

Inside the Nigerian Political Zoo (Posted on Facebook 02/06/2020)

Yesterday, the “Northern Nigeria Security Initiative” (alias Shege-Ka-Fasa) emerged in an unending quest for regional security outfits in the country. The political issues at stake is clear to the public—even the most careless eyes would not miss the imposing image of a roaring lion, the mascot of Shege-Ka-Fasa. Here, the politics of animal imagery goes beyond exploiting nature to amplify or exaggerate humans’ tendency for savagery. Indeed, it emphasizes the superiority of the lion--the king of the jungle-- to all other animals, including the leopard, the imprint of the Southwest’s imagination of maximum strength. More importantly, it corroborates Nnamdi Kanu's allegoric description of Nigeria as a zoo—a lawless space inhabited by animals of unequal strength vying for unregulated power.

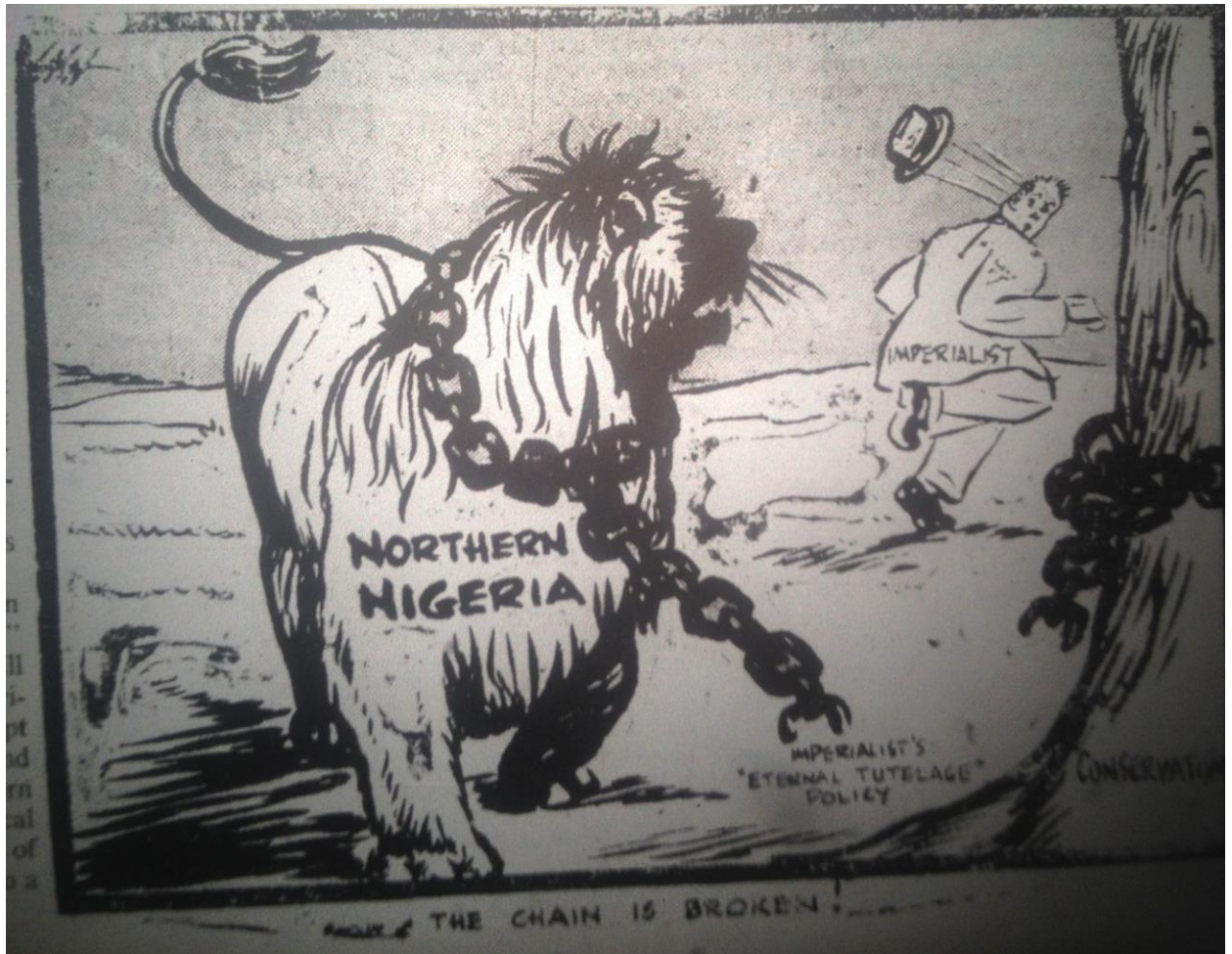
However, the idea of Nigeria as a zoo is not original to Kanu. And the leaders of the new security outfits are not the first to imagine the state, the people, and power as animals. From the 1930s through the 1960s, pioneering Nigerian cartoonist, Akinola Lasekan (1916–1972), produced provocative works that depict the state as a zoo and the people as animals of varying predatory ability vying for political relevance, while simultaneously annihilating one another. The parable of power in the colonial state found expression in the thought of an artist whose work laid the foundation of political cartoon culture in postcolonial Nigeria. In fact, over 90 percent of Lasekan’s cartoons in the 1940s through the 1960s used animal symbols or what artists call iconography. By using Nnamdi Azikiwe’s West African Pilot to channel his creative energy, Lasekan positioned himself as the first “de-tribalized” or “pan-Nigerian” artist.

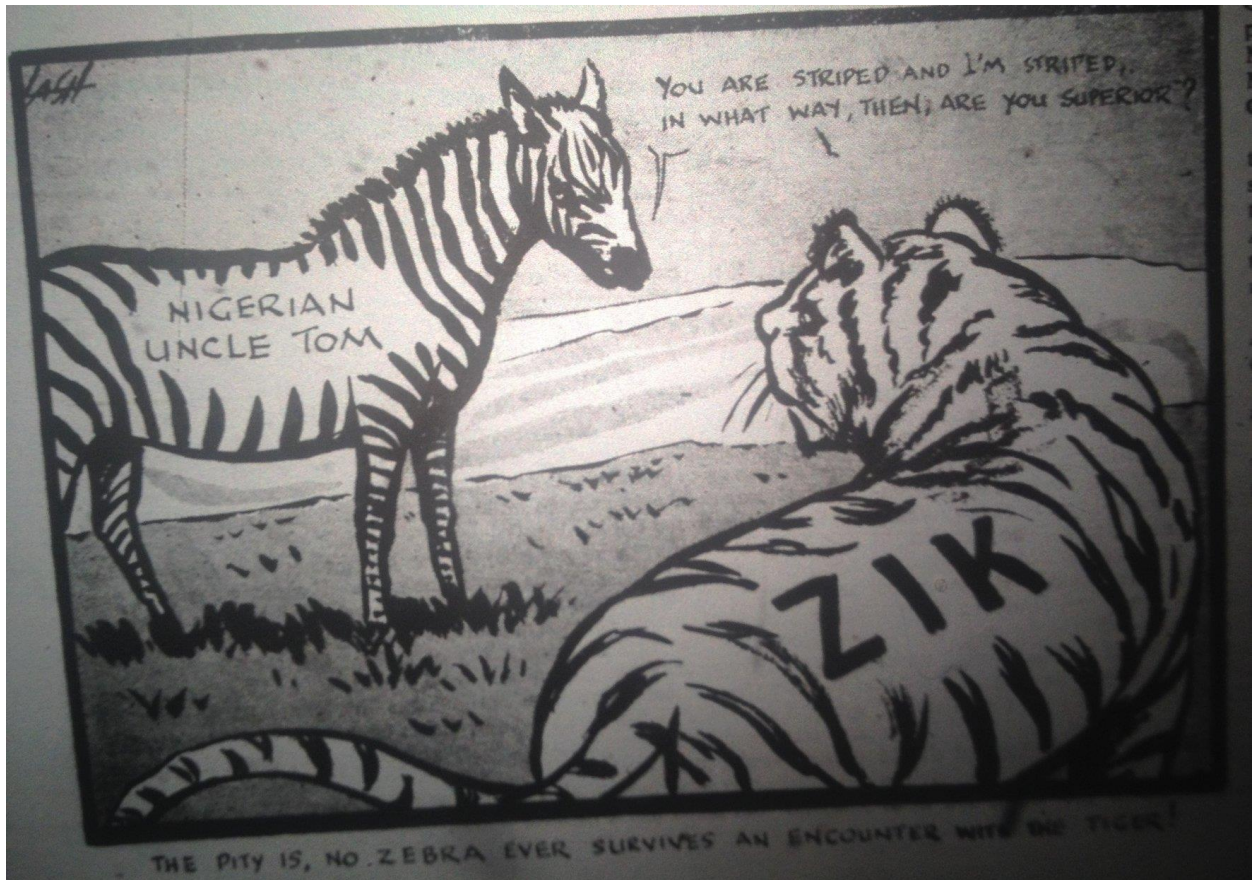
Why are animals so important in humans’ imagination of power? Why can’t we just leave them out of our problem? Possible answers to this can be found in my forthcoming book “Animality and Colonial Subjecthood in Africa: The Human and Nonhuman Creatures of Nigeria.” Chapter 4, the most difficult part of the book to write, focuses on the representation of animals in the works of Lasekan.

History matters in everything because it is just the only way to understand anything!











THE PROBLEM IS, THE LION MUST LIVE!

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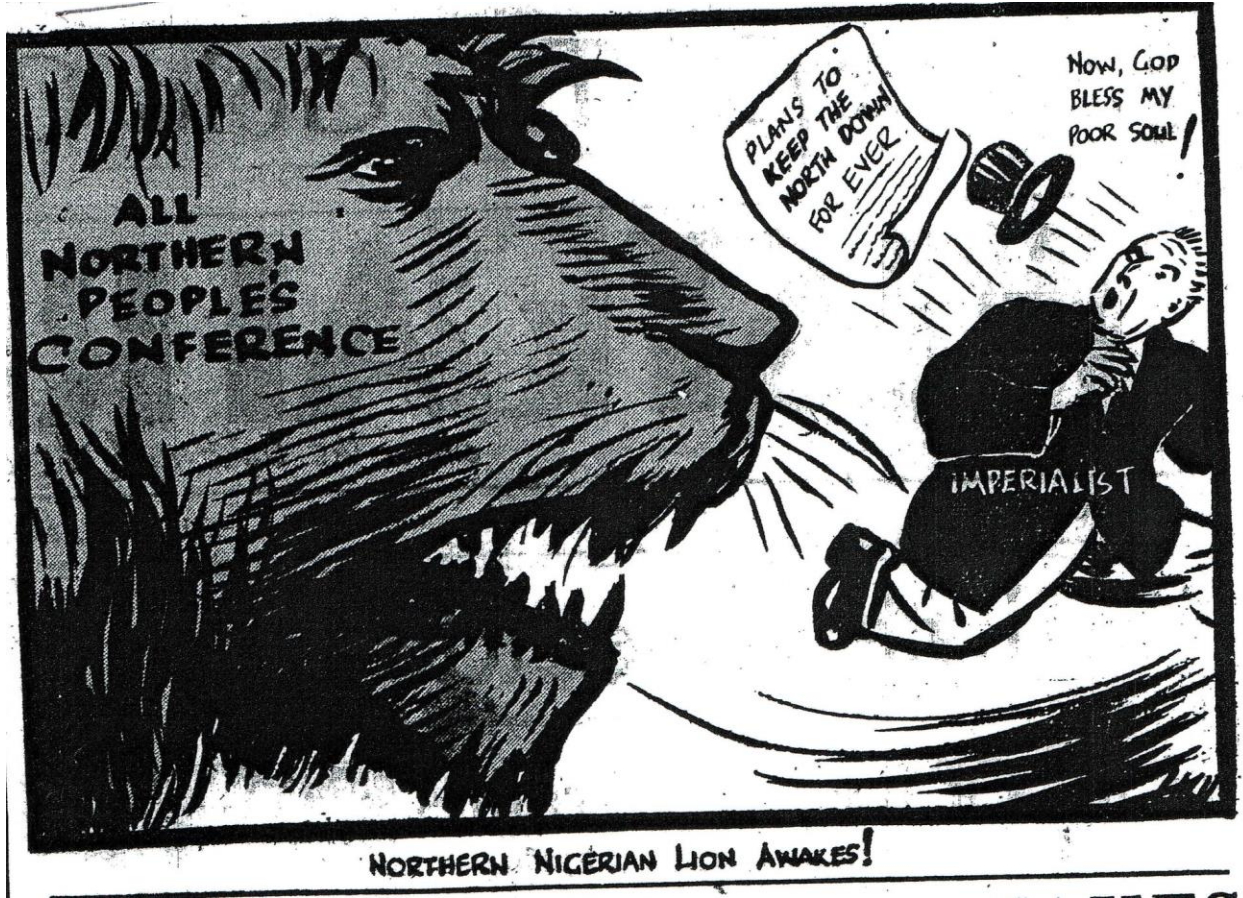












NORTHERN NIGERIAN LION AWAKES!