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Nigeria-Ghana Relations from 1960 to 2010: Roots of Convergence and Points of Departure (Pp. 131-145)

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Abstract

Over the years, relationship between Nigeria and Ghana has faced dramatic twists and turns. In a restless manner the interactions between the two countries has oscillated between co-operation and mutual suspicion. Even though the two countries have so many things in common, their interactions have defied the logic of simple prediction. The paper attempts to give reasons for this trend. Concentrating on a period that covers from Nigeria's independence to 2010, the paper discusses that relations between the two countries demonstrate the characteristic dynamism of the study of international relations. It also shows how far the ruling elite can shape the disposition of one country toward another, and concludes by demonstrating how the unstable nature of African government can affect their relations, and stresses the need for collaboration between the two countries.

Introduction

The study of the relations between two countries constitute an interesting field of study for both scholars of international relations and all those interested in understanding the dynamics of international relations. Nigeria and Ghana relationship is an interesting case study. Historically, both countries were victims of exploitative and dehumanizing British colonialism. They both achieved political independence through a series of constitutional conferences (Idisi and Idise, 1996). Economically, both countries have been faced with similar economic problems of mass poverty and misery. Contemporaneously, both countries are in their Fourth Republic, after seeing their democracies battered by a series of military interventions (Linck, 2007). Today, apart from being the most populous nation in Africa, Nigeria's role as a major oil supplier seems to be an important point in this analysis, but due to recent discovery of oil wells in Ghana in large quantities, the latter would in ten years be an oil producing and exporting country like Nigeria. Sports-wise, both countries have a long history of soccer rivalry.

Suffice it to say that an examination of these relationships would definitely lead to unraveling these puzzles: First, what accounts for the nature of Nigeria's foreign policy towards Ghana? Secondly, what were the policy directions of various Nigerian governments toward Ghana and what were the factors responsible for these policy directions? Finally, how do we rationalize Nigeria's relationship with Ghana? This paper written to reflect the current realities of Ghana-Nigerian relations, attempts to answer these questions from two basic contentions. First, it is argued that the foreign policy direction of Nigeria toward Ghana has been a reflection of the preferences of the ruling elite. Secondly, it is contended that these elite preferences are usually rationalized as a way of promoting and protecting the nation's national interest. However, international relations' experts argue that pursuance of national interest is deplored by leaders to cover up their misdeeds, and it is a convenient way of avoiding criticisms and a shorthand expression for anything the leaders of a country does in relation to other countries.

For the purpose of comprehensibility, the paper is divided into the following sub-sections: Nigeria and Ghana – Roots of convergence, points of departure; Nigeria's relations with Ghana: an analysis of various regimes (1960 – 2010) and conclusion.

Nigeria and Ghana Relations: Roots of Convergence and Points of Departure

Scholars and political leaders had raised posers on relationship between the two countries. Such germane questions include: what are the similarities and dissimilarities between Nigeria and Ghana? Or, put differently, what are the roots of convergence and the points of departure between these two countries? An answer to this question would help amplify the oscillatory nature of Nigeria Ghana-relations. We shall begin with the roots of convergence.

One major area of convergence between Nigeria and Ghana is in their colonial history. Both countries had similar colonial experiences. The independence of Nigeria, just like that of Ghana, was the logical outcome of a series of political and constitutional conferences. Yet, another major area of similarity between the two countries is in the nature of their economies that were basically agricultural and dominated with the export of primary produce and the import of a wide variety of manufactured goods and services from Europe and North America.

Another irreducible area of convergence between the two countries is the existence of a virile public. It can be said that internal political pressures constitute an important factor in the policy direction of the foreign policies of both countries. Though scholars like Dennis Austine (1972 cited by Aluko, 1977) argue that the existence of public opinion is not a factor in the foreign policies of African states, a scholars like Legun (1965) have helped to show that internal political pressures constitute a continuing factor in the foreign policies of African states. The example of the two countries exposed to almost the same external environment is worth mentioning. At independence, the challenge of African unity was at the front burner of their national discourse as they lived up to the challenge of helping other colonized people to gain their political freedom.

Despite the above similarities, the two countries also have their differences. Politically, Nigeria was markedly different from Ghana. Unlike Ghana, Nigeria became independent under a federal form of constitution that was very awkward. The Nigerian federal arrangement neglected a fundamental principle that stated that no region or component unit should be larger than the rest of the federation as enunciated by K. C. Wheare (1963), the doyen of federalism. Furthermore, Nigeria did not have a national hero unlike Ghana where Dr. Kwame Nkrumah was shoulder-level above all other politicians.

The importance of such a hero in an emerging nation was to mobilize and bring the people together for the purpose of nation-building and development. The hero now serves as a rallying point for the peoples' aspirations.

At independence in 1960, Ghana was more financially buoyant than Nigeria. This was understandingly due to the value of gold and other mineral resources that Ghana had to export. Nigeria's foreign reserve was at December 1960 put at One Hundred and Seventy-two, point Five Million Pounds (£172.5 Million) (see Federal Office of Statistics Report, 1961). That of Ghana was higher even though in reality, Nigeria's economy was more stable.

Nigeria–Ghana relations in historical perspectives: an analysis of various regimes from 1960 – 2010

With the benefit of hindsight, relationship between the two countries tended to divide scholars into two large camps following an unstable and unpredictable pattern. Within the period of study, there were Nigeria regimes that viewed Ghana with suspicion and jealousy while there were those that co-operated meaningfully with Ghana. We shall briefly discuss each of these periods.

The era of mutual suspicion and jealousy: 1960 – 1966

The years 1960 to 1966 were dominated by an attitude of jealousy and suspicion in the external relations between Nigeria and Ghana. There were three major reasons for this situation. Firstly, Nigeria and Ghana at independence were ruled by different political elites that had different attitudes and styles. Ghana, for example, was ruled by Dr. Nkrumah, a renowned nationalist and strong advocate of the unity of African states. Nigeria, on the other hand, was ruled by Tafawa Balewa and Nnamdi Azikiwe, part of the conservative political elite who view the unity of African states with great caution. By and large, the conservatism demonstrated by Nigeria in the immediate post-independent years conflicted with the radicalism of Ghana. The outspokenness of Ghana on issues bordering on the welfare of African states attracted jealousy from Nigeria. Conversely, the prominence that welcomed Nigeria to the league of independent nations attracted jealousy and suspicion from Ghana in terms of which country would take on the hegemonic role of leading the African continent. Thus, before the military struck in both countries in the second half of the 1960s, the civilian political elite viewed one another with jealousy and suspicion. This

manifested in war of words between diplomats of both countries. At the second conference of independent African states in Addis Ababa, Maitama Sule, the then Nigerian Minister of Mines and Power, warned that the two dangers of pan-Africanism were the internal policies of some states which Nigeria could not tolerate and the attitude of someone who *"thinks he is Messiah with a mission to lead Africa"* (Daily Times, 1960; Akinyemi, 1974). Indirectly, the Minister was referring to Ghana, and Ghana's Nkrumah. In 1965, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa himself remarked that *"In size, population and wealth, there was nothing for which Nigeria could envy Ghana"* (Aluko, 1981). To this end, when the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was created, it equally turned out to be the theatre of leadership war between both countries. As a matter of facts, the first five years of the organization's existence were dominated by leadership tussle between the two countries leading to the formation of two opposite camps, namely, the 'Casablanca Group' under the leadership of Ghana, and the 'Monrovia Group' under the leadership of Nigeria.

Perhaps, one of the most important and striking reason for the unhealthy relationship between the two countries during the period under examination was meddling in the affairs of each other country with consequences. For example, in 1962, some members of the Action Group (AG) that dominated the politics of Western Nigeria went into exile based on the persecution they faced from the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC)-led Federal Government. The Balewa/Azikiwe led Federal Government accused the Ghana government led by Dr. Nkrumah of providing a base for the AG to train and to overthrow the Nigerian government. Expectedly, the accusation was refuted by the Ghanaian government. The above set the stage for mutual suspicion, accusations and counter-accusations; and remain unabated until the military struck in the early period of 1966 in both countries.

From temporary co-operation to discord and back to co-operation: 1966-1975

From 1966 to the year 1975, the relationship between Nigeria and Ghana was dominated by a characteristic unpredictability, twists and turns. In a swift manner, the coups that changed the governments of the two countries ushered in a period of co-operation. However, the co-operation had hardly spent a year when the military struck again in Nigeria. This second coup was followed by a lot of complications leading to the outbreak of a civil war. The second coup and the problematic atmosphere that accompanied it marred the relationship between Nigeria and Ghana. The co-operation

witnessed in early 1966 vanished and discord took its place. In 1972, with the re-emergence of the military in Ghana, discord ceased and co-operation resumed. The question that bothered the minds of observers then was what were the factors that could be responsible for the various postures of the relations between the two countries at different times? The answer to the puzzle could easily be articulated when the reasons for co-operation or discord on each occasion were critically examined. The co-operative relations between Nigeria and Ghana in the early period of 1966 can be explained by two major factors. First, General Ironsi who took over power in Nigeria following the military *coup d'etat* of January 1966 and Major-General Kotoka, a principal actor in the Ghanaian coup were professional friends. Both of them trained together at Eaton Hall, England. Secondly, the two leaders had no conflict in their ideological orientation. They criticized the previous civilian regimes in their respective countries and they were out to purify the system(s).

However, the outbreak of the genocidal and fratricidal civil war in Nigeria affected both countries relationship as the Ghanaian government expressed sympathy for the Biafran cause. However, various attempts were made by the OAU to settle the Nigerian Civil War through the setting up of *various* committees in which Ghana played a prominent role. Its role, *however*, was not unbiased as on various occasions where General Ankrah of Ghana was made to report on the Nigerian Civil War, he referred to Ojukwu as Head of State, to the annoyance of the Nigerian delegates (African Diary, 1980).

Following the 25th August 1969 General Elections, Dr. Busia became the Ghanaian leader. But the acrimonious relations between them continued unabated. Under the Busia era, Ghana's relations with Nigeria took a sour turn in 1971 when the regime deported illegal immigrants from Nigeria. Nevertheless, Busia's administration did not last beyond 1972 as it was overthrown by the military under the leadership of General Kutu Acheampong, and later, Lieutenant-General Frederick William Kwasi Akuffo. The re-emergence of the military in Ghana dramatically turned the relations between the two countries from that of discord to co-operation, Acheampong's administration, for example, released about 1000 Nigerians who had been detained for not possessing resident permits. This act and other positive actions helped to renew the mutual friendship between the two countries.

The continuation of co-operation: 1975-1979

The foreign policy of Nigeria towards Ghana during the regimes of Generals Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo that lasted from 1975-1979 was dominated by co-operation and understanding. In July 1975, General Gowon was removed from power in a military coup that brought Murtala Mohammed to power. During the brief stay of Murtala Mohammed, apart from a few instances of mutual suspicion, there was much cordiality between Nigeria and Ghana. General Acheampong, the leader of Ghana during this period did not interfere in the affairs of other nations, especially Nigeria. Conscious attempts were also made by Ghana during the period to strengthen her relations with Nigeria. For example, on the 5th of January 1976, a special message was delivered to Murtala Mohammed by his Ghanaian counterpart through his Commissioner for Foreign Affairs. However, the Murtala Mohammed's administration was short-lived. A military coup intended to entirely change the government only succeeded in killing the Head of State, Murtala Mohammed thereby paving way for his second-in-command, General Olusegun Obasanjo to take the mantle of leadership. By and large, the Obasanjo administration continued the foreign policy posture of Nigeria towards Ghana as was practiced by the Murtala Mohammed's administration. General Akuffo who succeeded Acheampong in Ghana was also favourably disposed towards Nigeria. The result was that under the two Heads of State, the relationship between the two countries witnessed increased co-operation in various areas. Both countries re-affirmed their commitment to the liberation of all parts of African from the shackles of colonialism.

Nevertheless, the co-operation between Nigeria and Ghana was slightly disturbed when Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings took over power in Ghana. This was basically caused by the political situation in Nigeria. The Obasanjo administration had already committed itself to a transition programme and would not want any factor (whether internal or external) to disrupt the transition programme. Coming at this critical period, the Obasanjo administration regarded the Rawlings' coup as having the capacity of having a contagious effect on Nigeria (Africa Diary, 1980). Such an anti-democratic act and a violent way of changing government were unacceptable to the Nigerian leader. The dissatisfaction of the Obasanjo administration was registered against Rawlings administration in a number of ways. First and foremost, the administration refused to recognize the Rawlings administration. Secondly, a number of punitive economic measures were taken against the administration such as stopping the flow of oil from Nigeria

to Ghana (Presidential Release, 1982). This ugly political relationship between the two countries remained until Nigeria successfully completed its transition programme that brought Alhaji Shehu Shagari to power.

The re-emergence of mutual suspicion: 1979-1983

The 1st of October, 1979 was a significant day for both Nigeria and Ghana. For the two countries, it marked the transition from military to civilian rule. While Nigeria moved into its Second Republic, Ghana moved into the Third Republic. This significant development had fundamental implications for the two countries separately, and also for the relations between them.

The coincidence of civilian administration in Nigeria and Ghana in 1979 tended to draw the two countries closer. President Shagari of Nigeria and Dr. Hilla Limann of Ghana were not unmindful of the fact that they were products of similar circumstances and needed close co-operation in order to forestall conditions that would threaten their existence. Thus, in 1980 and 1981, Dr. Limann of Ghana paid official visits to Nigeria. These visits *inter alia* were aimed at strengthening the relations between the two countries. Agreements were reached by the two governments to continue to work in close co-operation. This was the situation when Rawlings made his second coming to Ghana's highest position via a coup that swept away the administration of Limann. The second coming of Jerry Rawlings was rationalized as a deliberate attempt to purge Ghana of the economic mess occasioned by corruption of government officials. Whatever the reasons were and no matter how cogent, the second coming of Rawlings drastically affected Nigeria's foreign policy towards Ghana. In the first place, the Shagari administration was not prepared to give a categorical recognition of the Rawlings administration. This stance is understood when viewed from the thirteen dark years of military rule that preceded the Shagari administration which naturally made military intervention in Africa and Ghana in particular unattractive to the Shagari administration. Of additional significance was the fact that Rawlings himself had demonstrated his displeasure for the Shagari-led Nigerian government, accusing it of corruption.

Ghana's relations with Nigeria, West Africa's leading country, began on a sour note in the early period of the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) rule when Flt. Lt. Rawlings deposed the Dr. Limann's administration in 1981 (USLC, 2011). Nevertheless, Rawlings was uncomfortable with the ambivalent position of the Nigerian government and

so decided to mend the fence. In 1982, he sent a three-man delegation under the leadership of Ghana's Chief of Defence Staff and Vice-Chairman of the PNDC, Brigadier J. Nunoo-Mensah, to brief the Nigerian Federal Government on the events that led to the dethronement of Limann's government. Even though this group made unsuccessful attempts to see President Shagari, Rawlings was undaunted. Later in 1982, he sent another delegation of seven under the leadership of the same man. This time around, the delegation was able to gain the attention of the Nigerian leader. President Shagari, in a reaction to Ghana's accusation of Nigeria's plan to restore Limann's government, stated:

That he was anxious to disabuse the mind of all Ghanaians that Nigeria had no intention of invading their country in an attempt to restore the overthrown government of President (Dr.) Limann. It is the rightful responsibility' of Ghanaians to solve their own problems by themselves without interference from anywhere. It is the long held policy of Nigeria not to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries (ARB, 1983).

The above comments by Nigeria's Head of State seemed to have helped in ameliorating potential sources of tension. The crisis that was looming in the horizon could not be averted. First, Nigeria in protest refused to continue much-needed oil supplies to Ghana because at this particular time, Ghana owed Nigeria about US\$150 million for crude oil supplies and depended on Nigeria for about 90 percent of its petroleum needs (USLC, 2011). Second, in 1983, the Nigerian government expelled more than One million Ghanaian immigrants even at a period Ghana was facing severe drought and economic problems (USLC, 2011). This strained relations between the two countries.

Nigeria – Ghana relations from 1984 – 1993: a period of discord and co-operation

On December 31, 1983, the Nigerian government was sent packing by a new military junta headed by Major General Muhammadu Buhari. The military struck because of the economic problems facing the country and unmitigated corruption. As part of measures taken to solve the economic problem, the military government turned to illegal aliens mostly Ghanaians. In fact,

another 300,000 Ghanaians were sent home in early 1985 on short notice. This further strained relations between the two countries.

In August, 1985, a bloodless coup swept away the Buhari-led military junta leading to the emergence of Major General Ibrahim Babangida. Suffice it to say that General Babangida had to rule Nigeria from 1985 to 1993. But at the administration's inception, the Ghanaian leader, Jerry Rawlings took advantage of the change of administration to pay an official visit with a view to mending frosty relations that existed between the two countries. The Babangida administration pursued economic diplomacy which made it play a leading role in regional economic integration. The government knew that Nigeria needed the support of other countries in the sub-region especially Ghana. To bury the hatchet and lay the foundation for the take-off of *Big-brother diplomacy*, Nigeria and Ghana in April 1988 established a Joint Commission for bilateral co-operation with the Ghanaian leader visiting Nigeria, a visit the Nigerian leader reciprocated in January 1989. From that point, both countries solidified existing relations both at the governmental and social levels which spanned the security sub-sector including the provision of petroleum supply to Ghana from Nigeria and conversely training of personnel for the Nigerian service and security sector by Ghanaian instructors (Brazi, 2009). The two leaders regularly consulted themselves on a wide range of issues that affected their countries such as bilateral trade, and the transition to democracy, and also focused on peace and prosperity within West Africa (Owusu, 1994). Even though the reconciliatory moves by the Babangida administration were hailed as a watershed in Ghana–Nigeria relations by the Ghanaian leadership, the deliberate manipulation of the transition to civil rule programme by Babangida disappointed Accra but that did not significantly affected their close relations.

Nigeria – Ghana relations from 1994 – 1999: a period of consultation

After the exit of General Babangida, an Interim National Government (ING) headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan was established. The political impasse engendered by the June 12, 1993 Presidential Election which even necessitated the emergence of the ING as a “*child of necessity*”, did not allow the government to pursue any clear-cut economic bilateral or multilateral agenda. However, after the takeover in November 1993 by General Sani Abacha as the new Nigerian Head of State, Ghana and Nigeria continued to consult on economic, political, and security issues affecting the two countries and West Africa in particular; and issues that concern the African continent in general. Previous and existing relationship between

Nigeria and Ghana were consolidated by the Abacha regime until his death in July 1998. The period Abacha was Nigerian leader were a trying period for some countries in the sub-region like Liberia and Sierra Leone. The Nigerian and Ghanaian leadership were at the vanguard of ending the civil war and restoring democratic governance in both countries through the instrumentality of the ECOWAS monitoring Group (ECOMOG).

At the time General Abacha died, Nigeria was already a *Pariah State*, because of its poor human rights records and especially the hanging of the Ogoni-Nine despite appeals for state pardon from various countries and international organizations. So, General Abdusalam Abubakar who took-over the mantle of leadership sought to improve on the bartered image of Nigeria. He ensured that Nigeria's relationship with other countries was not further strained, and that includes Ghana.

Nigeria – Ghana relations from 1999 – 2010: a period of intense co-operation and discord

The Abdusalam Abubakar's transition ended on May 29, 1999 when Chief Olusegun Obasanjo emerged as the democratically-elected President of Nigeria in an era of globalization. It was also the era that the opposition under President John Kufuor took the mantle of leadership in Ghana. The post-Rawlings presidency in Ghana witnessed new heights of co-operation between the two countries as records available show personal warmth shared between Presidents John Kufuor and Olusegun Obasanjo. This was a relationship which allowed the former to acquire greatly beneficial favours for his country from the former; police patrol vehicles, oil supplies at concessionary rates and terms, heightened international co-operation for the promotion of bilateral interests and to cap it all, constant participation at all G-8 Summits for the two gentlemen (Brazi, 2009). During this period, relationship between the two countries improved dramatically. As democratic states and potential regional giants, these new leaders made frantic efforts aimed at strengthening their age-long socio-economic ties with a view to making their countries reap the gains of a globalized world. This led to series of bilateral agreements between them in many areas of their national endeavours. The Kufuor administration in Ghana made good use of this opportunity to focus on trade and good neighbourliness between Nigeria and Ghana. As a consequence, many Nigerian businesses went to establish in Ghana thereby creating job opportunities for the Ghanaian people in line with the Kufuor's administration motto of "*Property Owning Democracy*" (Essuman, 2010; Beddy, 2010). At the sub-regional level, this co-operation

resonated in the growth of ECOWAS in the area of substantial amount of trade and investment, a way of benefitting from globalization with many Nigerian businesses making marks in the Ghanaian economy in various sectors.

As a result of this, the total volume of export trade between Nigeria and Ghana was officially put \$525m as at 2008, with the breakdown for the period showing that Nigeria recorded \$89m non-oil exports to Ghana, while the value of Ghana's exports to Nigeria was \$25m (Ghana Business News, 2008). At the end of 2010, Nigerian businesses account for about 60 percent of foreign investment in Ghana from within the African continent which analysts say would continue strong economic connection (Ghana Business News, 2008; Linck, 2007).

Despite the flourishing economic relations between the two countries, Ghana-Nigeria relations tend to be turning sour since the government of President John Atta Mills came on board as Nigerian businessmen in Ghana complain of alleged discrimination against them under the Ghana Investment Promotion Act (GIPA) that raised the amount of money in registering businesses owned by foreigners in Ghana (mostly owned by Nigerians to \$200,000) and bars foreigners from selling (trading) in areas designated as markets (see Daily Graphic, 2009). One major reason for the frosty and deteriorated relationship between the two countries was the alleged plan by the Ghanaian government to enter into agreements with Equatorial Guinea for the supply of oil instead of the initial agreements with Nigeria by previous governments (Essuman, 2010). Ghanaian policy analysts including high-level government officials say that the symbiotic relationship which had developed between President Obasanjo and President Kufour laid the foundation for the Nigerian businesses invasion of the Ghanaian market even though they provided employment for the teeming unemployed population (Daily Graphic, 2009; Essuman, 2010). The unofficial reasons adduced for crisis in this area of business is that Nigerians were competing for space with Ghanaians whereas such wears were banned in Nigeria. This move was seen as a measure to protect Ghanaian economy from Nigerians' vandalism.

However, contingent upon the dangers and perils of this development, several efforts had been made to deepen trade and bilateral relations between the two countries. This has led to the establishment of a Joint Task Force from the Trade Ministries of the two countries to inspect manufacturing facilities of companies registered under the ECOWAS Trade

Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) in both countries (Daily Graphic, 2009). Analysts and watchers say this is the best way to resolve emerging issues in trade and bilateral relations between the two countries. By way of trying to overcome this challenge and strengthen age-long socio-economic ties which will provide the vital platform for energizing and consolidating relations, the two countries organized an Economic Summit in Accra in 2010, a platform that would enable the business community of both countries to make an input into the formulation of government policies by eliminating trade barriers (Linck, 2007).

Conclusion

Even though Ghana and Nigeria have the history, the experience, the culture, the resolve, the people and resources to lead both the region's integration and economic growth, the foreign policy of Nigeria towards Ghana in particular, and the relations between the two countries in general over the years, has faced dramatic twists and turns. In a restless manner, the relations between the two countries have oscillated between co-operation and mutual suspicion. There is no gainsaying the fact that both countries are forces to reckon with not only in the sub-region but also in the African continent. They both need to complement each others effort to make ECOWAS a powerful trading bloc as more investment bilateral relations between the two countries would lead to the West African sub-region's prosperity.

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