

УДК: 327

DOI: 10.25629/HC.2022.10.22

## THE HISTORICAL BASIS OF NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS AFRICA IN THE FIRST REPUBLIC

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**Abstract.** The period between the 1950s and 1960s was a pivotal moment for the African continent. It was the time many African states gained independence from their colonial rulers. Independence meant many of these new states had to formulate their own foreign policy approach. Using the constructivist theory of international relations, we argue that the shared struggle experience of colonial rule significantly influenced the foreign policy approach of many African states, including Nigeria. As a result, pan-Africanism was prominent at the time, and countries such as Nigeria developed an international relations framework based on two key principles: a focus on Africa described as Afrocentrism, and non-alignment. Our article concludes with a critical analysis of Afrocentrism and if it has been successful for Nigeria. This article is an important addition to the debate on the foreign policies of newly independent African states in the 1950s and 1960s, after they gained independence.

**Keywords:** Africa, Afrocentrism, foreign policy, international relations, independence, Nigeria, first republic, liberation struggle, West Africa.

### Introduction

The historical basis of Nigeria's foreign policy towards African countries can be traced back to colonial times, beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century until the country's independence in 1960. During this period, Nigeria's foreign policy was influenced by a number of factors, among which are the country's colonial constitutions. These include the Oliver Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 [1], the John Macpherson Constitution of 1951 [2], the Arthur Richards Constitution of 1946 [3] and Hugh Clifford Constitution of 1922 [4], all of which laid the foundation upon which Nigeria's foreign policy was formed. For example, the Hugh Clifford Constitution of 1922 replaced the old legislative council for the Lagos colony with the Nigerian council, comprised of some local people, who reported to the Secretary of State for colonies in Britain [4]. Furthermore, the Implementation of Exclusive Legislative List of the Nigerian Constitution Order in Council 1954 -1956 [5] outlined a detailed foreign policy approach which became the first serious foreign policy document in Nigeria. It was a product of joint efforts of the Governor-General of colonial Nigeria, his Chief Secretary, the British Colonial, and Commonwealth Relations Offices [6].

Around the time of independence, Nigeria had spent about a century as a colony of Britain, and remained under the influence of the British crown even after it became an independent state. This close relationship led to some challenges for the new Nigerian government as anti-colonial and pan-African sentiment became more intense. For example, as a pre-condition for gaining independence, Nigerian government officials signed a joint defence agreement with Britain. However, this led to a mass movement of opposition throughout the country [7]. These issues, alongside pressure from the local population, eventually led the Nigerian government to adopt its two most prominent foreign policy approaches, 'non-alignment' and 'Afrocentrism'. During its inception, Afrocentrism was focussed on Africa-oriented policies aimed at the decolonization of the African continent and to promote continental unity [7]. The non-alignment principle was an approach to foreign policy which meant the country would not take sides in the international power struggle between the Western-aligned nations and the Soviet aligned ones [8].

The goal of this article is to provide a critical evaluation of the historical basis of Nigeria's Afrocentric policy in its first republic, spanning from the period around its independence until 1966.

### **Theoretical background: Constructivism**

Among the many theories of international relations, the Constructivist theory is frequently referred to as one of the most important. In recent decades, it has become more prominent and is often cited as providing a moderate approach for analysing international relations [9,10]. In simple terms, the theory places the importance of shared values, culture, history, consciousness and other intangible belief systems as the primary influencer of a country's international foreign policy [11–13]. According to Burchill et al.[14], systems of shared beliefs and values can often have a strong influence on a country's social and political approach.

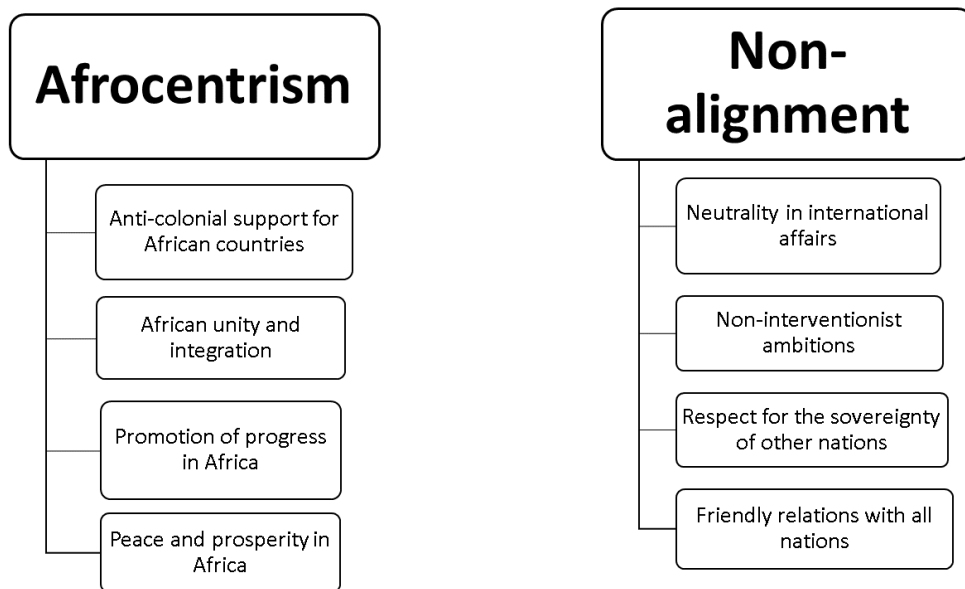
In attempting to explain the foreign policy of Nigeria and other African states in the 1950s and 1960s, we argue that it is the constructivist theories that offers the best explanation. During this period, the people across many African countries had gone through decades of colonial/imperialist rule, and there was a keen fervour to develop a sense of brotherliness with many the people of other African countries. This gave rise to the pan-African movements and the liberation supports for other countries in Africa. This was also significant factor in shaping the Africa-centric and non-interventionist beliefs of the newly independent Nigerian government.

### **Nigeria's foreign policy 1960-1966**

After gaining independence, Nigeria became a member of the United Nations, the Commonwealth, and other multilateral organisations. Scholars have traced the foreign policy of Nigeria to Lyttleton Constitution in 1954 [1]. The constitution was associated with the devolution of power for foreign relations from Britain to the Nigerian government [15]. The offices of Nigeria's external relations during this period worked in collaboration with the office of Chief Secretary of the Federation, who was indirectly responsible for implementing Nigeria's foreign policy. However, after Nigeria attained self-governing following the first local general elections of 1957, Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa personally took charge of the portfolio of external relations of the country. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Relations was officially created in 1961, with Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa appointing Jaja Wachuku as the inaugural Minister of Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Relations. Before Jaja Wachuku's tenure, Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa doubled as the Foreign Affairs advocate of Nigeria from 1960 to 1961. During this period, Balewa also retained the services of British Colonial officer Peter Stallard, who served the secretary of the Nigerian government, and advised the government on international affairs [16].

Scholars have often referred to the Prime Minister's Balewa's speech at the Plenary of the 15th Regular Session of the United Nations General Assembly as one of the most pivotal articulation of Nigeria's foreign policy approach. The speech, which was presented just six days after Nigeria became an independent country, declared that Nigeria hoped to work with all African states for the progress of Africa and to assist in bringing all African territories to a state of responsible independence and help in finding a lasting solution to the problem affecting Nigeria's immediate neighbours. Balewa also outlined Nigeria's non-aligned stance when he said: "we shall not forget our old friends, and we are proud to have been accepted as a member of the British Commonwealth. But, nevertheless, we do intend to ally ourselves as a matter routine with any of the Power blocs. We are committed to uphold the principles upon which the United Nations is founded." [17].

Figure 1 shows the Nigeria's main foreign policy focus after gaining independence in 1960.



Source: Authors' work

Figure 1 – Nigeria’s Foreign policy 1960 – 1966

### The Rise of Afrocentrism

Scholars have argued that Nigeria adopted Afrocentrism due to the remnants of colonialism at the time, and the liberation struggle in many African countries including the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. For example, Nigeria became an important voice for freedom in South Africa [18] and was important in putting international pressure on the apartheid government of the country, culminating in the establishment of the United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid in 1963 [19]. But Nigeria’s African focus, was not only on South Africa. Afrocentrism also ensured that Nigeria was deeply involved in the struggle for decolonization in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, among others.

Afrocentrism remains a pillar of Nigeria’s foreign policy approach to date. The Afrocentric foreign policy was consistently centred on uniting and promoting the political, economic, and sociocultural activities of Africa. Despite a few dissenting voices on its foreign policy decisions towards Africa. For instance, Nigeria deployed its diplomacy to bring global support – such as financial and material aid – to the Liberation Movements across the African continent. In the context of cultural relations, Nigeria’s movie industry, Nollywood has emerged as the most effective soft-power instrument to transmit the country’s cultural narrative as well as a tool in facilitating cultural diplomacy in Africa. Nollywood is the leading source of movies on the African continent [20]. Furthermore, the commitment to Afrocentrism also made Nigeria push for the establishment of multilateral institutions in the African continent. For example, Nigeria played a crucial role in the formation of the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) [21], the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the African Development Bank (ADB) assisted to improve the economic integration of African countries. However, there have been growing criticisms of Nigeria’s focus on Africa. For example, experts have argued that the country’s Afrocentric approach is motivated by the selfish goal to be the leading state in Africa [8,22,23]. Oshewolo [24] argued that Nigeria’s Afrocentric foreign policy describes Nigeria’s leadership status and role towards Africa, believing that Nigeria’s contributions have always brought a sense of entitlement in shaping the activities of international relations of African countries. This was buttressed by Obi [25], who believed that the Afrocentric foreign policy primarily connects the pursuit of Nigeria’s foreign policy to its quest for

leadership on the continent. Thus, the Afrocentric foreign policy facilitated Nigeria's ambitions towards gaining international recognition and helped to harmonize the continent to achieve its Pan-African objectives.

While there is some evidence of the political success of Afrocentrism for Nigeria, such as the success of peacekeeping efforts, democratic principles, anti-terrorism and liberation struggles, there is less evidence of its economic success. Experts have argued that the continuous focus on Africa has yet to bring about any tangible economic success for Nigeria. The country's persistent internal challenges is frequently cited as the most important cause of this [21,24,26–28].

### Conclusion

Using the Constructivist theory of international relations as a background, we have provided a comprehensive literature analysis of the development of Nigeria's Africa-centric foreign policy approach of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The influence of colonialism, and the colonial constitutions, among other factors were analysed in this article. Our results revealed that the success of Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy can be described as mixed, at best.

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## ИСТОРИЧЕСКАЯ ОСНОВА ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКИ НИГЕРИИ В ОТНОШЕНИИ АФРИКИ В ПЕРВОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКЕ

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**Аннотация.** Период между 1950-ми и 1960-ми годами стал поворотным моментом для африканского континента. Это было время, когда многие африканские государства обрели независимость от своих колониальных правителей. Независимость означала, что многие из этих новых государств должны были сформулировать свой собственный подход к внешней политике. Используя конструктивистскую теорию международных отношений, мы утверждаем, что общий опыт борьбы за колониальное господство существенно повлиял на внешнеполитический подход многих африканских государств, включая Нигерию. В результате panaфриканизм был замечен в то время, и такие страны, как Нигерия, разработали систему международных отношений, основанную на двух ключевых принципах: сосредоточении внимания на Африке, описываемой как афроцентризм, и неприсоединении. Наша статья завершается критическим анализом афроцентризма и того, был ли он успешным для Нигерии. Эта статья является важным дополнением к дискуссии о внешней политике новых независимых африканских государств в 1950-х и 1960-х годах, после того как они получили независимость.

**Ключевые слова:** Африка, афроцентризм, внешняя политика, международные отношения, независимость, Нигерия, первая республика, освободительная борьба, Западная Африка.