THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS OF NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY DURING THE SECOND REPUBLIC: LESSONS AND ALTERNATIVES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

This study examines the socio-economic and political foundations of Nigeria's foreign policy during the Second Republic and their lessons in charting a new path in the 21st Century. It explores how neo-colonialism, within the context of an international capitalist economy, intensified class antagonism, socio-economic and political contradictions, which impinged negatively on the foreign policy initiatives and postures of Nigeria between 1979 and 1983. Drawing insights from the Marxist political economy approach, this fresh study departs from the common orientation of economic determinism by focusing on the complex interplay between the political, economic and social subsystems through the historical materialist approach to which little attention has hitherto been paid. The study made use of primary data through the conduct of interviews and also relied on secondary sources. The study found that the distorted and peripheral role of dependent neo-colonial Nigeria in the world capitalist economy, its sole reliance on oil and the neglect of agriculture generated socio-political and economic crises that constrained it from pursuing viable foreign policy goals during the period under study. The paper concluded that the pursuit of bold and impactful foreign policy goals by Nigeria depends on its ability to reactivate the non-oil sector of its economy, particularly the agricultural and manufacturing sectors.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Second Republic, Neo-Colonialism, Dependency, Capitalism, Oil, Agriculture.

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Introduction

The dominant themes in the political economy of Nigeria, particularly issues relating to its economic history and foreign policy behaviour are seen as intimately connected with capitalism and neo-colonialism. The latter is a product of the former, as colonialism has its roots in monopoly capitalism defined in terms of how over-production, surplus capital and under-consumption in industrialised countries stimulated a policy of imperial expansion. The partition of Africa and the subsequent establishment of direct political control over Nigeria towards the close of the nineteenth century were series of capitalist-imperialist ventures. Economic imperialism was, however, preceded by a pre-monopolist orientation in which free trade predominated in the pre-colonial era (Uzoigwe, 1985). During this period, trade relation between Africa and Europe was carried out on mutually beneficial terms. As such, the process of development and state formation were progressing steadily among the various independent political entities north and south of the Niger River until the introduction of the Atlantic slave trade in the middle of the fifteenth century.

The introduction of the obnoxious triangular trade marked the beginning of Nigeria's entry into an unequal and exploitative trade relationship with Europe, which expectedly arrested its progress and development so much so that the socio-economic and political development it recorded in the previous seven hundred years before the traffic in Africans began suffered irreparable reverses. Rodney (1982) has pointed out the adverse impact of the asymmetrical relationship that underlined the Atlantic slave trade. According to him:

> When two societies of different sorts came into prolonged and effective contact, the rate and character of change taking place in both are seriously affected to the extent that entirely new patterns are created. The weaker of the two societies (the one with less economic capacity) is bound to be adversely affected, and the bigger the gap between the two societies concerned the more detrimental are the consequences

This submission points to the disparity in the level of development between Europe and Africa in the mid-fifteenth century. At this historical epoch, Europe was already a fledgling capitalist society characterised by a disposition to scientific and technological innovation that set it along the path of steady transformation of its mode of production from an agricultural to an industrial one. This spirit of invention gave Europe a slight edge over Africa that was still emerging from communalism. Indeed, nothing attests to the validity of Rodney's thesis more than the highly inhuman and exploitative pattern which the Atlantic slave trade took and its deleterious effects on the peoples of Africa, in particular West Africa. In like manner, the so-called "legitimate trade" that replaced the slave trade incorporated Nigeria into the international capitalist system in a manner that ensured the dependence and underdevelopment of the country. The peripheral participation of Nigeria in the world economy at this point clearly showed in the international division of labour whereby Nigeria produced agricultural cash crops and palm oil products and exported them at cheap prices while the advanced countries of Western Europe and the United States sold finished products to the country at exorbitant prices.

The introduction of formal British colonial rule from 1900 superimposed new political and social structures on Nigeria as well as new production relations meant to facilitate the economic exploitation of the colony. Colonial economy, like the economic innovations that followed the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, restricted Nigeria to the production of primary agricultural goods for export and kept her dependent mainly upon Britain for manufactures. This orientation of the local economy to meet the needs of the metropole has continued in post-colonial Nigeria. The domination, exploitation, and expropriation of Nigeria's resources have remained in place even after the attainment of political independence. Because the departing colonial masters had devised the strategy of neo-colonialism before handing over power to the Nigerian elite. This petty-bourgeois class has largely continued to maintain and enhance the traditional economic influence and control of the metropolitan power. In return, the ruling elites depend on dominant countries to consolidate their hegemonic status and to ensure unfettered access to foreign capital.

The foregoing formed the premise for the analysis of the socio-economic and political foundations of Nigeria's foreign policy during the Second Republic, which will be based on the Marxist political economy approach. This theory stresses the primacy of the material conditions of life in determining the behaviour of social groups and those economic factors constitute the primary focus of analysis. The theory pays particular attention to the modes of production in the society, the class structure of society, and how these sub-structural factors determine the superstructure. Other assumptions underlining the Marxist political economy framework include historical materialism that touches on the dynamic nature of social life and dialectical materialism as its method of analysis (Asobie, 1990). This methodological tool provides a holistic framework for understanding the extent to which the domestic economy and socio-political dynamics influence and shape foreign policy. Specifically, the theory helps in explicating the linkages between economics and politics, modes and relations of production, class struggles, and the roots of contradictions within the international division of labour, and how these affect and shape Nigeria's foreign policy between 1979 and 1983.

Using this theoretical framework, the paper, therefore, analyses from the historical materialist perspective how the neo-colonial economic systems within the context of an international capitalist economy, intensified class antagonism, political, social, and economic contradictions during the administration of Shehu Shagari (1979-1983), which negatively impinged on its foreign policy initiatives and choices. It also focuses on the subservient character of the Shagari administration, its protection of the interests of western capitalist countries, its dependence solely on the sale of oil and collection of oil rents, all of which have serious implications for the contents and options of Nigeria's foreign policy in the period under survey. Further, it proffers strategies that could end the dependent and mono-cultural nature of Nigeria's economy, intending to place it at a vantage position of formulating and implementing feasible and bold foreign policy goals rather than rhetoric that cannot be backed with actions and credible material resources.

Britain's Colonial Economic Policy in Nigeria

The direct political interference in Nigeria, starting from the middle of the nineteenth century, can be traced to the "gunboat diplomacy" of Britain through which the then-existing traditional authorities were supplanted by British consular power and subsequently the Crown Colony administration (Ikime, 1977). By 1900, Britain had formally taken over the administration of Nigeria. The imposition of British formal rule on Nigeria was meant to facilitate the economic domination and exploitation of the country's rich resources, and as such the colonial economic policy revolved around this objective. The production of cocoa, oil palm products, groundnuts, cotton, and rubber in Nigeria, for example, was oriented almost exclusively to British and Western markets, and this became the bedrock of the economy. To Rodney (1985), the deliberate policy of compelling indigenous farmers to produce these export crops led to disequilibrium in terms of shortages of food crops which laid the foundation of food importation in post-independence Nigeria.

There are other elements of the colonial economic policy that are associated with this disarticulation. One of them is the haphazard development of infrastructure in the country as demonstrated by the construction of roads and rail lines to facilitate the transportation of raw agricultural products to the coast, while other areas were neglected. Also, the British colonial authorities did not develop the local manufacturing sector as raw materials were processed into finished products overseas. The other policy is the tight monopoly control of Nigeria's economy by Britain that cut across the mining industry, foreign trade, monetary system, banking as well as insurance business line. This was adopted by Britain to intensify its primitive accumulation of wealth, and this bred contradictions that later became the albatross of foreign policy decision-makers in post-independence Nigeria.

Socio-Economic and Political Contradictions of Nigeria's Foreign Policy (1979-1983)

Developments in the international oil market with regard to the oil glut of the late 1980s and the subsequent decline in Nigeria's oil revenues and foreign reserves made the Shagari administration depend on foreign loans, with all the stringent conditions of the International Monetary Fund. As a result, the government became highly vulnerable to foreign domination and manipulation, acting carefully at all times in order not to step on the toes of Western countries. Meanwhile, the external debts of the country continued to pile up and by the third quarter of 1983, its foreign debts had increased to N16 billion, while the then nineteen-state governments had also incurred external debts of N13.3 billion (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1988).

These huge foreign debts seemed to have impinged negatively on the autonomy of the Shagari regime to make bold and assertive foreign policies. An official of the ministry of petroleum resources opined that Nigeria's oil and gas resource has not in any way promoted the welfare of the people as it has not brought any improvement to the average income of the Nigerian people. As he disclosed, it has further distorted the economy of the nation by inflicting Nigeria with the "Dutch disease" in terms of crowding out the traditional agricultural export sector. According to him, the existence of a vibrant non-oil export sector in Nigeria is necessary as it would always compensate for the drop in oil revenues each time a glut occurs in the world oil market, noting that the failure of the country to devote sustained attention to the agricultural sector was the reason for the huge external debts that characterised the Shagari government.

Very central to the viewpoints of this respondent is the leadership crisis that Nigeria has contended with since it attained flag independence. The successive political leaders have largely failed to wrest the country from the parasitic chokehold of Western capitalist countries and they appear unable to manage well and invest the oil rents they have been collecting over the years. As economic resources available to the political class rapidly declined, competition ensued among them to corner the remaining small oil money. This animosity within the bourgeois class manifested in the form of a virulent power struggle by the six political parties in existence during the Second Republic. These political parties, which included the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP), the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), the Peoples' Redemption Party (PRP), and the Nigeria Advance Party (NAP), worked at cross purposes on many burning national issues and articulated divergent foreign policy programmes.

A retired official of the ministry of foreign affairs observed that there was nothing bad in the existence of different foreign policy objectives of the six political parties but it was incumbent on the NPN, which was the ruling party at the centre to implement its foreign policy goals. He noted that the NPN was seriously constrained from implementing some of its foreign policy objectives, particularly the continuation of the struggle against the apartheid system in South Africa due to the financial difficulty that confronted it (Interview, April 10, 2021). Closely connected with this was the alleged exploitation of the 1979 constitutional provisions by political opponents to obstruct foreign policy actions of the Shagari regime. As revealed by a current member of the Nigeria House of Representatives, the 1979 constitution did not give President Shagari exclusive powers over foreign policy decision-making, rather the president shared that power with the National Assembly. Since Shagari did not enjoy the overwhelming support of members of the National Assembly in the Second Republic, the constitutional provisions on Nigeria's external relations were often employed to frustrate his foreign policy activities (Interview, April 5, 2021).

The limitations imposed by the 1979 Constitution on foreign policies under the Shagari presidency cannot, however, be extricated from over generalisation and reductionism. Section 12 of the 1979 Constitution empowered the National Assembly to determine the making of treaties by Nigeria with other foreign countries and to approve those nominated by the President for ambassadorial posts just as Section 14 provided that the conduct of foreign policy is the responsibility of both the President and the Legislature. But the executive organ of government had, and still has, some institutional advantages over the National Assembly in the actual conduct of foreign policy. Again, foreign policies were initiated and formulated by the executive branch of government and this arm had both human and material resources at its disposal that could be deployed to achieve the approval of its foreign policies by the National Assembly, an institution that lacked the type of large bureaucracy and financial power of the executive. It, therefore, appears that the apparent lacklustre foreign policy behaviour of the Shagari regime had little or nothing to do with the exploitation of the 1979 constitutional provisions by its opponents.

In the context of the political limitations of foreign policy objectives of the Shagari government, the real problem appeared to be the sub-structural arrangement rather than the super-structural architecture of the country. In other words, the dependent nature of Nigeria's economy badly affected its political structure and governance under Shehu Shagari. This peripheral position of Nigeria in the capitalist world economy informed the categorisation of Nigeria's government between 1979 and 1983 as a "factional democracy." (Ojameruaye, 2004). In like manner, the social unrest and disharmony that characterised the Second Republic limited the foreign policy options of the Shagari regime. The poor state of the economy intensified the contradictions between workers and the bourgeois class. Added to the labour unrest that culminated in the nationwide strike of 1981 were the Maitatsine religious riots in Kano in 1980 as well as in Kaduna and Maiduguri in 1982. With runaway inflation, unemployment and widespread corrupt practices among government officials, which, according to (Sinclair, 1983), precipitated the massive flight of capital estimated at US$14 billion between 1979 and 1983, the Nigeria people became more frustrated and aggrieved.

Foreign Policy Initiatives of the Shagari Administration

The foreign policy initiatives of President Shagari concentrated on the African continent, West Africa, and the world at large. With regard to Africa as the declared centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy since independence and which continued under Shagari, the first move was the N10 million grant made by the president to the then newly independent Southern African country of Zimbabwe. Shagari gave financial assistance to Zimbabwe for Nigeria to be seen as friendly to liberated countries in Africa. But the National Assembly heavily criticised him for not seeking its approval before giving out the money, given the poor state of the Nigerian economy (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1988). Furthermore, Nigeria's handling of its border problems with Cameroun also left much to be desired. In May 1981, some Camerounian security personnel (Gendarmes) ambushed and killed five Nigerian soldiers at Ikang, a border town near Cross River State (Ate, 1992). Nigerians at home protested this unprovoked aggression and they called for retaliation but Nigeria failed to take any military action against Cameroun. As noted further by Ate (1992), Cameroun was heavily backed by France, its former colonial master and Nigeria's dependence on advanced countries of the West made it tone down its aggressiveness to Cameroun on account of the involvement of France.

It seems that Nigeria under Shagari did not in any way fare better on the issue of Western Sahara. The Saharawi Democratic Republic (SADR), a nationalist movement wanted independence but Morocco was bent on controlling the territory. The response of the Shagari government was uninspiring as it refused to recognise the SADR (Gambari, 1987). Underlining the foreign policy choice of Nigeria on the Western Sahara matter was Nigeria's weak position in relation to Western powers and its abiding desire not to antagonise the interests and views of these colonial and neo-colonial masters. With regard to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, Shagari's contribution appears marginal. As a result of its declining revenues, according to Falola and Ihonvbere (1988), the regime of Shagari could not sustain the financial assistance of its predecessors to the liberation movement in South Africa, though it retained the economic sanctions imposed by previous regimes on South Africa. However, these sanctions, as further documented by Falola and Ihonvbere (1988), were ineffective as South Africa got Nigeria's oil through third parties.

Concerning its foreign policies in the West African sub-region, the performances of the Shagari government appear uninspiring. In Liberia, the then Master Sergeant Samuel Doe took over power through the barrels of the gun, while another military officer, J.J. Rawlings also struck in Ghana. Though Nigeria condemned these undemocratic changes of government in these two West African states, it failed to take any concrete measure against these usurpers (Akinterinwa, 2012). The economic and military impotence of Nigeria under Shagari glaringly showed in her handling of the crisis in Chad following the emergence of Hussein Habre and Goukouni Waddeye as factional leaders in that country. While the OAU peace-keeping forces in Chad, led by Nigerian troops, were defeated by the factional fighters, Nigeria's feeble response to the imbroglio was revealed by the decisive action taken by the late Libyan leader, Moammar Gaddafi. The troops of Libya intervened militarily on the side of Waddeye in June 1980 and they wasted no time in dusting the forces of Habre (Vogt, 1992). The military capability demonstrated by Libya in this case correlated with her relative economic prosperity while the weak nature of Nigeria's economy prevented her to take any decisive action in Chad.

The declining revenues, impoverishment of the non-bourgeois forces as exemplified by labour unrest, rising unemployment, and the decay of social amenities in urban centres forced the Shagari government to crackdown on "illegal aliens" in the country, leading to the expulsions of an estimated two million "foreigners", mostly from Ghana, in January/February 1983 (Aluko, 1990). This diplomatic move was a big blow to Nigeria's image given the leading role it played in the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Adedeji, 2004). On the world stage, the foreign policy thrust of Shagari was anchored on the promotion of world peace and the protection of the dignity of the black race anywhere in the world (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1988). It is, therefore, not difficult to aver that Nigeria's global foreign policy statements during the Shagari era were mere propaganda, rhetoric, and utopian goals that could never be achieved given the country's weak and dependent economy as well as the reactionary and conservative nature of the ruling elite.

Beyond the issues of the weak nature and dependence of the Shagari administration, it is important to note that the country during the Second Republic had not garnered enough experience in foreign policy decision-making under a democratic government. From 1966 to 1979, the country was under military rule with its command system and dictatorial tendency. As a result, the making of decisions based on consensus was somewhat strange to politicians of the Second Republic and this adversely affected the foreign policy posture of the Shagari administration.

Lessons and Alternative Path for Nigeria's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century

What then are the lessons which this reconstruction of Nigeria's economic history and its foreign policy postures during the Second Republic has taught us? Perhaps, the most important lesson of history is the danger of relying on a mono-cultural economy and the neglect of the traditional export commodities such as cocoa, palm produce, cotton, groundnuts, and other products. The projection of domestic and external policies of Nigeria solely on oil revenues is an invitation to social, political, and economic crises of immense proportions given the instability in oil production and oil prices at the world market. History has also enlightened us about the need to invest in oil windfall, whenever it comes as no state receives such revenue at all times, given the volatility and exhaustibility of crude oil. The economic difficulty which militated against the pursuit of dynamic foreign policy objectives by the Shagari regime was, indeed, a carryover of the failure of previous administrations to invest excess earnings from the oil sector in productive ventures.

History has similarly taught us that the resort to borrowing from the international financial markets to compensate for the decline in oil revenues will further compound Nigeria's problem as exampled by the huge external debts incurred during the Second Republic, which intensified socio-economic and political tensions in the polity and incapacitated the government from pursuing respectable foreign policy goals.

In the 21st century when issues relating to globalisation and regional economic integration decisively shape the foreign policy aims of states, a new perspective on the economy and policy decision-making must be put in place. One of the policies that have the potentiality of steering Nigeria away from poverty is the reactivation of the non-oil export sector, which was crowded out following the arrival of oil wealth. In this regard, the country must embrace scientific agriculture to start reaping a bumper harvest of food and cash crops that are comparable to those of advanced countries. Intimately connected with this is the need to industrialise Nigeria and engage the greater percentage of its working population in industrial activities so that the substantial part of their wealth would be realised from factories and industries as China has successfully done. The iron and steel industry as well as the production of electrical power must be encouraged and empowered so that they can be capable of manufacturing machinery needed by other industrial and agricultural establishments. Before Nigeria can effectively break the vicious circle of dependence, under-development, and exploitation associated with imperialism, it must give a premium to heavy industry, scientific agriculture, and sufficient food production.

The other measures that would take Nigeria away from its past and present lacklustre approach to development include the re-introduction of the commodity Marketing Boards to coordinate the exportation of traditional agricultural commodities; the promotion of research on these non-oil export products; serious commitment of the government to the provision of infrastructure-roads, railways, and ports- as well as the adoption of a more pragmatic way of curtailing the multidimensional security challenges currently rocking the country such as terrorism, kidnapping for ransom, banditry, trafficking of people, drugs, small arms and light weapons and, lately, raping and killing of young girls. The taming of these security threats is important because Nigeria, or any developing country for that matter, can never experience development in an atmosphere of fear and widespread insecurity.

Conclusion

Attempts have been made in this paper to examine the impact which the unequal and exploitative incorporation of Nigeria into the international capitalist economy has exerted on its foreign policy in the Second Republic. The asymmetric trade relationship between Nigeria and Europe started with the introduction of the Atlantic slave trade and from that period onward, the international division of labour foisted on Nigeria has ensured that the country continues to depend on the West for trade, technology, and capital. This strategy of control outlived colonialism and the petty bourgeoisie that took over political power in post-colonial Nigeria have been collaborating with the imperialists to consolidate their positions as agents of the international capitalists. As such, the local elite has been most unwilling to put in place policies that would wrest Nigeria from the strangulating grip of industrialised countries.

This has generated economic, social and political contradictions of immense proportions in Nigeria and these crises had already become deep enough between 1979 and 1983 to limit the foreign policy options and maneuverings available to the Shagari administration. An alternative path has been laid out to end the dependent nature of Nigeria's economy that would empower it to pursue assertive foreign policy goals and catapult it to a respectable position among the comity of nations. Nigeria's foreign policy in the 21st Century must be assertive enough to portray the country as a credible player not only in Africa but the world as a whole.

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