



THE FATHERLAND GROUP

Speech by Dele Ogun delivered at The Inter-Cultural Association of London, The National Liberal Club, Whitehall



Nigeria and Britain after Elizabeth

I have been struggling to find the right words to convey the significance of this speech to my life journey to date in all its dimensions.

The task has been all the greater because, as one of the first Africans to break into City law practice in the early nineties, I have been honoured with the presence this evening of my former colleague at Hogan Lovells LLP, Mr Andrew Skipper MBE, who heads the firm's Africa Practice. Whenever I look upon Skipper's plum cheeks, it causes to me to reflect on how much I have sacrificed for Nigerians.

But it is this historic venue, the National Liberal Club, here in Whitehall, which really makes this the ultimate speaking engagement for me. This is because of a man called Joseph Chamberlain.

Although there are, approximately, 125 years between us, still our connection is strong. It was while reading his multi-volume biography that I came to realise that we both grew up playing on the same Highbury Fields in Highbury, Islington, a little under 5 miles from here.



Chamberlain, for those who do not know him, apart from being the father of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, was, as his biographer put it, **'the prophet and leader of the Imperial movement'**.

Such was his influence on British politics in his time that it was said that the loyal toast became **"To Chamberlain and the King"**. And it was right here, in the then home of the Liberal Party, when that party was the heavyweight rival to the Tory Party, that he reigned.

Our theme this evening is **'Nigeria and Britain after Elizabeth'** but I think it is important to say a little on the period before, and a little more on the period during, Elizabeth's reign.

Before Elizabeth's, it was Queen Victoria's reign which had been the longest running. That **began in June 1837**, around the time of the beginning of the project to make Nigeria in the wake of the abolition of slavery in 1833. **Victoria died on 22 January 1901** shortly after Nigeria's first birthday on 1st January.

Now, strictly speaking there were, at that time, two countries called Nigeria: there was the largely Islamic Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and the Christian Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The two Nigeria's had been made in 1900, under the direction and supervision of my Highbury colleague of yesteryears, Joseph Chamberlain. And then separately, there was the predominantly Christian Colony of Lagos with its Yoruba hinterland.

By the time Chamberlain left office in 1903, he had set in motion plans for a series of amalgamations to make 'One Nigeria'. First came the 1906 amalgamation of the Colony of Lagos, and its Yoruba hinterland, with the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria to form what was known as "the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria"; **this was done by the edict of King Edward VII.**

Then, in 1914, came the big one: the amalgamation of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria with the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, to make the Colony of Nigeria. **This was done by the edict of King George V.**



The next major development was the reversal of the 1906 southern amalgamation by the administrative partition, on 1st April 1939, by the Colonial Office, of what had been Southern Nigeria into Eastern Region and Western Region. Two years later, **in August 1941, came the publication of the Atlantic Charter**, with its commitment to self-determination for all peoples, which set off the nationalist campaigns for independence. However, the interpretation of the Charter adopted by the Colonial Office was simply: to *'bring subject peoples to self-rule under the Crown'*.

By the time **Queen Elizabeth took to the throne on 6 February 1952**, at the age of 25, the campaign for independence was approaching its climax; the first sitting of the newly established Nigeria House of Representatives had taken place just days before, **on 29th January 1952**. The beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign thus effectively marks the beginning of Nigeria's experiment with democracy underscoring the importance of this audit, now that her reign has come to an end.

Nigeria under Elizabeth

She met Nigeria in the early stages of the political crisis which prevailed throughout her reign. **The Coronation Commission having announced, in June 1952**, that her coronation would be taking place **on 2 June 1953**, the sudden tabling, by Southern Nationalists in the House of Representatives, **on 31 March 1953, of a motion for independence**, with effect from the end of the current parliamentary term, in 1956, must have thrown the Colonial Office into panic. There was no way the Coronation was going to be spoilt by the departure from the Empire of the biggest colony in Africa especially given that **it was only in 1947 that India**, that jewel in the crown, had been lost. What the nationalists got, instead of independence, was a hastily convened **Constitutional Conference in London in 1954** and a visit **from the Queen in 1956**, the very year of the wished-for independence. But the campaign for independence could only be slowed; it could not be stopped. And so, **on 1st October 1960**, independence was granted to Nigeria by an Act of the British Parliament. Although



Parliament had thus left the stage, Elizabeth remained as Head of State. This continued **until 1st October 1963** when Nigeria declared itself a Republic. Even then, she remained connected with the country as Head of the British Commonwealth.

It was in **February 1965** that Major-General Welby-Everard was replaced as Commander in Chief of the Nigerian army. His successor, Thomas Aguiyi-Ironsi, had been **the Queen's equerry** during her Nigerian tour. Eleven months later, **on 15 January 1966** came the first military coup which saw Ironsi become Nigeria's first military ruler, following the assassination of Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa. The political horror show was only just beginning.

The first round of pogroms, in the North, against Igbos occurred on **29th May 1966**. The second round was on **29th July 1966**, as part of the countercoup in which Ironsi was murdered and replaced by General Yakubu Gowon. The third, and bloodiest, round of pogroms against Igbos in the North occurred on **29th September 1966**. A mass exodus of Igbos to Eastern Nigeria followed.

Peace talks, in Aburi, Ghana in January 1967, produced the Aburi Accord by which all parties committed to a more federal arrangement, with each region having military control of its own area. When that compromise was reneged upon by the Gowon Government - which instead announced the division of Nigeria into 12 states - **the independent state of Biafra was declared on 29th/30th May 1967**.

The war, which began in July 1967, ended with the unconditional surrender of the Biafrans on **15th January 1970**. It was a brutal war in which some 3 million Igbos are reported to have died, mostly as a result of economic blockade and starvation.

Since the end of that war, Nigeria has been moving from one political crisis to another, with military rule alternating with civilian rule. It was only as head of the Commonwealth **Heads of Government meeting in December 2003**, that the Queen paid her only other visit to Nigeria.



Once can thus see that Nigeria's experiment with democracy in Elizabeth's time has been bloody and much troubled.

What then of the outlook for Nigeria and Britain after Elizabeth?

As we speak, the country is preparing for winner-takes-all **Presidential elections in February 2023**.

The three main candidates seem to me to be three flavours of the same ice cream: all three, Bola Tinubu (from the South West), Peter Obi (from the South East) and Abubakar Atiku (from the North) are billionaires. All have accounting/trading backgrounds; none brings to the table any new thinking on the underpinning constitutional problem.

This is troubling at a time when, now more than at anytime before, there is a realisation that Nigeria is operating without a Constitution and is only being held together through the barrel of General Buhari's guns. On 20 October, we marked the second anniversary of the Lekki Massacre of young Nigerians singing the national anthem. The currency, the Naira, is in free fall and the Exodus of the young and talented is growing.

What then can we expect in the relationship between Nigeria and Britain after Elizabeth?

Here, I think, we must be guided by history.

I turn first to the words spoken by **The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Oliver Lyttleton (Lord Chandos), on 21 May 1953**, during the emergency debate on Nigeria's constitutional future, roughly a week before Queen Elizabeth's coronation:



Recent events have shown that it is not possible for the three Regions of Nigeria to work together effectively in a federation so closely knit as that provided by the present Constitution. Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, while greatly regretting this, consider that the Constitution will have to be redrawn to provide for greater regional autonomy and for the removal of powers of intervention by the Centre in matters which can, without detriment to other Regions, be placed entirely within regional competence. It is at the same time necessary to ensure that the common economic and defence requirements of all Regions are secured.

I next turn to the words of Sir Peter Smithers, who was **the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister of State and the Secretary of State in the Colonial Office from 1952-59** in the run up to Nigeria's independence. He was also the Secretary General to the Council of Europe from 1964-1969. **Writing in the Times on July 15th, 1998**, he said:

Sir, During the negotiations for the independence of Nigeria the view of the Secretary of State at that time, with which I agreed, was that in Nigeria we should attempt to put together a large and powerful state with ample material resources, which would play a leading part in the affairs of the continent and the world. This was attractive but it involved forcing several different ethnic and cultural groups into a single political structure.

The negotiations were complex and very difficult, the chief problem as I remember relating, significantly, to the control of the police and the military.

In the retrospect of 40 years it is clear that this was a grave mistake which has cost many lives and will probably continue to do so. It would have been better to establish several smaller states in a free-trade area.



In exculpation it must be said that we did not then have the examples of the collapse of Yugoslavia and of the Soviet Union before our eyes. It should now be clear for all but the wilfully blind to see that it is extremely dangerous to force diverse racial and social entities into a single rigid structure such as that which is being built upon the foundation of the Maastricht treaty. Recent history suggests that it would be best to complete the development of the Common Market and to call a halt to political integration in Europe.”

It must follow, in the retrospect of another 24 years since Sir Peter Smithers issued that warning, that it remains extremely dangerous to continue to keep diverse racial and social entities into a single rigid structure such as we see in Nigeria.

When we remember that one of the claims made to justify the original British colonisation project was to put a stop to the practice of human sacrifice by despotic rulers, it is a tragic irony to observe that more Nigerian lives have been sacrificed, since the push for ‘One Nigeria’ was started by Chamberlain in 1900, than those despotic rulers could ever have taken. And as Sir Peter Smithers warned, more will continue to be sacrificed as long as this remains the agenda.

What then is to be done?

Since I don’t believe that the relationship between Nigeria and Britain after Elizabeth is going to be left to the wilfully blind, what should we expect? The answer takes us back to the times of our friend, Joseph Chamberlain.

It was **Prime Minister William Gladstone’s policy of Home Rule for Ireland** - meaning a separate parliament with full powers to deal with Irish affairs - which led to Chamberlain’s **resignation from the Liberal party on 27 March 1886**. He viewed Home Rule for Ireland as the weakening of Parliament’s control over the United Kingdom.



Gladstone's speech in the debate on the Irish Home Rule Bill makes interesting reading in relation to the political situation in today's Nigeria. He said:

"I wish now to refer to another matter. I hear constantly used the terms Unionists and Separatists. But what I want to know is, who are the Unionists? I want to know who are the Separatists?"

(In Nigeria at the current time, the equivalent labels being used are "One Nigerianists" and "Secessionists").

" . . . But we believe as proved by history, that where there are those disturbed relations between countries associated, but not incorporated, the true principle is to make ample provision for local independence, subject to imperial unity. These are propositions of the greatest interest and importance. Gentlemen speak of tightening the ties between England and Ireland as if tightening the tie were always the means to be adopted. **Tightening the tie is frequently the means of making it burst, whilst relaxing the tie is very frequently the way to provide for its durability and to enable it to stand a stronger strain;** so it is true . . . that the separation of Legislatures is often the union of countries, and the union of Legislatures is often the severance of countries."

So the choice that will shape the relationship between Britain and Nigeria after Elizabeth is the one between (1) the union of legislators and the severance of the ethnic groups which were thrown together to make Nigeria or (2) the separation of legislators for the continued union of these groups.

The bitter harvest from Nigeria's experiment with democracy during the reign of Elizabeth, coupled with the clear warnings from the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1953, which were repeated by his Parliamentary Private Secretary in 1998, and with the greater level of awareness through social media by a new generation of Nigerians of their history, I am confident in my prediction that the



road ahead is more in line with Gladstone's Home Rule Bill for Ireland and a firm rejection of the One Nigeria template created by that arch-Imperialist, from my Highbury neighbourhood, Joseph Chamberlain.

The Orange Union

What then will the new Nigeria look like?

Rousseau, the 18th century French Philosopher, defined the challenge as follows:

The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and good of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before. This is the fundamental problem of which the Social Contract provides the solution.

I ask for it to be imagined as the Orange Union, in contradistinction to the Apple Union. Each segment of the orange uniting itself with all others to make the whole, in an association in which "it may still obey itself alone and remain as free as before".

I conclude by encouraging us to proclaim loudly: "The Queen is dead. Long live the King".

Dele Ogun

Convenor of the Fatherland Group

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