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## **South Africans Xenophobic Attack on Nigerians: Should Nigeria's Afrocentric Foreign Policy Continue?**

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### **Abstract**

Diplomatic relationship is built on mutual understanding with accruing mutual benefits. No nation goes into bilateral or multilateral relationship without thinking of its national interest first. In contradistinction to the above, Nigeria appeared to be championing the course of Africa without corresponding benefit to her national interest. From independence to 2015 when South Africans intensified their xenophobic attacks on Nigerians, Nigeria had expended enormous amount of her national wealth on various countries in Africa. It is on record that Nigeria spent Sixty-One Billion US Dollars in fighting apartheid in South Africa. She has been in the fore front in peace keeping operations in Africa with devastating effect on her human and material resources. Yet she is not recognized by African countries that benefited from her magnanimity and therefore challenged her interest at regional and international levels. The topical issue is the South Africans xenophobic attacks on African immigrants with Nigerians mostly affected. This paper using print and electronic materials examined the South Africans xenophobic attack on Nigerians and concluded that Nigeria should rather develop her domestic economy than making Father Christmas to African countries without reciprocal returns.

**Key Words:** Africa, Brotherhood, Xenophobic Attack, Nigerian Foreign Policy

### **Introduction**

The African centeredness of Nigerian foreign policy cannot be divorced from the cultural values of Africa prior to the colonial incursion. In pre-colonial Africa for example, common features of kinship, unity, agriculture, gift, traditional market and fixed division of labour pre-dominates the

society. These are the knots that tied Africa together in brotherhood. This is what informed the thoughts of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania when he said, traditional African society lived according to the principle of “Ujamaa” meaning family hood in Swahili. He said Africans lived together and worked together because that is how they understood life. The resources of their joint effort were divided equally according to well understood customs and norms. Traditional Africans thought of themselves as one and all their languages and behaviour emphasized their unity. The basic goods and life according to Nyerere are “our land, our food and our cattle”. This mode of production and wealth distribution was successful in traditional Africa because of mutual respect for one another, sharing all the basic goods and everyone had an obligation to work.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that at post independence, Africa became the centre piece of Nigeria’s foreign policy. The reason is not farfetched. The first generation leaders of Nigeria are moralists from Northern extraction who are deeply rooted in African culture of kinship. Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was a down to earth peasant, rightly guided by Sir Ahmadu Bello, another down to earth aristocrat. It is therefore not surprising that they extended the culture of African kinship and unity into the Nigerian foreign policy formulation and implementation which became a foundation upon which successive regimes in Nigeria built their foreign policy.

### **Nigeria’s Foreign Policy Disposition since Independence**

Northern People’s Congress (NPC), a culturally based political party with massive Northern support formed government at the federal level in 1960 where parliamentary democracy was practiced for the first time in Nigeria. At independence, the government of NPC settled for a number of foreign policies based on the manifesto of their party (NPC) which stated that “A dynamic foreign policy adaptable to circumstances, but founded on our fundamental beliefs”. It is against this backdrop, that the following foreign policy pronouncements were made in 1960 by NPC led government:

- That Nigeria would be a member of the Common Wealth of Nations.
- That Nigeria would be a member of the United Nations Organization.
- That Nigeria would maintain a close ties with United Kingdom.
- That Nigeria would maintain an increasing friendship with United States of America.
- That Nigeria would maintain a friendly relations and closer cooperation with all countries in the African continent particularly those in West Africa.
- That Nigeria would be friendly to all countries sharing common interest with her and accepts Nigeria’s sovereignty.
- That Nigeria would accept the principles and obligations of the United Nations Organization (UNO)

It was based on these principles that Africa became the centre piece of Nigerian foreign policy.

### **Africa as the Centre Piece of Nigeria’s Foreign Policy**

Haven made the above foreign policy pronouncements, the Tafawa Balewa’s government did not derail from her commitment to Africa. This commitment did not only stop on the part of the ruling party (NPC) at post independence, but also extended to the opposition parties that formed coalition at the centre. This commitment can be seen in the members of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) when in 1960 they moved a motion in the parliament calling for the creation of a Ministry or Government Agency that would handle African affairs.

The motion of NCNC created a very good opportunity for Dr. K.O. Mbadiwe, the then adviser to the Prime Minister on African affairs to call for a conference in 1960 involving the representatives of various interest groups such as Political Parties, Trade Unions, Women Organizations, Students, Artisans, Parliamentarians, Clergymen, Intellectuals and War Veterans. The intention of the conference was to get all shades of opinions as regard African affairs. The outcome of the conference was the creation of a committee on African affairs headed by Chief H.O. Davies, prominent lawyer and nationalist.

This conference has laid the foundation for successive regimes in Nigeria to be committed to Africa in her foreign policy pronouncements. It is within this purview that, immediately after independence, Nigeria's decision makers outlined four (4) basic foreign policy principles in their dealings with African countries as follows:

- a. The Principle of Sovereign Equality of all African States.
- b. The Principle of Respect for the Independence, Sovereignty and territorial Integrity for every African State.
- c. The Principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other African countries.
- d. The Principle of commitment to functional cooperation to further promote the unity of Africa (Alexander, 1980).

It was on the basis of these principles, that Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Nigerian Prime Minister opposed vehemently racial discrimination and foreign domination in Africa. He demonstrated this when he resisted the testing of atomic weapons by France in the Algerian axis of the Sahara. He warned France several times before cutting diplomatic relations with Paris on the 5th of January, 1961. Balewa's government banned all French goods in Nigeria and asked the French ambassador to leave Lagos within forty eight (48) hours. This decision was taken by Balewa to protect the interest of Africa.

General Gowon's foreign policy towards Africa was a naira jamboree. His regime was a free gift of Nigerian naira to African countries as a foreign policy towards Africa. He gave the drought affected countries of Africa money to ameliorate their sufferings. For example, he gave Mali, ₦432, 579, Mauritania, ₦14,912, Niger, ₦342,105, Ethiopia, ₦200,000, Senegal, ₦333,333, Chad, ₦302,176, Somalia, ₦1,007,893. (Mbachu, 1998)

He gave grants to the following countries at their independence. Guinea Bissau ₦500,000, Cape Verde ₦60,775, Mozambique, ₦675,890, Sao Tope and Principe, ₦60,775. He also gave grants to the following countries to solve some of their domestic problems. Such countries include Niger, ₦664,000, Zambia ₦500,000, Sudan ₦400,000. He gave technical assistance to The Gambia, Swaziland, Algeria and Botswana. He gave scholarship to students from Uganda, Guinea, Sudan, Liberia and Kenya.

Nigeria's government under Gowon gave Republic of Benin Two Million Loan with free interest payable within 15 years. He also gave Benin Republic 30% equity and ₦7.2 million investments in joint cement project. Nigeria also donated ₦42,000 printing machines to Benin Republic and built ₦1.8 million Idiroko – Porto Novo highway. In her focus on Africa, Nigeria under Gowon sold oil to Guinea at highly subsidized prices and laid electric cables from Kainji Dam New Bussa to Niger Republic. The presidential villa in Lome Togo was built by Gowon.

Murtala's regime was committed to the elimination of racial discrimination, eradication of white minority dominance in Southern Africa. Murtala Muhammad supported the liberation of Angola from imperialist powers and mobilized the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to recognize the MPLA

as the only government of Angola and also invite MPLA president Dr. Augustinho Neto to attend heads of States and Government meeting in Addis Ababa to take his place of honour among African heads of States.

Having recognized the MPLA government in Angola, Garba (1991) opined that Murtala immediately ordered the release of Twenty Million Dollars to Angola including military equipments such as Rifles, Cloths and other essential commodities in large quantities. Garba (1991) stressed further that other Southern African countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique were assisted by Murtala's government. He gave \$1.6 million dollars to Mozambique.

Nigeria's commitment to Africa as the centre piece of her foreign policy was further elucidated by Obasanjo in his speech at a dinner organized for president Kaunda of Zambia in 1977 as reported by Garba (1991)

The Nigerian government and people are totally committed to the course of freedom and respect for human dignity in southern Africa, not only simply for its own sake, but because we are convinced that African freedom is a sacred duty that must be done in the pursuit of this objective, we shall not consider any sacrifice too great nor any weapon to mean to hasten the end of all oppression and injustice in Southern Africa and to ensure the total liquidation of apartheid/foreign domination and economic exploitation.

The central place of Africa in Nigeria's foreign policy as demonstrated by successive regimes in Nigeria since independence was further strengthened by Shehu Shagari's regime. Shagari's foreign policy objectives were totally centered on Africa. The foreign ministry under Professor Ishaya Audu outlined the following guidelines on the implementation of Nigeria's foreign policy under Shagari:

- Total commitment to the strengthening and consolidation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to be able to serve as a potent platform for solving Africa's problems.
- Unalloyed dedication to African Liberation and Freedom.
- Promotion of Social, Political and Economic Emancipation of African States through bilateral and multilateral cooperation.
- Active participation in efforts for peaceful settlement of inter African disputes.
- Respect for independence and territorial integrity of African States and non interference in the domestic affairs of African Nations. (Ate and Akinterinwe, 1990).

In furtherance to his commitment to Africa's development, Shagari deposited Fifty Million Naira (₦50,000,000) in African Development Bank to serve as loan facility for other African countries. He also assisted other African countries with quality human capital such as Judges, Medical Doctors, Nurses, Teachers, Engineers, etc. Shagari's government also provided free higher education in Nigerian educational institutions for students of Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe whose political ideologies made it difficult for them to be educated in their own countries.

Obviously, the enormous wealth of Nigeria expended by Shagari's government in the fight against apartheid in South Africa, decolonization of Mozambique, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe cannot be over emphasized. Shagari's regime funded adequately the liberation committee of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to enable her emancipate the whole of Southern Africa from the Shackles of colonial exploitation.

In the specific case of South Africa, the Federal Republic of Nigeria single handedly sponsored the launching of South African Relief Fund (S.A.R.F). Nigerians in all works of life across class and gender both in public and private sectors of the economy voluntarily donated to the fund. Over Seven Million Naira was donated to the National Committee on Apartheid. The money was used to buy

relieve materials such as Blankets, Adult Boots, Children Sandals Brown Canvas to be utilized by adults were sent to South Africa by Federal Republic of Nigeria under Shagari's leadership.

### **South African Xenophobic Attack on Nigerians**

The commitment of Nigeria in terms of human and material resources to the peace and unity of Africa cannot be overemphasized. This glaring display of brotherhood by Nigeria in her foreign policy statements and actions since independence has come under attack by South Africans for almost two decades. South Africans have forgotten so soon, the enormous amount of money Nigeria spent to fight apartheid and instituted democratic governance in South Africa, thereby bringing her to the main fold of independent nations. If young South Africans do not know history, then two reasons can be deduced for the incessant xenophobic attacks on Nigerians and other foreign nationals in South Africa.

The first reason can be attributed to the South African agitation for regional hegemony. In cognizance of the resources in terms of territorial land mass, population and mineral resources, there is no doubt, Nigeria in the eyes of South Africa is an emerging threat to her regional hegemonic ambition in global politics. Bremmer, an analyst from the United States of America made the following submission in 2012 as regard the unhealthy competition between Nigeria and South Africa.

What is emblematic of this unhealthy competition between Abuja and Pretoria is the broader shift towards regionalism in global affairs, where geography begins to take on much of the role formally held by hard power. In response to global power vacuum, we will see a return to geography as a primary organizing principle, where a country's placement will determine its friends and enemies, trading partners and foreign policy focus to an outsize degree.

It should be noted that the relationship between Nigeria and South Africa since her independence has not been an institutionalized bilateral relationship. The relationship has been built over time on the personal friendship of the leaders in power of the two countries at a given point in time. Therefore, any regime change, in both countries, comes with new friendship only at the apex political leadership levels of both countries.

Unfortunately, Nigeria was carried away by her prominent role in the emancipation of South Africa from the grip of Apartheid and the temporary ego created for Nigeria by addressing her as the giant of Africa over bloated her pride and refused to develop her economy to move at the speed with which South African white dominated economy was moving in line with global capitalism.

As it is stated in Marxist tradition, the strength of the economy determines virtually every aspect of human society. Althusser (1970) stated that in the premise of Marxism, it is not men's ideals, philosophies or religion that determines their social consciousness but on the contrary, the economic or material existence that determines their social consciousness. Marx and Engels (1977) stressed further that economic factor is the primary determinant of the form of politics, culture and ideology of a society.

Apparently, South Africa taking into cognizance the above Marxist postulations with the reality of her strong economic base reflecting conspicuously in her investments not only at home, but even in the Nigerian economy, decided to challenge Nigeria's national interest in global politics. Adding strength to the above, Adebayo and Landberg (2003) opined that:

South Africa since the collapse of Apartheid has experienced relative economic prosperity. The South African economy which is highly diversified and technologically advanced has its foundation in an industrial infrastructure that is the most developed in

Africa. Manufacturing is the single most important economic activity and accounts for 25% of the GDP of South Africa. She produces more gold, diamond and chromate than any other country in the world. South Africa is by far the continent's wealthiest state both in GDP per capital and in total GDP. The country exerts major influence on total output, trade and investment flows to African continent. She accounts for 40% of all industrial output, nearly 50% of mineral production, 20% of farm products in Africa.

Obviously, apart from the economic factor which serves as the independent variable in this analysis, the dependent variable can be analyzed from the view point of the Zulu culture of aggression orchestrated by prolonged apartheid domination, exploitation and the post apartheid politics of neglect by the black leaders.

Appreciating the fact that the culture of aggression is incarnate in the Zulu people, the government of South Africa covertly influenced intolerance and aggression towards foreign citizens with greater negative impact on Nigerians. It is instructive to note that, the xenophobic attacks in South Africa is truly a government project because since 1913 several acts were passed into law with the intention of sending out immigrants. There was the 1913 Immigrants Regulation Act which provided for the exclusion of "undesirables" particularly Indians. The Act succeeded in reducing the number of Indian migrants to South Africa. Sequel to this, the 1924 township franchise ordinance was passed which denied Indians municipal franchise.

It was therefore not surprising that in 1998, a campaign called "Buyelekhaya" Meaning "**Go Back Home**". Impliedly immigrants should go back to their home land. They started with physical attacks on immigrants from Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. By May 2008, they were so aggressive on immigrants in the township of Alexandra. By April, 2015, the South African Xenophobic attackers went virile following the instigated statement by the paramount traditional ruler of the Zulu ethnic extraction, king Goodwill Zwelithini.

This officially instigated xenophobic attacks, has devastating consequences on Nigerians in South Africa. A reasonable number of Nigerians lost only their homes and businesses, while some unfortunately lost their lives.

### **Conclusion**

It is very glaring that there is unhealthy rivalry between Nigeria and South Africa premised on the agitation for leadership of the continent in global politics. Nigeria benevolently spent her resources to free South Africa from the grip of Apartheid. It was on the records of South African institute of international affairs that between 1960 –1995, Nigeria spent Sixty-One Billion Dollars in the fight against apartheid. But while Nigeria was pre-occupied with emotional concern to gain political freedom for South African blacks, the white minorities concentrated on building the South African economy in line with global capitalism. Today, South African economy is far ahead of Nigeria in terms of development. In cognizance of this, the South Africans realized their comparative advantage over Nigeria and therefore want to assert their economic strength in assuming regional leadership for Africa.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made:

- Nigerians cutting across status (the leaders and the led) should be sincerely committed to the development of their economy from primary, secondary to the tertiary levels of the economy.
- South Africa should accommodate other Africans in their agitation for regional hegemony.



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