NIGERIA AND THE AFRICAN UNION (2002–2019)*

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In the present study the author applies qualitative and descriptive historical methods when analyzing the primary sources. The historical dimension considers the antecedents of the Nigeria's foreign policy with respect to Africa being the key aspect of its external relations starting from gaining independence till the present period. The descriptive and analytical aspects of the methodology focus on the analysis of Nigerian foreign policy objectives based on the empirical validation, while the descriptive approach deals with the impacts/role of Nigeria in the continental integration of Africa and finally, the admission of Nigeria into the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA), and respective challenges and prospect for economic and political integration. The study employed the role theory to reveal, develop, and validate the correlation between the role of Nigeria in the African Union and in the regional integration for economic and political realization.

Keywords: *diplomacy, foreign policy, national interest, regionalism, role conception.*

Introduction

Background of the study

Nigeria gained independence from the British Government on October 1, 1960. The then Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa in his first address to the United Nations General Assembly on October 7, 1960 stated Nigeria's great desire to remain on peaceful and friendly terms with all countries of the UNO (Ashiru and George 2013: 2). It was in that Prime Minister's historical statement, which is usually referred to as the 'Balewa Doctrine,' that the following objectives and principles were articulated which would later define the Nigerian foreign policy framework:

- acceptance of the sovereign equality of all African states;
- respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of every African state;
- non-interference in the internal affairs of other African countries;
- commitment to functional co-operation as a means of promoting African Unity; and
- total eradication of racism and colonialism from Africa (Nweke 2010: 13).

The subsequent Nigerian governments would supplement the guiding principles of Nigerian foreign policy with five other main objectives of the national foreign policy, namely:

- protection / defense of the sovereign and territorial integrity of the Nigerian state;
- creation / promotion of the necessary political and economic conditions in Africa and the rest of the world which will help to defend the independence and territorial

integrity of all African countries, while at the same time promoting national self-reliance and rapid economic development;

• promotion of equality and self-reliance in Africa and the rest of the developing world;

• promotion and maintenance of justice and respect for human dignity, especially the dignity of the black man; and

• defense and promotion of world peace (Nweke 2010: 14).

It is important to mention the assertion which the Minister of External Affairs, Jaja Wachukwu made when speaking about the involvement of Nigeria in the African continent development.

> Our Foreign policy is based on three pillars: the concept that Nigeria is an African nation; it is part and parcel of the continent of Africa and therefore it is completely involved in anything that pertains to that continent; that it cannot be neutral and must never be considered as a neutralist country. We are independent in everything, but neutral in nothing that affects the destiny of Africa (sic). The moment Africa is affected, we are involved. We want to make this absolutely clear! Nigeria finds itself involved in anything affecting the African continent anywhere, any square inch of African territory. We are involved. The peace of Africa is the peace of Nigeria. Its tribulations are our tribulations and we cannot be indifferent to its future (Wachukwu (1963) cited in Akinterinwa 2005: 8).

To fully appreciate the different facets of the Nigerian foreign policy, one should take into account the fact that its guiding principles remain the same, yet there is preserved some space for adjustment and change in line with domestic and external realities and variables. For a proper understanding of the development of the Nigerian foreign policy, there were also distinguished the following historical periods:

1. Nigeria after independence or the Balewa Administration (1960–1966).
2. The civil war era (1966–70).
3. Post-civil war or oil boom years (1971–1983).
4. Period of prolonged Military rule (1983–1999).
5. President Obasanjo's Civilian Administration (1999–2007).
6. Late President Musa Yar'Adua's Administration (2007–2010).
7. President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's Administration (2011–2015).
8. President Muhammadu Buhari's Administration (2015 – till present).

Two years after Nigeria had gained independence, the country became a force to be reckoned with on the African continent, playing a vital role in the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). In that regard, one may also point out three emerging African groups, namely: the Casablanca Group which stood for immediate political union of all African countries, with a radical approach to Africa's international relations; the moderate Monrovia Group, which advocated functional cooperation, equality of all states, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states as well as opposition to forced political union of the continent; and the conservative Brazzaville Group, which was made up exclusively of French colonies holding on maintaining their ties and influence with France. It was against this background of political fragmentation that these groups came together at the conference held in Addis-Ababa in May 1963 to

form a single organization that would embrace all African states (Akinterinwa 2005: 10; Nweke 2010: 15; Obikeze and Anthony 2003: 303).

Over more than 50 years of independence, Nigeria's foreign policy was focused principally on Africa. Successive Nigerian leaders declared Africa to be the key component of the foreign policy. Nigeria considers itself and is widely regarded as the leader of Africa, and this has profoundly influenced the perception of its role both on the continent and in the world. Since Nigeria's gaining independence in 1960, Africa has been the central point in Nigerian domestic and foreign policy which manifested in its commitment to the total liberation of Africa from colonialism, racial discrimination and apartheid. Thus, Nigeria was in the forefront in the clamor to intensify embargoes, boycotts and economic sanctions against apartheid South Africa (Abegunrin 2009: 2).

Nigeria's impressive commitment to spending huge diplomatic and financial resources for the sake of the complete beration of Africa significantly contributed to the elimination of both apartheid and colonialism on the continent. The diplomatic, moral and financial resources were consistently provided at the disposal of the liberation movements across Africa (Saliu 2012: 48). The need to form an African unity-oriented organization came as a result of the quest to create a collective anti-colonial struggle on a continental level. This quest brought about a manifestation of the age-long search for an institutionalized body which led to the formation of the OAU in 1963 (*Ibid.*: 49).

On September, 9, 1999, the Heads of states and governments of the OAU at their 4th Extraordinary Summit held in Sirte, Libya, deliberated extensively on the ways and means to strengthen the continental organization. The aim was to make it more effective so as to keep pace with the political, economic and social developments that were taking place within and outside Africa. The primary goal was to accelerate the implementation of the Abuja Treaty. Nigeria played the leading role in the transformation of the OAU into the African Union (AU) (Akinsanya 2005: 106). According to President Olusegun Obasanjo,

> The nature of African union should be understood to mean the pursuit of socio-economic integration of the continent as a first and necessary step towards the achievement of a political union. This arrangement may not necessarily be in the form of a federation or even confederation at this stage, but could be the ultimate goal to be aspired to in the future (*Ibid*.: 107).

The problem setting

While there have been conducted numerous scholarly studies on Nigeria's role in the African Union, many of them have failed to explore how the general framework of its role (foreign policy goals and strategies) in Africa has served both its national interest and the overall integration of the continent and its peoples.

The expectations were running high at the start of the new millennium when the African Union was established in 2002 as the successor to the OAU. The general hope was that it would overcome the long-standing problems and speed up the African integration. However, it has been observed that political intentions will not always translate into action. It soon became clear that many African leaders did not want to give up any element of their national sovereignty. The Constitutive Act of 2002 that underpins the creation of the African Union was therefore a compromise between the adherents of a federal union (endowed with supranational competence) and those who

resisted this ambitious vision and did not want to give up their sovereignty (Laporte and Mackie 2010: 15).

There is also the hindering human factor which negatively affects the African Union, as manifested in widespread corruption, economic mismanagement and inefficiency, lack of probity and accountability in government and a sit-tight leadership. Ethnic conflicts, economic recession, diseases, illiteracy, poverty, military coups or their threats, genocide, ethnic cleansing and international terrorism have combined to undermine Africa's capacity to propel development and face up the challenges of the twenty-first century (Azaigba 2010: 127).

In addition, improper coordination has fostered a low level of trade and communication among the African states. In addition to this, there are non-implemented treaties that form the bedrock for the integration efforts and lead to the failure of African states to achieve diversification and structural transformation within their economies. And these are a reflection of the degree of economic and political crises fueled by globalization, the problem of refugees and displaced persons, as well as the slow rate of democratization (Oche 2005: 156).

It has also been observed that some countries are concerned about the implications of certain articles of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, especially with respect to notions of a central government which is capable of enforcing those union's principles which seem to derogate from the sovereignty of member states, such as 'the right of the union to intervene in a member-state pursuant to a decision of the union in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity' (Article 4(h), *etc*. These are circumstances in which any member-state that fails to comply with the decisions and policies of the Union may be subjected to sanctions such as denial of transport and communication links with other member-states as may be determined by the Assembly (Article 23 (2) even when such sanctions may be difficult for friendly states to observe (Agubuzu 2010: 371).

However, the most compelling observation that is not yet explored is the role of Nigeria in the political and socio-economic integrative forces like common defense, common government, single currency, continental airlines, common market and trade, common anticorruption measures, harmonized migration policy, common policy on refugees crises, coordinated climate change actions and free trade zones. This study seeks to fill the gap by providing appropriate insights.

Research questions

From the above-presented considerations there arise the following research questions:

1. How does Nigeria support the effectiveness and efficiency of the African Union in continental integration in terms of failure or success?

2. What is the impact of Nigeria's national interest and foreign policy on achieving the objectives of the African Union in the quest for continental integration?

3. What progress has been made and what lessons have been learnt from the establishment and institutionalization of the African Union in the quest for continental integration at the level or degree of integration?

4. Is there any apparent disconnect between Nigeria's foreign policy and the African Union's key objectives?

5. What are the key challenges and prospects of the African Union in a rapidly changing Africa, continental and global context?

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to assess the impact of Nigerian foreign policy on the African Union as well as on the regional integration. Other objectives are the following:

1. To examine the role of Nigeria in supporting the African Union's effectiveness and efficiency in the pursuit for continental integration.

2. To determine the impact of Nigeria's national interest and foreign policy on achieving the objectives of African Union in the pursuit for continental integration.

3. To find out the progress made and lessons learnt from the establishment and institutionalization of the African Union in the quest for continental integration.

4. To investigate whether there is disconnect between Nigeria's policy and the African Union's key objectives with respect to the levels or degree of integration.

5. To define the key challenges and prospects for the African Union in a rapidly changing continental Africa and global world.

Statement of assumptions

The study is guided by the following basic assumptions:

1. The high level of economic and political crises in Africa tends to slow down the pace of continental integration.

2. The leaders' degree of commitment and political will can determine the level of continental integration through the African Union.

3. The asymmetrical relationship among African countries tends to inhibit effective continental integration.

4. The high rate of corruption among African leaders tends to undermine integrative efforts/mechanisms in Africa.

5. The pragmatic and strategic conduct of Nigerian foreign policy can improve the institutional framework of both continental integration and the African Union's sustainable objectives.

Justification of the study

This study is a critical appraisal of Nigeria's and of the African Union role in the context of continental integration. It is expected to be beneficial to Africa's quest for political stability, increased intra-regional trade, improved security, poverty reduction, overcoming drought and its adverse effects, elimination of human and arms trafficking as well as improvement of standards of living. It should also verify Nigeria's respected leadership role in African affairs, engagement in peacekeeping missions, peace building, conflict resolution, the promotion of democratic governance, and in particular, in the African integration. It will also show whether or not such engagements have promoted Nigeria's national interests. Importantly, the study should clearly demonstrate the status of African integration as well as highlight the attendant challenges and the future prospects of the on-going process.

Nigeria's Role in the African Union

It is beyond argument that the African Union is a continuation of the major discourse that started in the periods of colonial rule in the African continent which focused on the nature, character, and dynamics of future relations among the newly independent countries in the context of the then prevailing international system. It concentrated

primarily on finding appropriate and effective approaches to the lingering security and developmental dilemma then confronting the newly independent countries which were deeply rooted within the broader Pan-African Movements moderated by developments in the dominant Cold War international system at that period of the West-East rivalry and which the African Union's Predecessor – Organization of African Unity (OAU) – had to live within (Sesay 2008: 10; Ogunsanwo 2010: 44).

Nigeria considers the African Union as a new instrument for economic emancipation and political integration in Africa and looks for the ways to use its foreign policy to promote and sustain the African Union in a way that increase African capacity to respond to the emerging challenges of globalization, insecurity, governance, corruption, civil wars, refugees, migration and climate change. Until now Nigeria has been very instrumental to the maintenance of peace and security in Africa and managed to positively influence the decolonization of the continent, so Africa's position in Nigeria's foreign policy formulation and thrusts can be easily explained.

Nigeria's role in the AU is best understood within the broader context of the country's overall orientation and commitment to Africa in its foreign and defense policy. The orientation which has largely been described as Afrocentrism dates back to the period of getting independence in 1960 and pursue the foreign policy options designed to promote the interests of Africa. The policy is driven by the belief in Pax Nigeriana, which emphasizes that Nigeria should play the Big Brother role for other African countries. Its role in the AU is motivated by its commitment to the unity, peace and development of the continent which is believed to be a gradual process as different from the radical approach of former Libyan leader, Muammar Ghadaffi who favoured immediate unification of African states under a single government (Okereke 2012: 6). As such, Nigeria has been playing a unique role in Africa since gaining its independence in 1960 including its role in the eradication of colonialism and racism on the continent (Ashaver 2014: 3). Again, the African continent has been designated as Nigeria's primary sphere of diplomatic interests. The nations with large power capabilities measured in terms of military strength, economic profile, favourable demographic matrix and domestic political stability are inclined to create the spheres of their international influence (Saliu and Oshewolo 2018: 10). This underscores Nigeria's commitment to world peace as a foreign policy objective and an element of national interests and cherished domestic values. Its contributions to the various international peace-keeping and peace enforcement missions around the world serve a confirmation of the country's commitment to world peace and security. In this vein, very few African and Third-World countries have provided comparable data to evidence such kind of commitment (Afinotan 2010: 303).

The evidences of Nigeria's Role in the AU are listed below:

1. *Financial contributions.* Nigeria's commitment to the AU is reflected in its financial contributions to the organization. The AU inherited some of the financial problems faced by the OAU which had affected the funding difficulties as it increased its budget requirements by about five times compared to the OAU budget. Nigeria remains one of the five major countries funding the AU operational budget which allows it to have full voting rights and sponsor its nationals for key/strategic positions requiring the AU support in various international organizations. In 1987, Nigeria initiated a concert of medium powers, more widely known as the Lagos Forum to facilitate multilateral cooperation and to enable member-states to exert greater

collective influence on the world affairs (US Library of Congress n.d.: 3; Adigbuo 2017: 162).

2. *Pursuit of peace in Africa*. As regards peace and security in Africa, Nigeria has consistently played a prominent role following the ratification of the protocol related to the Peace and Security Council (PSC) in December, 2002; the PSC became fully operational in 2004 as Nigeria chaired the council and mediated in the Darfur crisis in Western Sudan, Cote d'Ivoire and other crisis spot areas. Nigeria's greatest contribution to Africa's agenda of decolonization and anti-racism was mostly enhanced with the formation of the OAU using the same approach of African solidarity engaged in peacekeeping missions in states affected by crises (Okereke 2012: 8). The proactive role that Nigeria has played in various international organizations over the years has helped to articulate and consistently defend African concerns and interests (Okunnu 2010: 2; Ojekwe 2010: 30).

3. *African Peace and Security Architecture*. Nigeria's commitment to the AU is further demonstrated by its role in the implementation of Africa's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The country participates in the AU capacity-building exercises for the military, police and civilian components of the African Standby Force (ASF) which is an integral part of APSA and in the ECOMOG activities. It engages in the promotion and consolidation of democracy, good governance and human rights in Africa by ratifying the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. Nigeria has remained committed to Article 3(9) of the AU Constitutive Act, which seeks to promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance in Africa especially in countries like Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Liberia, Ghana, Niger, *etc*. Nigeria has conducted its own reforms in this sphere in 2002, 2006, and 2010 with the aim of restoring integrity of electoral strength in Africa (Okereke 2012: 10).

4. *Nigeria's role as a security actor has also been framed so that it resonates beyond West Africa*. According to Haastrup and Lucia,

> While West Africa provides the space to exercise its security prowess, there is arguably a carefully constructed narrative that places Nigeria as a leader within the whole continent. The emphasis on a transnational outlook, in part, explains Nigeria's robust engagement in African security affairs especially since the creation of the AU (Haastrup and Lucia 2014: 7–8).

5. *Nigeria's role in democratization and entrenchment of democracy in African countries*. One should note Nigeria's role in democratization in West Africa and beyond within the African continent, which has become as one of the hotbeds of political instability and protracted civil wars, in the post-Cold War era. Nigeria assumed responsibility for democratization and strengthening of conflict resolution and intervention. It originally initiated democratization having realized that no matter how effective these interventions were, it was difficult to establish peace and stability without democratic therapy (Osaghae 2010: 55).

According to Osaghae,

> The lessons and benefits of Nigeria's role in democratization are fairly obvious: first, it strengthened the appreciation of the recursive relationship between democracy and conflict resolution, which necessitated the building of capacity in this area both for peacekeeping forces and the foreign policy establishment. But this did not apply to Nigeria alone, ECOWAS also

entrenched democratization and good governance as instruments of conflict resolution and peace-building. Second, the interventions showed Nigeria as a promoter and defender of democratization, including peaceful co-existence, free and fair elections, constitutional rule; and conflict resolution. Third, it restored and enhanced Nigeria's status as a credible regional power which increased its influence within regional and international organizations. Finally, the role served as a surety for Nigeria's own continued demo-cratization as, increasingly, the strength of its voice and ability to influence events in other countries depended on the extent to which it remains a thriving and stable democracy (*Ibid.*: 74).

6. *Nigeria has been promoting the integration of ECOWAS security apparatus* into the continental African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) which functions on the logic that the sub-regional groupings such as ECOWAS constitute a building bloc of African security in general; so Nigeria's broader role in Africa will be to a larger extent measured by its engagement in West Africa within an evolving mindset and its role in Africa within the framework of the concept of assurance, preventive protection and compliment, mainly linked to ECOWAS. Nigeria helped to create these dimensions within the APSA. Its role within the APSA helped to prioritize some of its own security threat perceptions including piracy, trafficking, terrorism, banditry and kidnapping (Haastrup and Lucia 2014: 8; Dauda, Ahmad, and Keling 2019: 7; Odigbo, Udaw, and Igwe 2014: 8).

7. *Nigeria continues to protect her own interests and those of the union*. Among other things, this involves standing up against anyone or any country that tries to take control of the union for their own benefit through both subtle and riot-so-subtle means. It guarantees an increasing role of the civil society in the affairs of the continent to promote good governance (Shinkaiye 2005: 94).

8. Nigeria's role in the AU after the start of the Arab spring.

According to C. Nna-Emeka Okereke,

> In the spring of 2011, the Arab world was engulfed by popular demonstrations and rebellion, generally referred to as the Arab spring. These events erupted in Tunisia and also engulfed Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen, and led to an escalation of insecurity in Africa. Central to the protesters' demands were greater political freedom, economic opportunities and elimination of systemic corruption in affected states. Other demands were for greater political pluralism, transparency and political accountability. These events brought about the change of regime in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen while Morocco, Algeria, and other Arab countries embarked on basic socio-economic and political reforms without regime change. The effects of the Arab spring were felt in Africa as the AU was compelled to intervene in the peace process in Libya. In West Africa, the influx of weapons stolen from Libya heightened the sub-region's vulnerability to terrorism and rebellion as Nigeria has not been spared of the insecurities emanating from the Arab spring (Okereke 2014: 16).

9. In relation to the foregoing, it was the reality that underscores Nigeria's com-mitment to the ECOWAS peace process in Mali and the implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolution 2071 which allows military and other intervention and assistance aimed at preventing the spread of insurgency and terrorism and from having huge impact in Nigeria and elsewhere. Nigerian contribution to the AU projects

in Africa was also manifested in the formation of the NEPAD, when Nigeria and South Africa tirelessly worked together and with other countries to develop the initiative adopted at the OAU summit held in Lusaka, Zambia in July, 2001. Moreover, the adopted name of NEPAD was suggested by Nigeria and there was also added the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) which provided both vigor and meaningful direction for adopting the peace and security decisions in the new AU commission (Umezurike, Iwu, Asuelime and Umezurike 2017: 21; Olagunju 2014: 267).

10. Another perspective through which one can understand and appreciate the role of Nigeria in the AU is through the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) which remains the most decisive steps taken by African leaders to save the continent from the frustration of economic underdevelopment, political instability and insecurity (Gusau 2013: 178). Again, Nigeria's considerable influence was the argument on what should be the methodology or modalities for realizing the African integrating agenda, while there was a strong consensus on the need for integration, there were opposing views on what should be preferred to be adopted – technical framework or institutional arrangement (Oshewolo 2019: 2; Okunnu 2010: 2).

11. Nigeria Technical Aid Corps (TAC) which was established in 1987 by Decree No. 27 as a foreign policy tool to promote goodwill, foster social and economic development in partner countries. It is structured to provide human capital assistance in all fields of social and economic development (Mailafia 2010: 193). It revived the old tradition of providing technical assistance by Nigeria to other African states (Asobie 2002: 91). It acts as a channel through which South collaboration is enhanced by means of streamlined programme of assistance to other developing countries, especially in Africa. It shows enormous amount of local ownership and knowledge transfer from Nigerian experts to the participating personnel of recipient countries.

According to Boalji Akinyemi cited in Akinterinwa (2012), the Technical Aid Corps scheme was given a four-point original objective which includes:

- to share Nigeria's know-how and expertise with other ACP countries;

- to give assistance on the basis of the assessed and perceived needs of the recipient countries;

- to promote cooperation and understanding between Nigeria and the recipient countries; and

- to facilitate meaningful contacts between the youths of Nigeria and those of the recipient countries (*Ibid.*: 29).

TAC played the key role in cementing the existing relations between Nigeria and beneficiary countries. It has given a positive boost to the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy with respect to its efforts at enhancing both sub-regional and regional cooperation (Ogbonna and Ogunnubi 2018: 2; Nigeria-Technical Aid Corps/Lend CD). According to the late prime Minister of Ethiopia, H. E. Meles Zenawi cited in Directorate of Technical Aid Corps in the last report of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM):

> Commendations for Nigerian Technical Aid Corps scheme as one of Nigeria's contributions to the socio-economic development among the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. It is the only volunteer programme/service of this kind currently operated by an African country and therefore worthy of emulation as it challenges the commonly held perception that Africa is only a recipient of aid (DTAC 2019: 5).

12. Nigeria as the champion of Reparation Drive in Africa.

Nigeria's role extended to the drive for the reparation of Africans lost to the colonial masters as its objectives include: acknowledgement of damage done to Africa, atonement for such damage and redress to halt the continuing effects of such damage. It has been generally estimated that the slave trade cost black Africa some hundred million people. It is the quest to redress the negative impact that necessitated the initiation of the reparation drive by Nigeria on behalf of other African countries/people (Okafor 2009: 118). According to Nwosu (1993) cited in Okafor (2009),

> We are now demanding from a world that pretends to have forgotten to take a second look at Africa, and to see in every African tragedy or disaster, the foot prints of our erstwhile alien predators... The inescapable truth is that they are where they are only because we are where they placed us (Okafor 2009: 118).

13. Nigeria seeks to readdress the relationship between Europe/developed nations and Africa with a view of determining 'whether the developments are new measures to appease Africa for the centuries of plunder, and cement Euro-African relationship; or whether they are just another set of strategies to further create a stranglehold on the continent economically and make it perpetually dependent' (Folarin 2007: 14).

According to Ambassador Sanders (USA),

> Leadership by far is Nigeria's first role on the continent as it is a key political, security and trading partner in the sub-region and with other world nations. Nigeria's development role is next, particularly, as Nigeria and the rest of Africa should next be emerging frontiers for economic growth, markets and trade... (Sanders 2011: 3).

14. While Nigeria has been a great promoter and spokesman of African affairs, it also used her relative material endowment and oil to enter joint economic ventures with some countries in Africa disregarding any returns and using oil for the implementation of the African policy of the Nigerian state (Saliu 2005: 293). Within Nigeria's Afro-centric foreign policy, the West African sub-region remains the first line of imple-mentations given its vast size, natural, economic and human resources, large market drive. Nigeria perceives itself as having a historic mission to exercise hegemonic influence in the West African sub-region and on the continent in general (Okunnu 2010: 2; Springer 2011: 6).

15. Nigeria plays a pivotal role in the implementation of the NEPAD strategy which was the merger of the millennium partnership for Africa's Recovery Programme (MAP) and the OMEGA plan for Africa and which was influenced by the African Development Plan initiated by President Olusegun Obasanjo to later become NEPAD (Kolawole and Iyiola 2004: 250). Again, the adoption of NEPAD exemplified how the country re-directs its interest within the new world order (Owa 2012: 64). With respect to the global institutions, Nigeria has been calling for democratization of the United Nations Security Council via expansion of the permanent members with veto power to include representatives of the African continent including the interested member-states like Nigeria, South Africa and Egypt (Okafor 2009: 117).

16. Again, Nigeria played the leading role in coordinating a 22-country African boycott of the Olympic Games in Montreal, Canada, to protest New Zealand's sporting links with South Africa during the Apartheid era in South Africa (Ordu 2019: 2).

17. During the 1973–1974 oil embargoes of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Nigeria sold petroleum products at reduced prices to African states (Adigbuo 2012). Nigeria also severed diplomatic relations with France when France tested the atomic bomb in the Sahara Desert in the 1970s. Nigeria expelled the French ambassador with his staff and closed Nigerian ports and airports for the French ships and planes (BBC News 1960).

18. In the recent past, the Federal Government under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari donated US$ 500,000, about 350 electoral kits and seven vehicles to the Government of Guinea Bissau to facilitate a successful conduct of legislative elections in the country in 2018.

Furthermore, Nigeria really played a great role in the OAU history especially in the South-African resistance struggles. In 1976, General Murtala Muhammed helped the Popular Movement for the liberation of Angola (MPLA) in the struggle for the independence of that Portuguese colony. At the OAU Extraordinary summit in Addis Ababa of 1976, General Murtala Muhammed said,

> The issue before the summit was not merely recognize or not to recognize the MPLA, but a much larger issue of African nationalism and self-determination. It is a much deeper danger of extra-African powers in collusion with the inhuman and obnoxious apartheid regime in Pretoria, trying to frustrate the will of a people who have sustained a heroic struggle against a most brutal colonialist repression to self-determination. If the colonialist succeeds in Angola, then our hope for southern Africa will have been dead. Since Africa was of little concern to American Foreign policy, President Ford's circular to African leaders constituted the most intolerable presumption and a flagrant insult on the intelligence of African rulers. Since the FNLA and UNITA have fortified their right to the leadership of the Angolan people by joining hands with neo-colonialists adventurers and racist soldiers of fortune, the OAU had no choice than to recognize the MPLA government headed by President Agustinho Neto (Fawole 2003: 96).

Similarly, the Nigerian government then supported the MPLA government by providing military, economic, diplomatic, political, and investment assistance to maintain its consolidated power against the South African apartheid government (Dallaji 2012: 272). Again, the work of Dr Peter Onu who served as the Secretary General of the OAU from 1983 to 1985 was remarkable in the sense that his issue when trying to contest for the substantive position of Secretary General, became a controversy since the position of the Nigerian Government based on the principle of agreement amongst the 'OAUs Big Five' (Egypt, Algeria, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and South Africa) was not to contest or field candidates for the position (Malcolm X 2017: 2).

Nigeria's approach to sub-regional security has been largely influenced by the national role which the country's leaders conceived for it in international relations. This role conception has become the defining paradigm for foreign policy engagement (Alli 2012: 5). The Nigeria Armed forces consequentially became the instrument for implementation of an aggressive foreign policy in peace-keeping missions under the auspices of ehe Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in trouble spots of West Africa and its commitment to peace-building under the UN and African standby force in general (Osakwe and Audu 2017: 107).

According to Fawole (2003: 153),

In the years when the military held sway, Nigeria's external relations went through a series of twists and turns, depending on both the character of the regime in power at any point in time and the personal idiosyncrasies of different leaders, thereby influencing the choices that the country made, and the strategies and methodologies adopted for accompanying their set objectives. Coupled with Nigeria's 'big brother' or 'power status' in Africa, these were factors that played a role in determining Nigeria's next line of action in addressing conflicts in the West African sub-region.

The 1981 ECOWAS protocol of mutual assistance provided the legal framework used by the ECOMOG for its peacekeeping missions during the Liberian crises which started in 1989 and later during the Sierra Leone civil war, in which Nigeria had leading role being the ECOWAS chairman and deploying military forces for combatant functions in both countries which led to the eventual end to the civil wars (Osakwe and Audu 2017: 114).

The composition of the ECOMOG peacekeeping force, its funding and timing, revealed Nigeria's determination to play a crucial role in a crisis within its sphere of diplomatic concentration. The ECOMOG emerged out of the Ibrahim Babangida's political initiative and its operations were possible largely by his government in Nigeria between 1989 and 1993 (Elizabeth 2013: 44).

On June 16, 1976, the Soweto uprising began after police opened fire on approximately 10,000 protesting students when the resistance spread across the country against the laws that made Afrikaans compulsory in black township schools throughout the country. The South African Youth Revolutionary Council (SAYRCO) profiled itself as the third force political organization in the anti-Apartheid struggle and is associated with the Black consciousness movement formed in 1981 which obtained its funding from the Nigerian Government after they had been forced into exile in Botswana and later relocated to Nigeria. It called for more offensive forms of armed struggle against the Apartheid regime while criticizing the established anti-Apartheid movements like African National Congress (ANC) of being too defensive and not offensive as expected (Cooper and Horrell 1982: 86; Buntman 2003: 109; Ray 1989: 201; Sisulu 2003: 8; Mngxitama 2004: 8) while Nigeria provided secret military training at the Kaduna first mechanized army division with financial and diplomatic support to African National Congress guerrilla forces as well (Okosun n.d.).

In 2019, the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement could be threatened by Nigeria's closing its land and sea borders with neighbouring countries like Benin Republic, Chad, Niger, Cameroun and Gabon. The Government intended to stop the huge smuggling practice and illegal inflows of Asian rice and the outflow of subsidized fuel. This closing of borders resulted both in the gains on the part of Nigeria, and in some problems for the neighbours. However, the recently signed trade agreements between ECOWAS and AFCFTA are under threat since this action has been viewed by the analysts, African countries and even by the AU as the beginning of an 'unsuccessful journey' if appropriate and serious measures are not taken to resolve all matters related to trade with Nigeria being the largest economy in Africa (Ghins and Heinrigs 2019: 2; Golub, Mbaye, and Golubski 2019: 4).

Theoretical Framework: The Role Theory

The role theory first attracted attention in literature on foreign policy after the publication of Holsti's study of national role conceptions (Holsti 1970). Walker (1987) sets the stage for further advances in the use of the role theory with respect to foreign policy and international relations and this has descriptive, organizational and explanatory value for the foreign policy studies. Descriptively, the role theory provides a rich vocabulary for categorizing the beliefs, images and identities that individuals and groups develop for themselves and for the others, as well as types of processes and structures that guide the government in particular situations. Organizationally, the role theory allows the analysts to focus on any level of analysis commonly used in the study of foreign policy, in addition to bringing those levels through a peace-orientation that joins agents and structures. The explanatory value of the role theory may derive from its own middle-range theories as well as harnessing its concept to other theoretical approaches (Theis 2009: 3).

The role theory is derived from the concept of role as used by sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists in distinguishing individuals or groups, role perceptions and actual performance in any social gathering. This could be a family, a peer or a religious group, workplace, community, market, and also political group (Folarin 2010: 89). The role theory is a perspective in sociology and social psychology that considers most of everyday activities to be the manifestation of socially defined categories. Each role is a set of rights, duties, expectations, norms and behaviours that a person has to face and fulfil (Role theory 2017: 3).

This also refers to the explanation of what happens when people are acting out in a social process and the consequences of doing so. The essence is to provide a model of behaviour in a specific situation like the principal function of role-playing in conflict resolution and discovering details of a manifested behaviour which helps elucidate social positions in education, economy, science and government, and among many other categories (Role theory leadership 2016). Many scholars are credited to have been the founders and proponents of the role theory, and these include Margaret Mead, Talcott Parson, Robert K. Merton, Burrhus Frederic Skinner, Henry Mintzberg, Ivan Nye, Ralph Linton, Erving Goffman, Ralph H. Turner, Helena Lopata and Sheldon Stryker. The theory formalized discussion in the 1920s (Role Theory 2017: 5).

The role theory considers the most important features of social life and also the characteristic behaviour patterns or roles. It explains the roles by presuming that persons are members of social groups and hold expectations for their own behaviour and those of other persons. Recent developments suggest both centrifugal and integrative forces within the role field. The former reflect differing perspectives of commitment by scholars, confusions and disagreements on the use of role concepts, and the fact that role theory is used to analyze various forms of social system. The latter reflects the shared, basic concerns of the field and efforts by role theorists to seek a broad version of the field that will accommodate a wide range of interests (Biddle 1986: 68).

The linkage and relevance of role theory to the present study lies in the attempt to interpret and examine the Nigerian state foreign policy as projected by different actors with different ideological and political orientations. We are going to study the role of each player in the conception, formulation and implementation of the country's foreign policy. The role of Nigeria as a nation with respect to its Afrocentric foreign policy objectives

and principles makes Africa to become its centerpiece and theorize/prioritize initiatives in the forms of concentric circles around the African Union regional integration.

Similar to other theories, the role theory has its own shortcomings as argued by scholars, which include the following: (1) the role theory hardly describes and explains deviant behaviour; (2) it fails to explain how role expectations came to be what they are; (3) it does not explain when and how role expectations change; (4) it has a hard time explaining social deviance when it does not correspond to a pre-specified role; (5) it is only a snapshot of activity performed by an individual and may not be representative of everyone and for all time (Role Theory Leadership 2016: 3).

Findings

The findings of the study are revealed through the key informants' interviews and claim that Nigeria has to reconsider its role in Africa to reflect the domestic policy and reality. It requires the country, which used to be a frontline state for countries struggling for their independence, to consider its national interest. Again, the dynamics of international integration process especially in the EU and ASEAN demands decisive and adequate measures for the economic and political integration of African states in which Nigeria is best expected to take the leading role. However, this should not make the country become a dumping site for dumping goods. Again, our findings revealed that the political will to integrate in order to collectively enjoy the fruits of economic and financial gains is not exercised and since the institutions are weak, this makes the realization practically impossible. It requires the government's and institutions' full commitment to ensure appropriate measures to safeguard smooth path for economic and political integration and mitigate or eliminate factors of war, climate change, migration, corruption, sit tight syndrome, hunger, famine, weak institutions, nationalism, *etc.* which are antithetical to continental integration.

Interrogating the Key Challenges of the African Union

Some scholars when discussing integration in the situation of distrust and division emphasize that it is not static at all. In this context, the following points are highlighted:

• Dependency on the West or East remains a dividing line for the member states of the African Union which has to search for African solutions to African problems. The world is facing such global challenges as climate change, financial crises and civil unrest. And Africa has its own numerous problems which, nevertheless, may also provide some opportunities.

• The modeling of the African Union followed the EU pattern. However, the existing political, economic and social disparities in Africa may weaken the African Union (Chirisa, Mumba, and Dirwai 2014).

• Africa continues to remain the periphery of the global economy as is evident from the continent's declining share in global production and trade; so the majority of 47 Sub-Sahara African countries are ranked as small and least developed (UNCTAD 2007: 8).

• Apart from wars, conflicts and the overwhelming poverty, another unexpected development is the scourge of the remnant HIV/AIDs pandemic and of the new contagious Ebola disease and their damaging impact on the African continent as majority of the victims are Africans between 15 and 49 of age. In the most affected countries, the catastrophe has adversely impacted every sphere of life including education, agriculture and food production and especially health enterprises and life expectancy (Sesay 2008: 15).

- The sluggish progress of member states' economic development has been a recurring concern as Africa is the continent with the widest gap between rich and poor, with more than 40 per cent of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa living on less than one dollar a day.

- Insufficient funding and absence of critical logistics capability are the most damaging constraints to Africa's peacekeeping operations since the member states fail to pay their annual subscription to the African Union, while those that still pay contribute small amounts of money (Grimm and Katito 2010: 3).

Prospects of the African Union in a Rapidly Changing Global World

Africa's position within the international system has long been built and relied on the idea of Pan-Africanism. The idea is based on understanding that confronting the challenges of globalization requires a coordinated/continental interaction and unity of interests.

- The regionalization of economic activities will enable national economies to build capacities in all critical areas via the absorption and generation of new production and marketing technologies as a starting point for a more meaningful participation in the world economy.

- While the African Economic Community have laid strong foundations for regional economic cooperation and integration in Africa through the establishment of regional economic communities, the latter still should continue to build their capacities, harmonize and coordinate institutions, improve performance and avoid wasteful duplication of efforts. This will include the coordination of national reconstruction programmes of the member states with those of the RECs in such a way that they could complement each other. It also refers to relationship among the RECs, the AEC, countries, multinational organizations and the African Union.

- The African Union together with the RECs and their various member states should put more energy and resources in promoting the integrity of electoral processes and in preventing electoral violence and supporting peaceful post-election transitions. The joint activities between the African Union and the RECs and other international actors contribute to increasing trust and strengthening of collaboration (IDEA 2016).

- The African Union should realize that Africa's enemies such as diseases, illiteracy, poverty, wars, famine, conflicts, economic recessions, sit-tight leadership, corruption, refugees/migration crisis can only be eliminated through common action and joint efforts of the African Union government and parliament which must struggle to achieve universal human dignity and racial equality across the continent and the world in general. Africa's political and economic integration is interlinked and involves democratization of African regional organizations, free movement of goods and people throughout the countries and actions to address such cross-border problems as AIDs, child labour, and human trafficking.

- Rationalizing Africa's many different regional institutions to reduce their overlap and inefficiency.

- Pursuing the pace of integration which is simultaneously ambitious and realistic. Reconciling conflicting interests of countries with diverse sizes, natural resources and economic performance.

- African states should undertake a legal reform to address the issues of corruption, money laundering, human trafficking and other deterrents to foreign investment.
- External aid is an impetus for the African states to prove the support for the programmes and policies of regional integration.
- The African Union now pays more attention to development of international cooperation and relationship, this occurs especially due to China's ever-growing influence and presence in Africa. The African Union should elaborate an appropriate strategy to manage international cooperation in the era of globalization and in the changing world so that it could develop relevant and practical conceptualization of innovative and transformation partnership among member-states to complement national development efforts (Lisk 2012: 2).

> African Union needs to be more firm in its use of force. The organization's conflict management strategy lacks effective coercive measures to ensure compliance of its members and implements forceful intervention as provided under Article 4(h) of its Constitutive Act and as proposed under the responsibility to protect (R2P) concept where and when consensual interventions and peaceful negotiations are inappropriate or inadequate. The delay in reaching political agreement among African leaders on collective security, norms and practices should be reduced or absolutely eradicated (Joshua and Olanrewaju 2017: 12).

- The creation of social capital through spreading information that would enhance trade and reduce possible conflicts as well as through building a strong social infrastructure in addressing other constraints.
- As some scholars reasonably point out, the successful regional integration in Africa would require first of all political liberalization and sound macro-economic reforms. This would lead to infrastructure development, growth of private economic activities, supporting of socially and economically viable indigenous practices, and creating of the right climate for the civil society; together these factors would contribute to the vitality of Africa's integration (Qobo 2007).

ECOWAS has adopted a single currency called ECO for the West African region so the African Union should think how to reproduce this experience an introduce common currency, defense and political platforms for the continent in the fulfillment of African Union agenda 2063-Sustainable Development Goals.

- Monetary integration can also become the basis for a more efficient coordination and monitoring of the social and regional impact of structural adjustment policies. Improved regional coordination and commitment of donors to such policies are equally decisive for the success of the creation of stable monetary areas (Bach 1999: 8).

Conclusion

In the present study we tried to justify the role of Nigeria in the pursuit for continental integration in terms of economic and political efforts for union/unity. This role, be it hegemonic, solidarity affirmative, selfless and assertive to serve both the Nigerian national interests and foreign policy realization and the attributed affection of the continent as its centerpiece, all worked for the realizing the aspiration of the founding fathers of the African Nations for integration of the continent and for the countries to become economically relevant, prosperous and self-sufficient.

NOTE

* This study is based on the author's previous publication, namely: Mustapha, A. H. Nigeria and the Africa in Economic and Political Perspectives (2000–2019). Journal of Humanities and Social Science December 31, 2019 Vol. 11 No. 6, pp. 217–236.

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