

History

The International Boundaries of Nigeria, 1885-1960: The Framework of an Emergent African Nation

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Joseph Christopher Okwudi Anene is the author of *The International Boundaries of Nigeria, 1885-1960: The Framework of an Emergent African Nation*. Anene was born at Onitsha, Nigeria in 1921 and attended a Roman Catholic School called Christ the King College where he became a teacher after graduation. He studied for an external degree in History offered by the University of London; in 1948, he got a local trader to sponsor him to go to the University College of Cork where he received the Bachelor of Arts degree of the University of London in the Upper Division with Second Class (Anene, 1970).

Anene did a postgraduate degree in London from 1949 to 1952 and was awarded the Master of Arts degree for a thesis titled ‘The Establishment of British Rule in Southern Nigeria, 1885-1906’ Following the degree with a Diploma in Education, he went to teach at the Ibadan branch of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology from 1954 to 1956 before moving to the University of Ibadan. His basic training was in Imperial History. For most of his teaching career, he taught courses in British Colonial History and the Growth of the British Commonwealth that were under the scheme of the special relationship with the University of London, which constituted a third of the History Honors Courses at Ibadan until 1962 when he gradually made the transition to African History that became a significant part of the History of Historiography in West Africa scheme (Anene, 1970).

Anene’s book being reviewed here was based on his Philosophy Doctorate thesis approved by the University of London in 1960. His contribution to historical scholarship went beyond his research and publications. He was a stimulating and methodical teacher who meticulously revised his notes every year. He particularly encouraged better teaching in schools of History in general and African History in particular. Before his death, he was a senior member and later Head of the Department of History. He was also an important architect of the new Ibadan Bachelor of Arts degree structure and of the postgraduate school in History which has produced many Nigerian teachers of History (Anene, 1970).

Book Review

The book was published posthumously as Anene died during the Nigeria Civil War (the war lasted from July 6, 1967 to January 15, 1970). The book examines the commonly accepted view that the boundaries around Nigeria, drawn by Britain, France and Germany, were not favorable to the indigenous sociopolitical and economic order. The book begins with an introductory chapter that deals with the common criticisms of colonial boundaries and the categories of African frontiers, while the second chapter describes how the coastal termini and certain crucial turning points in the hinterland were selected using historical evidence. The Nigerian boundaries were categorized in such a way that on the coast, the western terminus near Badagri reflected indigenous political structures and their respective allegiance

to Britain and France; in the East, the Rio del Rey terminus resulted from German opportunism, rather than from significant ethnic differences. Inland the Niger River West of Jebba and the Benue East of Yola were also important to the British government. Nonetheless, no attempt was made to explain the attachment to Lake Chad as the Northeast turning point (Anene, 1970; Prescott, 1971).

The remaining five chapters of the book deal with separate sections of the boundaries, since the negotiations for the various sections were largely independent of one another. The sections are the Anglo-German eastern boundary from the Rio del Rey to the Cross River rapids; from the Cross River rapids to Lake Chad; the Anglo-French western boundary from the coast to the ninth parallel and from the ninth parallel to the Niger; and the Anglo-French northern boundary from the Niger to Lake Chad (Anene, 1970).

The Anglo-French inter- Cameroons boundary, which replaced part of the Northeastern Anglo-German boundary after World War I is considered in the same chapter as the relevant Anglo-German boundary. In each chapter, the nature of the local political structures before and during the time of boundary negotiations is examined, and then the European boundary agreements are analyzed. The conclusion in each case is that the negotiating powers made a genuine attempt to consider the indigenous sociopolitical and economic structure. Anene places great emphasis on politics and personalities than on the geographical factors that influenced the negotiators. Thus, the neglect of geographical factors will be a major disappointment for geographers who use this book. For example, no attempt is made to explain why the northern terminus on the southern shore of Lake Chad was “35 minutes east of the meridian of the center of the town of Kuka.” It was thought that this definition would coincide with the 14th meridian; instead, it coincided with meridian 14 ° 8' E., so Britain gained territory at Germany’s expense (Anene, 1970; Prescott, 1971).

The important survey problems raised by vague definitions such as “the southern shores of Lake Chad” and “the point where the River Amjumba loses itself in the swamp” are not considered, nor are the difficulties associated with the use of rivers such as the Yobe (Anene, 1970; Prescott, 1971). The weakest section of the book in historical terms is the one dealing with the Anglo-French Cameroons boundary defined as the Picot Line in 1921. These complicated negotiations, which resulted in Nigeria’s new Northeastern boundary, were only discussed in three pages. Moreover, there is no discussion of the boundary between Northern and Southern Cameroons under British trusteeship, which also became part of Nigeria’s international boundary when the Southern Cameroons federated with Cameroun after independence.

The work is illustrated by 16 maps. And, as Anene acknowledges, the main weakness in the bibliography is the omission of several important articles and books written in French and German at the time the boundaries were being negotiated (Anene, 1970).

Book’s Greatness

First, the book is among the great series from the University of Ibadan’s School of History which centers on Nigerian boundaries employing mostly historical data and interpretation. Second, the book is Anene’s doctoral thesis which has enjoyed significant attention since 1960 and has been widely used and referenced when discussing Nigerian boundaries. More important is that despite the passage of time, the book remains a masterpiece in the study and teaching of the Sociopolitical History of West Africa in general and Nigeria in particular.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The analysis presented in this review shows that Anene’s book provides a significant

understanding of basic socioeconomic and political historical developments that affect the everyday lives of Africans since the pre-colonial period. The analysis also shows the relevance of places, history, sociocultural relationships between people and their environments between Africans and the outside world, and how they have been able to manage these relationships during and after colonial rule. In addition, the analysis gives readers information on the history of Africa and attempts by an African author to write African History using African perspectives and approaches.

Given all this, two recommendations are hereby made for future researchers. First, the book reviewed can serve as resource of great knowledge for students and non-students of History who want to gather literature and provide analyses of the political and sociocultural history of Africa using the Afrocentric approach. Second, in light of the decolonization of African History and the various efforts by the Ibadan School of History, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other African educational bodies, an endeavor that is highlighted in the book reviewed here, this review essay will serve as a great resource for the further exploration of the topic. These recommendations will allow future researchers to be well served in their analyses of African historical phenomena.

References

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