same way they had supported the NPC. Finally, the Great Nigerian People's Party replaced the Borno Youth Movement.

⁵¹ For details, see Emmanuel Oladipo Ojo, 'The Nigerian Democratic Process: Ethnicity and Formation of Alliances', Ph.D Thesis, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria, 2012, pp. 231-244.

⁵² Sofela, pp. 255-256.

⁵³ 1956 was chosen because it was the end of the life of the House and a point where a new constitution could be conveniently introduced.

⁵⁴ Richard Sklar, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

⁵⁵ Interview with Chief Anthony Enahoro, c. 85, No. 33, King George V Road, Onikan, Lagos, 22 August 2009.

⁵⁶ *Interview*. Others were rules governing the establishment of parliamentary councils and committees; principles governing the appointment of ministers and selection of the members of the House of Representatives and Nigerian unity.

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⁵⁹ Oyeleye Oyediran, *Nigerian Constitutional Development* (Ibadan: Oyeniran Consults International, 2007), . 24.

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⁶¹ Quoted from *My Life*, p. 115.

⁶² *Daily Times*, 20 September, 1951.

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⁷⁰ Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1983), p. 58.

⁷¹ *West Africa*, 15 September, 1951.

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