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AFRO-CENTRICISM IN NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA, 1960-1999: SOME DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

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Abstract

This paper examines the element of continuity in Nigeria's pursuance of the principle of African centeredness of her foreign policy between 1960 and 1999. It notes that since the foundation of the principle was laid by Nigeria's first and perhaps only Prime Minister, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa in 1960, subsequent regimes, both military and civilian, have kept and respected this commitment. They have also poignantly made it an article of faith for the country's foreign policy; though differences in strategy occurred from one regime to the other due largely to the idiosyncratic disposition of individual leader. The paper concludes that in the African spirit of brotherhood, Nigeria's huge human and material resource endowments really conferred on her great responsibilities to other African states. However, a lot still need to be done domestically to strengthen her weak institutions of government; enhance her economic viability; and promote a strong sense of social cohesion among its diverse peoples in order to enhance her leadership capacity within the continent.

Keywords: Nigeria, Foreign Policy, Afrocentric, Decolonization, Hostility

INTRODUCTION

Within the first-thirty-nine years of existence of Nigeria as an independent country, she had eleven different governments at the national level¹. It is interesting to note that under each of these governments, the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy was publicly declared to be guided by certain fundamental principles. One of such principles is Africa as center-piece and nerve center of Nigeria's foreign policy (Olusanya & Akindele 1986). This principle was adopted by Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa and has consistently been upheld by succeeding regimes in the country (Danfulani 2014:54).

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The principle implies that in Nigeria's foreign relations, African related matters shall be accorded utmost attention and priority. Fawole (2003: 46) as well as Olusanya and Akindele (1990:4) have attempted to explain the rationale for this principle. They argued that given the fact that Nigeria is geo-politically located on the continent of Africa and because she is indisputably Africa's and Black race's most populous country, Nigeria carried the burden of history. The realization of these historical and geographical status of Nigeria by Nigerians of repute before independence in 1960, had probably informed an Afro-centric conception of Nigerian foreign policy after independence (Chazan et al.1988:313; Fawole 2000:20-40). Long before independence, these Nigerians, including Ayo Rosiji, Jaja Wachukwu, Chief Femi Fani-Kayode and Nnamdi Azikiwe, had expressed the opinion that Nigeria was pre-ordained to play an important and leading role in African Affairs. For instance, Hon. Jaja Wachukwu, while contributing to a January 1960 Parliamentary motion requesting Britain to grant independence to Nigeria argued that the country's independence was essential because "the whole Black continent is looking up to this country (Nigeria) to liberate it from thralldom; the whole Negroid race is looking up to Nigeria to be free from slavery" (*House of Representatives Debates (Independence Motion, 4 January, 1960:89)*). Fawole (2003: 106) reports that a related sentiment had earlier been expressed by Hon. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria's first ceremonial president when he submitted that:

It should be the manifest destiny of Nigeria to join hands with other progressive forces in the world in order to emancipate the people of Africa and other people of African descent from the scourge of colonialism. Nigeria should be in the vanguard of the struggle to liberate Africans from the yoke of colonialism. (Azikiwe 1961)

FROM BALEWA TO ABDULSALAM: REFLECTIONS ON AFRICAN CENTEREDNESS OF NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY, 1960-1999

Perhaps, driven by the above notion of manifest destiny and the historic mission which Nigeria was destined to fulfill in inter and intra-African affairs, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa in his acceptance speech on the occasion of Nigeria's admission into the membership of the United Nations on 8 October, 1960 concluded that:

So far I have concentrated on the problems of Africa. Please do not think that we are not interested in the problems of the rest of the world: we are intensely interested in them and hope to be allowed to assist in finding solutions to them through this organization, we are naturally concerned first with what affects our immediate neighbourhood (Balewa & Epelle 1964:68)

As Ajayi (2004a:17) has rightly observed, Nigeria, under the Balewa regime was obsessed with the eradication of colonialism and racism from the African continent. This was demonstrated by the regime's declared support for freedom fighters through both military and financial assistance. Apart from this, it prohibited any form of relations, either political or economic, with apartheid South Africa. In addition, the nation sought and secured the expulsion of apartheid South Africa from the Commonwealth of Nations in 1961 (Ogunbanjo 2002:2). Balewa's government (1960 – 1966) made it absolutely clear that Africa would claim first attention in Nigeria's

external relations. This centrality of African affairs in Nigeria's foreign policy agenda was re-emphasized by Nigeria's first military leader, Major-General Aguiyi Ironsi (Kolawole 2001:42). In his speech delivered at the Regional Conference of Heads of Nigerian Missions in Africa, held at Lagos in June, 1966, Aguiyi Ironsi declared that: In the whole sphere of Nigeria's external relations, the government attaches the greatest importance to our African policy. We are aware that because of our population and potentials, the majority of opinion in the civilized world looks up to us to provide responsible leadership in Africa. We are convinced that whether in the political, economic or cultural sphere, our destiny lies in our role in the continent of Africa. (Quoted in Stremlau 1977:3)

Without mincing words, one may clearly observe that Ironsi was also being propelled by the concept of "historic mission" and "manifest destiny" of Nigeria on the African continent (Azikiwe 1961:71). As such, the Aguiyi Ironsi regime witnessed no significant change from that of Balewa. The most significant impact of the administration's foreign policy was however in the aggressive confrontation with the colonial and minority regimes in South Africa. His administration closed down the Portuguese mission in Lagos in compliance with the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) decision of 1963 that no Portuguese mission is allowed in member states as a result of Portugal's brutal colonial policy in Africa. Ironsi's government also declared white South Africans and Portuguese nationals as prohibited immigrants in Nigeria. (Akintola 2007: 438-471; Federal Ministry of External Affairs, 1991)

General Yakubu Gowon who succeeded Aguiyi Ironsi on 29 July, 1966 also preserved the Afrocentric base of Nigeria's foreign policy. He even made it clear that his government aimed at contributing meaningfully and effectively towards political stability, peace and development of African states while promising to give maximum support for the O.A.U in its search for solutions to African problems (Ogunbadejo 1999: 35-50; Ogunsanwo 1978:35-59). After the Nigerian civil war of 1967 to 1970, Yakubu Gowon's regime renewed her commitment to African unity and the eradication of apartheid policy and colonialism in Africa. In continuation of the country's commitment to her Afro-centric foreign policy posture, Gowon campaigned tirelessly for the formation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975, and provided financial assistance to some poorer African countries like Chad and Niger Republic. His administration did this to a fault to the extent that he was accused of recklessness in spending Nigeria's oil money (Adeniji 2005; Ajayi 2005: 51 – 52).

The Murtala Mohammed/Olusegun Obasanjo regime that took over power from Gowon in 1975 was even more committed to the Afrocentric foreign policy agenda. As Fawole (2003:89) has rightly observed, it was the advent of the Mohammed/Obasanjo regime that began "the boost in Nigeria's declared Afro-centric posturing, an era that saw the country taking more than casual interest in events happening in and around Africa". As a matter of fact, the country appeared auspiciously positioned for a dynamic role in African affairs not only because of the new leadership's fanatical commitment to Africa and the boom in crude oil resource after the civil war, but also because of a succession of prominent African issues which allowed the country to take the leading role. For instance, Nigeria hosted the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts

and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977. The country also recognized the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) faction in the Angola struggle for self-determination (Sotunmbi 1981; Akinyemi 1978). The government, in giving its total support to the MPLA, declared that the decision was taken due to the abundance of evidence of direct involvement of racist South Africa's troops and the presence of "other interests which were clearly against Angolan independence and freedom in Africa"(Cited in *West Africa* December 1975:1462). It would be recalled that Nigeria had always openly declared her opposition to apartheid rule in South Africa and other white supremacist regimes in Africa. She championed the expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth at the Munich Prime Ministers' Conference in 1961 and had since then been consistently opposed to racial discriminatory practices on the continent of Africa. The great threat that apartheid and Portuguese settler colonialism posed to Nigeria's security vividly came to the fore during Nigeria's civil war of 1967 to 1970. Both South Africa and Portugal supplied arms and ammunitions to Biafran rebels largely to aid the disintegration of Nigeria. This action made South Africa and Portugal sworn enemies of Nigeria. The Mohammed/Obasanjo regime quickly declared a total war on both of them. (Kaplan, 1979; Sotunmbi 1981)

It is remarkable to note that Nigeria was actively involved in the liberation of the Southern African states of Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia from colonialism. It was perhaps a combination of all these efforts to liberate African states from colonialism and apartheid rule in Africa that led to Nigeria being regarded as the most prominent African State and the foremost defender of the interests of Africans at the close of the 1970's (Fawole 2003:100-113).

The late 1970's witnessed Nigeria's leading role in conflict mediation and resolution in different parts of Africa. For instance, Nigeria singularly mediated successfully in the Chadian crisis in the late 1970's. It would be recalled that since independence in 1960, Chad had experienced political instability. This had forced France, her former colonial master, to maintain an effective military presence in the country up till the mid-1970's but without achieving any meaningful peace. It was by the late 1970's, when France appeared fed up with the incessant political turbulence in Chad and was determined to withdraw her troops from the country, that she (France) formally requested Nigeria's assistance in the search for peace, stability and reconciliation in Chad. (Federal Government of Nigeria, *Press Release No 865*, Lagos, 5 June, 1979). Nigeria's quick response to this invitation signaled the beginning of her active involvement in the management and resolution of the Chadian crisis. In 1979, series of conferences and negotiations were convened in Kano and Lagos by Nigeria to which government and opposition leaders in Chad were invited (*New Nigerian* (Lagos) 20 March, 1979:12). At such meetings, a number of resolutions were made, the most remarkable being the establishments of a neutral African force to supervise the cease-fire agreement and provide security for all important Chadian personalities (Magoro 1980). It is interesting to note that the neutral force was eventually made up of Nigerian troops. The force which was deployed in March 1979 was in force till June 1979 when it was withdrawn (*African Contemporary Record* Vol. XII, 1979-1980).

From the foregoing, there is no doubt that Nigeria was faithful to the ideology of making Africa the centerpiece of her foreign policy. In the process, she was able to bag the title of “Frontline State” in Africa throughout the Murtala Mohammed/Olusegun Obasanjo’s regime. It was on this note that Olusegun Obasanjo handed over power to the civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari on 1st October, 1979.

Shagari’s regime, though committed to an Afrocentric foreign policy, was accused of being too docile in mobilizing the huge human and material resources of Nigeria for the pursuance of Nigeria’s leadership role in Africa. As observed by some foreign policy experts such as Agagu (2004:101-120), Ogwu (1986:67-68) and Soremekun (1988:223), Shagari’s regime was characterized by lack luster and poor leadership which eventually beclouded the regime’s vision of pursuing Nigeria’s leadership foreign policy agenda in Africa and even beyond. This notwithstanding, Shagari’s regime also contributed meaningfully to the pursuance of Nigeria’s Afrocentric foreign policy agenda in a number of ways. Nigeria sent more troops to Chad in 1982 at the request of the O.A.U; while Zimbabwe was given a grant of 10billion U.S dollars to enable her acquire the *Zimbabwe Herald* from its white owners. The Afrocentric policy however waned due to the deteriorating economic fortune of the country. The economic crisis caused the Shagari administration to reduce aids to countries in the West African sub-region. The crisis also resulted in the expulsion of illegal aliens in 1983. Most of the affected aliens were from Ghana, Togo and Benin Republic. This action worsened the country’s image and created hostility towards Nigeria’s African policy during Shagari’s administration (Falola & Ihonvbere 1985:196; Aremu 2013a:340-352).

While Shagari was accused of docility and inaction in his foreign policy pursuit, his successor, Major General Mohammadu Buhari was accused of xenophobia in the pursuance of Nigeria’s African policy. Relations with immediate neighbouring states in West Africa were badly affected by the regime’s domestic economic revival policies and programmes. These included prolonged border closure, expulsion of illegal aliens and currency change (Fawole 2003:134; Aremu 2013b:143-153). As explained by Ibrahim Gambari, Buhari’s External Affairs Minister, the closure of Nigeria’s land borders with immediate neighbours was a product of security considerations (Gambari 1989:51-54). It should be observed that a common security policy of most military regimes in Africa is to declare land and sea borders as well as air corridors closed for the first few days or weeks after assumption of power. This is usually to prevent externally induced military intervention that may threaten their legitimacy. Such borders were however normally reopened once the administration consolidated itself in power. But the Buhari regime closed the Nigerian borders for a longer period than necessary for a good number of reasons. In the first instance, government was bent on preventing the escape of the then recently ousted politicians through the porous, unpoliced land borders. This was necessary to enable the government apprehend the corrupt politicians who were attempting to siphon huge sums of money from the national treasury into foreign lands. Gambari further submits that generally, the borders had to be closed to enable Buhari’s regime “look inwards and re-order our priorities internally; to check indiscipline; to consolidate the value of our currency; to check smuggling and then put

our trade relationship on a very positive path with our neighbours”(Cited in *Africa Now* October 1984:69).

While these explanations may be considered reasonable, Nigeria’s neighbours were not pleased with the prolonged closure because it had an adverse effect on Benin and Togo trading activities with Nigeria and this probably necessitated the visits of leaders of both countries to Lagos to plead with Muhammadu Buhari to open the borders. Unfortunately, such pleas fell on deaf ears (Akinrinade 1992:47-77).

As the border closure was biting hard on Nigeria’s neighbours, Buhari’s regime changed the design and colour of the Nigerian currency in early 1995. The change, which was meant to restore the value of the Nigerian currency that had been severely devalued by the activities of smugglers and money launderers, had devastating effects on the economic fortunes of Nigeria’s neighbours. During the same early 1985, the Buhari regime also ordered the expulsion of illegal aliens mostly from West Africa from Nigeria (Gambari 1989:32). This chain of actions called into question the sincerity of Nigeria’s claim to leadership in the sub-region. The affected ECOWAS States declared the action as unjust and unfair as well as a violation of the spirit of regional integration in West Africa. The Nigerian government also got a great deal of bad publicity from members of the international community on this issue of expulsion of aliens (Afolayan 1988; Dowty 1986:172) Houston Chronicles 1985.).

Judging from the hardship experienced by Nigeria’s neighbours between 1984 and 1985 as highlighted above, it may be observed that the principle of Africa as the center-piece of Nigeria’s foreign policy suffered a great set back during the Buhari regime. However, this does not suggest that the Buhari regime made no meaningful contributions in promoting African affairs. Indeed, his administration invented the popular “concentric circle” theory in Nigeria’s external relations. Accordingly, three concentric circles were identified to guide the conduct of Nigeria’s foreign relations. The circles clearly put Nigeria’s interest first, the West African sub-region second and then the rest of Africa and the world. The regime also accorded recognition to POLISARO government of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SAAR) and aided her admission to the O.A.U. The administration also paid the arrears of Nigeria’s contribution to the O.A.U. Liberation Fund which Shagari’s government had failed to pay (Akintola 2007:445).

Things however changed under the leadership of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida who succeeded General Muhammadu Buhari in August, 1985. The first move by the regime was the normalization of relations with Nigeria’s immediate neighbours which had become strained during the Buhari regime. This was achieved largely through the opening of Nigeria’s international borders on 28 February, 1986 after twenty-three months of closure. (Ajayi 2004b: 138). This helped to diffuse tension between Nigeria and her immediate neighbours and within the West-African sub-region in general.

Babangida also resuscitated the age-long policy of Nigeria’s involvement in sub-regional affairs. For instance in 1986, Nigeria mediated successfully in the border conflict between Burkina Faso and Mali. Largely through the diplomatic agility of Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, the then Nigeria’s External Affairs Minister, Nigeria, in

collaboration with Libya and Senegal negotiated a cease-fire agreement between the two warring states before referring the matter to the former Organization of African Unity (OAU) for resolution (*Newswatch* August 1988:25). Nigeria also became actively involved in the Liberian civil war between 1989 and 1990. The civil war in Liberia which started in December 1989 not only posed a great threat to the stability and survival of the Liberian state but also portend great dangers to the rest of West Africa largely due to the great refugee influx into neighbouring states. The necessity of curbing the negative impact of the Liberian civil war led Nigeria to lead the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) force to Liberia in August 1990 (Fawole, 2003:155; Ajayi, 2004b:138). The bulk of the troops and equipment deployed for the ECOMOG Operation were Nigeria's. Apart from the appointment of a Ghanaian, Lt. General Arnold Quainoo, as the first ECOMOG Field Commander, all the successive ECOMOG field commanders were Nigerians (Adisa, 1993:76; *The Guardian* 26 October, 1999).

Babangida's regime also revitalised the tradition of Nigeria's anti-apartheid policy, which began in the 1970's, when in 1987, she prevented the establishment of a South African satellite tracking station in Equatorial Guinea and also successfully persuaded President Obiang Mbasogo to expel South African nationals from Equatorial Guinea in early 1988. This was largely to curtail the spread of apartheid policy to other parts of Africa and to prevent any security threat which a South African military site portends within the West African sub-region especially on Nigeria's security (*West Africa* 21 March 1988:520; *West Africa*, 13 June, 1988:1090). In another related development, Babangida's regime also gave the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) 1.5 million dollars and the African National Congress (ANC) 1 million dollars for the prosecution of their respective independence struggles (Nigerian Army, 2011:10). In further pursuance of the principle of Africa as the center-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy, Nigeria, under Babangida, also played an active role in resolving the internal political conflict in Sudan. Even though not much success was recorded in this matter, the fact remains that Nigeria once again demonstrated her leadership profile within the African continent.

It is equally essential to note that during Babangida's regime, Nigeria also made a strong case for debt cancellation and forgiveness for African states by the Western financial institutions. According to Babangida, what African states needed after political independence was economic freedom through total debt write-off (Olagunju & Oyovbaire 1991:247). He further demanded for reparations for African states and peoples from Europe in order to compensate Africa for the loss of her human and material resources to Europe during the slave trade and colonial eras (Olagunju & Oyovbaire 1991:245). In his submission, Babangida asserted that the European slave trade not only retarded Africa's growth and development, but also destroyed African achievements and civilization attained before the slave trade era. It was in view of the above that Babangida made a special appeal on behalf of African peoples at the World Conference on Reparations to Africa held in Lagos in December 1990 saying:
We demand an African Marshall Plan to compensate for the centuries of abuse and neglect. We call on the countries of Europe and Americas to compensate Africa for the

untold hardship and exploitation that the continent had been subjected to in the past. We make these demands because the services of our fore-fathers in the American plantations were unrewarded and unpaid for (Cited in Noble 1990).

Another major foreign policy leap in the area of Afro-centricism by the Babangida regime was the establishment of the Technical Aid Corps Scheme (TACS) in 1987 (Daura 2010:112). As proposed by the Scheme, Nigeria would send young professionals in the fields of law, medicine, surveying, engineering and pharmacy, among others to needy countries in Africa for initial two-year duration. This could however be renewed upon request from the benefiting states. Nigeria was responsible for the payment of the monthly stipend of the recruited professionals while the benefiting states were required to provide suitable accommodation and local transportation for them. It need be observed that the TACS has remained a formidable programme and has continued to enjoy remarkable patronage from interested African states (Ibid: 120-121).

The Babangida regime however came to an abrupt end on 21 August, 1993 when he stepped aside from power following the controversies that surrounded the annulment of the 12 June, 1993 presidential election in Nigeria. In his stead, Babangida installed Ernest Shonekan as Head of an Interim National Government (ING). General Sani Abacha later overthrew the ING on 17 November, 1993. During Abacha's tenure as Nigeria's leader; isolation largely characterized the country's external relations. Nigeria attracted more enemies instead of courting friends. It was a period in which nations with means and substance decided to do away with Nigeria. This was perhaps why Omotoso (2004:148) asserted that the Abacha years reversed the previous gains of Nigerian foreign policy.

This general picture of the Abacha days as the dark-age of Nigeria's foreign relations notwithstanding, General Sani Abacha's military diplomacy in Liberia and Sierra Leone is highly commendable. It is true that the ECOMOG operations in both Liberia and Sierra Leone predated the Abacha regime. Indeed, the regime merely inherited and continued Nigeria's participation in the ECOWAS efforts to restore peace and normalcy to the two war-torn West African countries. During Abacha's tenure, Nigeria's role in ECOMOG brought about the restoration of constitutional order and the inauguration of the democratically elected civilian government of Charles Taylor in Liberia. His tenure also witnessed the restoration of the ousted civilian regime of Teejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone. The regime also continued to support the newly restored civilian government in Freetown with troops and weapons (Fawole 2001:1-8). It is interesting to note that several international organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity applauded Nigeria's interventionist role in both Liberia and Sierra Leone (Kolawole, & Ajayi 1997:147-153; Ajayi 1998:178-190).

Following the death of Sani Abacha on 8 June, 1998, General Abdusalami Abubakar became the Nigerian Military Head of State, the position he held till 29 May, 1999 when he handed over power to the democratically elected government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. During his one year tenure, Abdusalami Abubakar did his best at restoring Nigeria's lost glory in international relations. Specifically, in the spirit of promoting the Afro-centric principle of Nigeria's foreign policy, Abubakar embarked

on shuttle diplomacy to three four states namely; South Africa, Benin Republic, Niger Republic and Togo. Without any doubt, foreign visit is a key element of foreign relations as it helps in cementing cordiality of relations among states. This is why the honour bestowed on Abubakar by the Head of State of Niger Republic; General Ibrahim Mainasara in 1998 was a welcome development. It was in recognition of Abubakar's giant strides in economic and political fields during his short period of governance in Nigeria. For embarking on shuttle diplomacy, Abubakar had attempted to redeem Nigeria's battered image in external relations occasioned by Late General Sani Abacha's misdeeds at both the local and international scenes. Abubakar finally succeeded in winning the goodwill of the international community for Nigeria.

NIGERIA AND THE PROMOTION OF ECONOMIC RELATIONS AMONG AFRICAN COUNTRIES

It is essential to note that there is unanimity of support from African governments for regional integration. Indeed since independence, they have embraced regional integration as an important component of their development strategies and concluded a very large number of Regional Integration Arrangements (RIAs), several of which have significant membership overlap. Successful regional integration is believed to increase the size of the local market and enhance competition and efficient production, due to economies of scale. Socio-politically, successful regional integration is expected not only to increase intra-regional economic ties through trade promotion, but also weave a maze of valuable social, cultural, economic and political exchanges that enhance interdependence among the member states, to the extent that the risk of war and violent conflict among them is greatly reduced, if not eliminated. Furthermore, in a post-Cold War world order that has witnessed the emergence of successful economic groupings in Europe and elsewhere in the world, regional integration is seen as the key to political and socio-economic stability, successful nation building and political independence in the long run for West African states (Lolette Kritzingervan Niekerk 2011:2; Sesay, & Omotosho 2011:8).

It is in this wise that the role of Nigeria in the establishment and nurturing of the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) is highly commendable. (Udoh 2015:1)

Established by the *Treaty of Lagos* through the efforts of Nigeria and Togo on May 28, 1975, ECOWAS was billed to promote regional economic integration among member states. The idea then was to create an economic community that would cut across linguistic and cultural barriers, as a prelude to the pursuit of African common market and collective self-reliance. Preliminary negotiations that finally culminated in the formation of ECOWAS actually started between Nigeria's General Yakubu Gowon and Togo's General Gnassingbe Eyadema in April 1972. (Asante 1985:74) It is instructive to state, however, that ECOWAS actually had its roots in earlier attempts at economic integration among West African countries. At a 1967 conference on regional economic cooperation held in Monrovia under the sponsorship of the Economic Commission for Africa, 11 West African countries signed draft articles of association of a West African Economic Community. Little further activity occurred until after the

Nigerian civil war. Subsequently, the Nigerian government under General Yakubu Gowon, in collaboration with his Togolese counterpart, turned its attention to strengthening Nigerian leadership in West Africa and, consequently, reducing French influence in the region. Supporting the creation of a regional customs union of all West African states was no doubt considered one key way to advance this goal (Lancaster 1982:2; Ihejirika n.d:11). All subsequent leaders of the Nigerian have consistently shown significant degrees of commitment to the Community.

Without mincing words, the formation of ECOWAS has clearly manifested Nigeria's leadership role in West Africa. In the midst of competing allegiance and commitments to rival organizations, Nigeria has contributed to the development of the sub-region's economy and discouraged its comprising nation-states from relying totally on external economies, though without total success.

Meanwhile, Nigeria's commitment to the ECOWAS may be explained by a number of plausible factors. These include: the bitter experience during the civil war (1967 – 1970) when Cote d'Ivoire was used by France in an attempt to break Nigeria via provision of support to the Biafran secessionists; the increasing need to strengthen and enhance its unity and bargaining profile with the rest of the world; the complex and interlocking security boundaries with West African countries which makes Nigeria vulnerable to any crisis in neighbouring states; and the reality of the country's population which puts one out of every three West Africans as a Nigeria, among others (Babangida 1991:271).

However, one major problem of ECOWAS is the prevailing attitude of Nigerian citizens. Most of them are of the opinion that the regional organization is more of a burden than a blessing. Nigeria has almost two-thirds of the total population of the region and contributes one-third of ECOWAS finances. Critics feel that ECOWAS is an extra burden on the Nigerian economy. They argue that the Nigerian economy, though quite significant in relative terms, is hardly strong enough to carry the development burdens of the sub-region. This is indeed a great minus for ECOWAS because, without the Nigerian enthusiasm and sacrifice, the little willingness of its francophone neighbours would virtually evaporate. This would further strengthen the latter's links with Paris, and, of course, undermine the ECOWAS. The great joy however is that in spite of growing antagonism from some of her citizens; Nigeria has managed to maintain a respectable level of commitment to the goals of ECOWAS. The popular opinion, and especially the "giant of Africa quandary", compels Nigeria to remain intimately involved in all of Africa, and especially in West Africa. The ECOWAS has thus been regarded as the cornerstone of Nigeria's Africa-centered foreign policy test case (Ihejirika n.d:2).

Although prospects for successful economic integration in the framework of ECOWAS may not be said to be very promising, the Community has continued to make some modest contributions to expanding intra-African economic relations and development. ECOWAS countries have continued to aspire to the goals of collective self-reliance put forth in the Lagos Plan of Action of 1980 (Lancaster 1982:6). The originating concept of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which is to facilitate free movement of persons and goods within the West African sub-

region is equally on course. Prioritization of national interests over larger regional interests by ECOWAS member states, incompatibilities in immigration and customs policies, monetary zones and official languages among member states, have however impeded productive migration and integration within the sub-region (Adeniran, 2012).

CONCLUSION

This paper submits that in the spirit of African unity and good neighbourliness, Nigeria has been deeply involved in African affairs during the period of our study; but at a huge financial and human cost. That is no doubt praiseworthy considering the population and natural resource endowment of the country. However, it is necessary to suggest that the country has come of age and hence the scope of Nigeria's foreign policy should no longer be limited to continental affairs. It should be focused worldwide and geared toward the promotion of our cultural heritage, and scientific, economic and technical cooperation with viable partners in and outside Africa as a lever for the socio-economic, educational, scientific and technological advancement of the country and total emancipation of the citizenry from backwardness.

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1. The governments were led in succession by: Alhaji Tafawa Balewa (1960 – 1966); General Aguiyi Ironsi (1966, January – 1966. July); General Yakubu Gowon (1966 – 1975); Murtala Mohammed (1975 – February, 1976); General Olusegun Obasanjo (1976 – 1979); Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979 – 1983); General Muhammadu Buhari (1983 – 1985); General Ibrahim Babangida (1985 – 1993); Chief Ernest Shonekan (1993); General Sani Abacha (1993 – 1998); and General Abdusalam Abubakar (1998 – 1999).