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Daniel C. Bach

Nigeria's 'manifest destiny' in West Africa: dominance without power

Summary

Ever since independence, messianic references to a natural Nigerian leadership in the affairs of the African continent have been ingrained in the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy. Internationally, Nigeria's endowments of human and natural resources, deeply asymmetrical interactions with neighbouring states and the active engagement of successive regimes in the affairs of the continent have called for the country's treatment as a regional power and a pivotal state for West Africa. However, Nigeria's 'manifest destiny' remains more about influence than power. The country's unsteady projection of structural or relational power starkly contrasts with the deep regional imprint left by trans-frontier networks that focus on Nigeria but operate independently of territorial affiliations. The related regionalisation process exacerbates the fluidity and fragility of region-building as much as problems of statehood and governance within Nigeria.

Keywords

Nigeria, state, foreign policy, regional cooperation

The favorable combination of resource endowments only establishes the fact that ... potentials for growth and development are tremendous (Adedeji 2000: 46).

Nigeria is the tenth largest state of the continent, with a landmass of 924,000 square kilometres and a 853 km long coastline. Nigeria's population, officially estimated at 141 million in 2006, makes it the most populous country in Africa, and one of those in which the rate of urbanisation is at its highest. Nigeria is also Africa's first oil producer and, with an army of about 70,000, the second most important military power in sub-Saharan Africa. In West Africa, an estimated 60% of the population and over 50% of the potential for primary and manufacturing production are located in Nigeria. Such a combination of human and natural resources, dominance over neighbouring

states and the diplomatic or military engagement of successive regimes in the affairs of the continent helps to explain the perception of the country by its elites as a regional power and a 'natural' leader in African continental affairs.

Recent emphasis on Nigeria's status as a regional power is also nurtured by the international clout and revenues that it draws from an oil output that should reach 2.6 million barrels per day if peak production rates can be sustained – production has been reduced by a quarter since January 2006 due to instability in the delta. In addition to these resources, Nigeria has proven natural gas reserves estimated at 120 trillion cubic feet (tcf), with recoverable gas reserves of 45 tcf, which makes these the ninth largest source in the world. Nigeria's reserve–production ratio is estimated at 125 years for gas, compared with less than 30 years for oil. Since the 1990s, the Gulf of Guinea has also become one of the world's most promising energy frontiers for oil multinationals. The use of deep water drilling technology had resulted in a stream of new discoveries in Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome & Principe, and even Mauritania (Traub-Merz / Yates 2006). The much valued quality (low-sulphur contents) of the new oil fields and the relative insulation of those located offshore from onshore political turmoil, match with post 9/11 concern at diversifying US and European imports away from the Middle East.

This article discusses how and why the history of Nigeria's interactions with its West African neighbours reveals a pattern of dominance without power. It is argued that the country's performance with respect to the projection of 'relational' power or the establishment of 'structural' power in West Africa remains elusive.¹ This contrasts with an ongoing consolidation as a regional hub, stimulated by the expansion of cross-border transactions and the activities of 'trans-state' networks with a global reach. This engenders an array of dissonant interactions between Nigeria's regionalist ambitions and actual regionalisation both as a process and an outcome.² Nigeria's

1 Relational power refers here to the ability of a state to force another state to do something it would not otherwise do through the mobilisation of diplomacy, economic aid or military resources. Structural power relates to preeminence in the field of research and technological innovation, greater internationalisation or trans-nationalisation of corporate sector activities, etc. (Strange 1988: 24-25).

2 Regionalism accounts for ideas or ideologies, programs, policies and goals that seek to transform an identified social space into a regional project. Accordingly, regionalism can also involve the *construction* of an identity as opposed to its *formation*. It postulates the implementation of a program and the definition of a strategy and is therefore often associated with institution-building or the conclusion of formal agreements. Regionalism can proceed from an extreme diversity of situations. Regionalisation refers to the build-up of interactions that may or may not relate to an explicitly asserted or acknowledged regionalist project. Regionalisation is a more encompassing notion than regionalism since it takes

activism in the field of regionalism and region-building has yet to produce tangible results; by contrast, regionalisation processes convey patterns of Nigerian dominance. These, however, remain constrained by severe conversion problems due to the Federation's systemic instability, weak institutionalisation and weak territorial control over borderlands and entry points. After a review of Nigeria's regional policy orientations, we will discuss the country's specific conversion problems before addressing the discordant implications of Nigeria's *de facto* emergence as a regional hub and an anchor for 'trans-state' global networks.

Leadership as a project

Ever since the sixties, messianic references to a Nigerian leadership in conducting the affairs of the African continent have been ingrained in the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy and external relations. In accordance with this ambition,

successive administrations built a diplomatic case for Nigeria to fulfil its own 'manifest destiny' and be considered the 'champion' of Africa ... The term champion used but rarely defined, implied that Nigeria was a country that the Western powers would listen to, and that could champion causes that other nations were too weak to defend.³

By the mid-1980s, Nigeria's foreign minister and former academic, Dr Bolaji Akinyemi, even launched a much publicized bid to achieve what he termed as a 'middle power' status in world affairs. On the grounds of Nigeria's newly acquired oil wealth and influence, he and other Nigerian policy makers started calling for a Monroe doctrine that would spare West Africa from external (then mostly French) military interventions and promote, as an alternative, the concept of *Pax Africana*, namely the idea of conflict resolution among Africans and through African solutions.⁴

Pledges to economic and financial integration

It was Biafra's secession attempt (1967-70) that initially prompted Nigeria to launch regional initiatives designed to counter French, and Ivorian support of the rebels, circumvent international sanctions on arms deliveries and,

into account processes and configurations within which states are frequently not the key players (Bach 1999).

3 Wright (1998: 133); for an exhaustive discussion of this point, see also Nwokedi (1991).

4 The notion of *Pax Africana* was coined by Ali Mazrui (1967).

more generally, counter the effects of international mobilisation in favour of Biafra's independence. Once the war was over, Nigeria's diplomatic initiatives towards the establishment of the 15-member Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) played a decisive role.⁵ Nigeria's diplomatic activism was then largely stimulated by geo-political considerations, namely the perceived need to increase Nigeria's standing and influence among the Francophone West African states.

General Gowon (1966-1975) multiplied bilateral diplomatic contacts, in the context of which the Federal Government took financial stakes in joint industrial projects. He also established solid credentials as a regional leader when, after reversing Nigeria's initial hostility to the opening of negotiations towards the future EU-ACP Lomé Convention, he took the lead in the negotiations (Bach 1983: 605-623). Comforted by its oil resources and a favourable international environment, Nigeria extracted key trade and aid concessions from the Europeans. Within a few weeks after the signing of the Lomé Convention, the charter establishing ECOWAS was also signed in Lagos amidst much enthusiasm. This momentum was quickly lost when, following Gowon's overthrow in July 1975, General Muritala Mohammed's abrasive regional and continental diplomacy revived Francophone fears of the Nigerian 'bully'. Nigerian expectations that ECOWAS would offer a conduit for the expression of its influence were frustrated by consensus-driven decision-making processes, repeated delays in the implementation of decisions, and the Francophone member-states' behavior as a bloc, cemented by their common belonging to the *Communauté des Etats d'Afrique de l'Ouest* (Fawole 2003, Gambari 1978).

After Nigeria had to take external loans in order to alleviate the effects of declining resources, the cost of Nigeria's hegemonic ambitions was reassessed. Lagos had 'gained little that was tangible ... failed to institutionalise the capabilities that would have allowed Nigeria to take advantage of the inroads made between 1973 and 1983' (Myers 1991: 337). Frustration grew among Nigerian policy-makers for what ECOWAS had come to stand for, that is an organisation substantively funded by Nigeria but with little operational capacity and disappointing returns. This climaxed when, in January 1983, a government expulsion order compelled between one and two million immigrants, most of them West Africans, to leave Nigeria amidst chaos and confusion. By April 1984 another sign of Nigerian exasperation

5 ECOWAS dates back to the Lagos Charter of 1975, and has established a track record that makes it one of the more active regional inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) in Africa. Areas commonly mentioned include institution-building, the harmonisation of norms and the construction of regional transport and communication infrastructures. ECOWAS achievements remain largely formal as member-states remain reluctant to implement and adhere to commonly agreed decisions (Bach 2004: 69-92).

was prompted by flourishing cross-border trafficking with Francophone neighbouring economies. Nigeria's land boundaries were sealed by the army for a period which would last sixteen months. During 1985, another expulsion order also meant that another wave of about 700,000 'illegal aliens' had to look for safety in 'home' countries where some of them had never lived.

Nigeria's pre-eminence within ECOWAS contributed to a sharpening of the disconnection between speech and deed. As the ECOWAS treaty was being redrafted in 1992, the executive secretary of the Community watered down expectations that this should be enough to revive integration:

... the slow pace of regional integration in West Africa has almost nothing to do with the insufficiencies noted in the 1975 ECOWAS Treaty. The adoption of an ideal treaty is of little importance if member-states do not decide to consider regional integration as an important national enterprise ... (ECOWAS/CEDEAO 1992: 18).

A decade later, one of his successors gave vent to a similar frustration with what he himself described as the 'poor record' of member-states with regard to the execution of Community programs (ECOWAS 2000). Today, ECOWAS is nonetheless widely described as the most successful regional economic community (REC) in Africa. I would suggest, however, that the distinction tells us more about the paucity of achievements within the other sub-regional groupings. Significant progress has been achieved in such areas as institution-building, the harmonisation of norms and the construction of regional transport and communication infrastructures. ECOWAS achievements in promoting integration are largely formal: member-states remain reluctant to apply the provisions of the revised Cotonou Treaty (1993) instituting the principle of supranationality. Key protocols pertaining to free movement of goods and persons are casually contravened. The programme towards the achievement of a Customs Union, regularly postponed since 1976, is now billed for 2008. The establishment of an autonomous ECOWAS monetary policy through the creation of a single monetary zone, initially envisaged for 2005, was widely held to be unrealistic and had to be adjourned.⁶ Ongoing political instability within the region – currently Côte d'Ivoire – makes launching an autonomous and sustainable ECOWAS monetary policy highly improbable in the foreseeable future.

The establishment of ECOWAS, once viewed as an opportunity to build up Nigeria's hard structural power through trade and investment, has become an illustration of the limited reach of state-sponsored projects. A flurry of new economic and commercial agreements were concluded with West Af-

6 Nigerian Central Bank Governor Charles Soludo as quoted in *The Independent* (Banjul), 13 September 2004; also Debrun / Mason / Pattillo (2002: 26-27) and Uche (2001).

rican states in the seventies but their impact on official trade flows has been of little significance and federal government participation in joint ventures with Benin Republic (the sugar plant at Savé and the cement factory at Onigbolo), Niger (supply of energy from Kainji dam, uranium project of Afasto-East), Guinea (shares in the capital of the Mifergui Nimba iron ore project) were never underscored by private cross border investments. Over three decades after the establishment of ECOWAS, Nigeria's hub and spokes interactions essentially proceed from the dynamics of so called informal cross border trade and networks. Regional infrastructures, despite noted improvement, are highly inadequate and poorly maintained. It is yet too early to surmise what will be the spillover effects of the 620 miles long offshore pipeline that is being built so as to supply Togo, Benin and Ghana with Nigerian natural gas. The scale and cost of the West African Gas Pipeline (WAGP) certainly operate as an unprecedented incentive towards the harmonisation of regulations and energy policy orientations among the states concerned.⁷

A tangible sign of the emergence of a more enabling regional environment may reside in the closer coordination and harmonisation between ECOWAS and the Francophone member-states of the *Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine* (UEMOA), the regional economic and monetary union established in the wake of the devaluation of the CFA and dissolution of CEAO, in January 1994. Nigeria's own commitment to macro-economic reform has been equally decisive in the drastic reappraisal of the standard approach of ECOWAS to monetary and customs integration within UEMOA. In December 1999, after years of stillborn resolutions stating that ECOWAS should become the sole regional entity in West Africa, the ECOWAS Heads of States summit solemnly pledged to the 'relevance of a differentiated approach in the march towards integration', thus allowing 'any group of states within the Community to adopt concrete and pragmatic measures so as to accelerate their integration' (ECOWAS/CEDEAO 2000: 2). This adoption of an inclusive approach broke away from past attempts to stigmatise monetary integration within UEMOA/CEAO as a stumbling block, accountable for the poor achievements of ECOWAS. In a similar fashion, ECOWAS has recently adopted as a target the Common External Tariff (CET) rates set by UEMOA.

7 Construction of the offshore pipeline between Ghana and Nigeria was completed in October 2006, and gas was flowing through to Ghana's Aboadze thermal power plant by March 2007. Stakeholders in the US-\$ 500 million project are Chevron Texaco, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Shell, Ghana's Volta River Authority, SoBeGaz and SoToGaz.

Peace keeping and conflict resolution

Signed in 1999, the ECOWAS Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, provides the formal basis for a regional security architecture. Until the adoption of this protocol, the involvement of ECOWAS in peace-keeping and enforcement had developed on an *ad hoc* basis and was largely shaped by Nigeria's own policy orientations.

The initial decision of ECOWAS to intervene in Liberia (1990-1997) occurred in a post-cold war world where US unwillingness to intervene and restore order in Monrovia created what Nigeria and some West African leaders saw as a window of opportunity for experimenting *Pax Africana* on an *ad hoc* basis. At the instigation of the Nigerian president, General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993), ECOWAS heads of States resolved in May 1990 to form a Standing Mediation Committee (SMC). Babangida's influence also played a key role in August 1990, as the SMC agreed to form an ECOWAS Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) for the purpose of ordering a cease-fire in Liberia, establishing an interim government and holding general elections within a year. The motivation of Nigerian president Ibrahim Babangida was a mixture of personal inclination – Samuel Doe considered him as his mentor – with broader geo-strategic concern at the significant backing that Charles Taylor had been receiving from Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Libya (Gershoni 1993: 21-43, Ellis 1999: 162 ff).

From the decision of ECOWAS to intervene in the Liberian war in 1990 up to the temporary solution of the conflict seven years later, Nigeria's diplomatic, financial and military involvement shaped processes and outcomes in a decisive fashion.⁸ Within a few weeks of the dispatch of ECOMOG forces, their failure to prevent the gruesome execution of Doe by rebels enabled Nigeria to impose durably its lead on the conduct of operations: the Ghanaian field commander was replaced by a Nigerian and, from September onwards, he and his successors were all Nigerian appointees who took their orders directly from the Nigerian Ministry of Defense (Prkic 2000: 262). Nigeria also kept providing the bulk of troops (75% of the 11,000 ECOMOG troops by 1993) and funded an estimated 90% of the cost of operations. ECOMOG operations were formally accountable to ECOWAS but the Secretariat and the Authority had in effect no controlling hand over engagement (Adebajo 2002b: 48). Such domination did not mean, however, that Nigeria had the military capacity to impose its own solution. Nigerian troops, although they had initially been able to expel Charles Taylor and his

⁸ Unless otherwise stated, the following paragraphs draw from Ellis (1999), Adebajo (2002a, 2002b) and Francis (2001).

NPFL (National Patriotic Front of Liberia) forces from Monrovia in 1990, were unable to re-establish control over an estimated 85% of the Liberian territory. Peace-keeping operations suffered from severe financial and logistical handicaps and, despite some ECOMOG success, the rebellion could not be crushed. The ECOMOG was not seen as impartial by the parties involved in the conflict. Francophone ECOWAS-member states were also wary of what they saw as an attempt by Nigeria to promote a *Pax Nigeriana*, a situation that contributed to the revival of the Francophone-Anglophone divide (Mortimer 1996). Since conference diplomacy also failed to create sustainable political solutions, the option of a strictly sub-regional treatment of the conflict had to be reconsidered.

In July 1993 in Geneva, a UN-sponsored cease fire was concluded between the Liberian warring factions. In New York, the Security Council resolution subsequently established the UN Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL), a small group of 78 men, partly deployed in order to check the excesses of ECOMOG forces and bring Taylor to stick to the cease-fire agreement reached by all warring parties in Geneva and Cotonou (Adibe 2002: 124, van Walraven 1999: 83-84). General Sani Abacha's accession to power in Nigeria also led, in June 1995, to Nigeria's spectacular reconciliation with Taylor and his NPFL forces. They no longer had to face the hostility of ECOMOG forces and even occasionally received Nigerian military support (Prkic 2000: 273-274). The staged program towards disarmament, resettlement and elections came to fruition on 19 July 1997 with the election of the most powerful Liberian warlord, Charles Taylor, as president. His 'no Taylor no peace' motto had easily attracted the majority of votes. Peace was effectively re-established, although the price to be paid was a transfer of power that, after six years of violence and destruction, legitimised the triumph of the very warlord that Nigeria-led ECOMOG forces had vainly tried to eliminate.

The performance of ECOMOG in Liberia was not particularly impressive. It had exacerbated tensions among member-states, while prolonging the crisis and contributing to its regionalisation. The event, nonetheless, earned the Nigerian military dictatorship valuable international kudos. Indeed, throughout the second Clinton administration, US concern with curbing the spread of conflicts in Africa was mitigated by wariness that this should translate into entangling commitments. This meant backing regional 'anchor' states who, like Nigeria, were 'willing to take losses and sustain deployments' (Leatherwood 2001: 24). In spite of the growing opprobrium that surrounded the Nigerian military dictatorship, Washington officials working with West Africa had 'scrambled to circumvent the legal restrictions [on bilateral military relations with Nigeria] as soon as they were enacted. Although there was no precedent for providing aid directly to a regional organisation, procedures had also been quickly put in place to pro-

vide assistance to ECOMOG. Between 1996-1997, as international sanctions against Nigeria's Abacha dictatorship (1993-1998) climaxed, the US government also worked through contractors to send trucks, radios and helicopters to the Nigerian troops in Liberia' (Leatherwood 2001: 20-21).

The ECOMOG intervention in Sierra Leone offered another testing ground for Nigeria's projection of military force. One of the side effects of the war in Liberia was its spill over into Sierra Leone. After the president of Sierra Leone had endorsed the Nigerian stance over the formation of ECOMOG, Nigerian troops and Air Force had started using Freetown as a staging post to operate in Liberia, a situation that prompted Taylor to support Foday Sankoh whose Revolutionary United Front (RUF) invaded Sierra Leone from Liberia in March 1991. ECOMOG forces were still based in Sierra Leone when the civilian government of President Kabbah was overthrown by a military coup supported by the RUF on 25 May 1997. Kabbah's subsequent request for Nigerian assistance was promptly endorsed by Nigeria's General Abacha who then chaired ECOWAS. On 27 June, the Council of Ministers decided to engage in diplomatic consultations with the military junta while adding that the possible use of force should not be excluded were these to fail. No tangible results had been achieved when, on 29 August, the Authority agreed to the establishment of ECOMOG II, a force that was mandated to assist in creating a 'conducive atmosphere' towards the 'early re-instatement of the legitimate government of Sierra Leone', including the supervision of ceasefire, monitoring of violations and enforcement of the economic and military sanctions that were simultaneously decided by the Authority.⁹

As had been the case in Liberia, Nigerian involvement was decisive since the bulk of ECOMOG II was formed by Nigerian troops and all force commanders were Nigerian. Once more, Abuja's military and financial contribution dwarfed other states' to the extent that it could 'brush aside ... continued diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis and pursued a military solution instead' (Berman / Sams 2003: 46). In February 1998, this was manifested through Nigeria's decision to take advantage of its control over ECOMOG and expel militarily RUF forces from Freetown, thus enabling the reinstatement of President Ahmad Kabbah on 10 March. Internationally, the decisive contribution of the Abacha regime to the restoration of democracy in Sierra Leone was, however, obscured by the Nigerian military junta's domestic agendas. Abacha's promotion of democracy in Sierra Leone deflected international pressure at a time when the country was suspended from Com-

9 As quoted in Adibe (2002: 131).

monwealth meetings,¹⁰ decertified by the US on account of drug trafficking and confronted with (weakly enforced) international sanctions.¹¹ More tersely, military involvement in Sierra Leone also meant that 'Abacha and his generals could continue to divert millions of dollars ... while billing them as ECOMOG expenses' (Adebajo 2002b: 92).

Restoring democracy and rule of law in Sierra Leone was an impossible task given such constraints. ECOMOG forces, under-equipped and poorly funded, were unable to establish control over the rest of Sierra Leone so as to eliminate the rebels' military threat or prevent their unsuccessful but devastating incursion into Freetown in January 1999 (Adebajo 2004: 292). Within the UN Security Council, sympathy for the plight of Sierra Leone was tempered by budgetary concerns and reluctance towards any initiative that, while interfering with the international arms embargo against Nigeria, would also bolster Abacha's military dictatorship. As had been the case in Liberia, this contributed to a minimalist approach on the part of the UN Security Council. UNSC resolution 1181 of 13 July 1998, merely authorised the deployment of a small UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL), formed by 56 military observers and medical staff.

Nigerian military engagement abroad was drastically reappraised within a few months of President Olusegun Obasanjo's election and accession to office on 27 May 1999. No precise information on the human toll and financial cost of the Nigerian deployments in Liberia and Sierra Leone had ever been allowed to filter through, but this could no longer be the case with the instalment of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Intervening abroad was unpopular within the country and Obasanjo publicly announced, on 19 August 1999, that all Nigerian troops would leave Sierra Leone within six months. He also subsequently refused to reconsider his decision despite a belated increase in the financial and logistical aid offered by key UN members to ECOMOG. On 22 October, the UN Security Council authorized the deployment of UNAMSIL as a chapter VII operation that, after incorporating some of the ECOMOG forces, would take over from them. Inadequate preparation, insufficient personnel and limited resources transformed the subsequent deployment of 7,300 peace-keepers into a disaster. Within a few months, President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah had lost the little authority he had ever mustered and UNAMSIL was both paralysed and humiliated by rebels

10 In January 1996, General Abacha had explicitly ordered that Nigerian troops in Sierra Leone should not prevent Brigadier-General Julius Bio from staging a coup against Captain Valentine Strasser because he was angered by the latter's vote in favor of Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth at the November 1995 Auckland summit (Adebajo 2002a: 85).

11 In Liberia, drug-trafficking and extensive looting also prompted Liberians to rename ECOMOG as meaning 'Every Car Or Movable Object Gone' (Adebajo 2002b: 174).

who killed or captured its personnel. It is at this stage that Britain's decision to intervene militarily in Freetown restored order and set the basis for what became a yet unparalleled attempt to reconstruct a collapsed state in Africa. After stalling for almost a year, the UN Security Council also resolved, on 30 March 2001, that UNAMSIL forces would increase from 13,000 to 17,500 men. Sierra Leone became the most significant UN operation worldwide, and a testing ground for Britain's African Conflict Prevention Strategy. Sierra Leone was transformed into what it still is, an unprecedented case of post conflict state reconstruction based on the massive inflow of international aid which represented half of the budget of Sierra Leone early in 2005 (UN 2003, Fayemi 2004: 19).

Nigeria, which could still be viewed as an emerging power when the military had seized power in December 1983, belonged by 1999 to the group of the Least Developed Countries, and featured at the very top of the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International. Senior army officers had transformed Nigeria's ECOMOG operations into a conduit for personal enrichment. In the period between 1988 and 1994, no less than US 12.5 billion out of Nigeria's oil revenues were unaccounted for,¹² a pattern that went on during the regime of General Abacha, personally associated with the looting of more than US-\$ 3 billion, stashed away in European financial centres. By 1999, these two figures represented roughly half of the country's debt to the Paris Club. The Nigerian military itself was in a state of decay, its professionalism eroded, corruption rife and morale low. Military capabilities were equally low. In 2000, an American audit of the state of Nigerian armed forces reported that 75% of army equipment was 'damaged or completely out of commission'. Only ten out of the Navy's 52 vessels could be considered as seaworthy and 'perhaps' five Alpha jets of the Airforce could still fly out of a total of 90 combat aircrafts (*Africa Confidential* 2000: 6).

Nigeria's return to an elected civilian regime meant that checks and balances inherent in a democracy now overruled the patterns of unilateralism and instinctive behaviour that had been the hallmark of military interventionism in the 1990s. The end of Nigerian unilateralism also happened to coincide with the adoption of an institutional framework towards the management of peace and security in the ECOWAS sub-region. Accordingly, three key organs were established: the Mediation and Security Council, the Defence and Security Commission and the Council of Elders. The Protocol calls for the establishment of a standard force of specially trained and equipped forces (a battalion) drawn from all fifteen ECOWAS states. This

12 The Okigbo panel of inquiry could only trace US-\$ 206 million out of the US-\$ 12.4 billion that were put into extra-budgetary account between 1998 and June 1994. These resources were drawn from the windfall of oil proceeds during the first Gulf war and the collection of mining rights and signature fees (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1994: 12).

new institutional regime has been generating unprecedented expectations with respect to the engagement of Nigerian troops in ECOWAS, AU and UN missions.

Almost a decade later, the international clout and personality of Obasanjo have turned Nigeria into a key broker as UN and AU engagement in the conflicts of the continent have spectacularly expanded. By December 2005, 75% of UN resources for this area were being devoted to Africa. By then, engagement in Africa reached levels unprecedented since 1993 (Wiharta 2006). Obasanjo's activism within the ECOWAS sub-region and Africa as a whole has done much to boost international support for *Pax Africana* – a term nowadays much valued in Europe and the US where it correlates with such ideas as constructive disengagement and 'try Africa first' exit solutions to conflict management on the continent (Sesay 2006). Conversely, in West Africa, Nigeria has readily endorsed such external interventions as those of the British special forces in Sierra Leone (2000-2001) or the deployment of France's *Licorne* operation in Côte d'Ivoire (2002-). Both operations were meant to fill a temporary vacuum and have been inserted into UN and AU or ECOWAS sponsored PKOs. In West Africa as elsewhere on the continent, Nigeria has become a model and a mentor in efforts to combine multilateralism with conflict resolution through arbitration and rule of (international) law.¹³

Domestic governance as a stumbling bloc

Nigeria's poor performance as a regional power inexorably draws attention to the limitations associated with uneven capabilities to translate unquestionable assets into international diplomatic or military power:

On any measure of objective factors such as population, military power, economic strength and the like, Nigeria should dominate its West African region ... it could lay claim to primacy in all of black Africa ... Yet, while it has taken leading roles on several occasions, the reality is a great deal less impressive than the potential ... [C]ountervailing pressures ... are not ... a function so much of outside forces but of internal problems which have bedevilled the country ... and show little signs of being alleviated in the foreseeable future (Williams 1991: 269-70).

It is estimated that Nigeria earned nearly US-\$ 200 billion between 1970 and 1990 (Thomas / Sudharshan 2002: 4). By 2004, the revenues generated by the

¹³ A politically courageous decision was Obasanjo's final adherence, despite intense domestic opposition, to the decision of the International Court of Justice on the restitution of the Bakassi peninsula to Cameroon. The transfer became effective on 21 August 2006.

oil industry stood, according to another estimate, at US-\$ 400 billion. Yet, poverty is more widespread than it used to be at the beginning of independence. Real incomes have declined by an average 1.5% over the past 25 years; and about 70% of the population lives on less than US-\$ 1 per day. Nigeria was ranked 158th out of 177 in the United Nations Human Development Index in 2005. In September 2006, the Executive Chair of Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), an organ established in 2003 to fight 'grand' corruption, estimated the amount of public funds stolen or wasted by Nigerian governments since independence in 1960 at US-\$ 380 billion.¹⁴

The combination of Nigeria's return to democracy with the boost in oil revenues have all but reduced opportunities for 'grand' corruption and transnational fraud.¹⁵ The Fourth Republic and its complex federal architecture (36 states and 774 local governments) multiply opportunities for access to office and resources. In 2003, the stakes associated with the control of key positions within states and local governments transformed electoral competition into a fierce and often violent scramble. The federal government's failure to guarantee the security of citizens has contributed to what has come to be viewed as a criminalisation of Nigerian politics, marked by the assassination of several prominent personalities and the capture of public institutions by big men and 'godfathers'. By the middle of 2006, two thirds of Nigeria's 36 governors were being investigated by EFCC. Corruption at local government level was described as so 'rampant' that the Executive Chair of the EFCC considered that 'it's gangsterism. It's organized crime'.¹⁶

Despite an eight year long transition away from military rule, Nigeria's domestic governance remains deeply dysfunctional (Bach 2006: 47-79). Continuing adherence to consociationalism keeps politicizing ethnicity, promotes the entrenchment of sectional loyalties at the expense of citizenship and condones the discrimination between indigenes and non-indigenes (Human Rights Watch 2006). Nigerian federalism has also become an alias for prebendalism – the so called 'share of the national cake' ideology – and a rentier approach to politics under the pretence of promoting the federal character doctrine. In spite of much heralded public policies designed to fight corporate corruption and financial crime, the political culture of the ruling elites remains, at all levels of government, fundamentally un-

14 'Nigerian leaders "stole" \$ 380bn', *BBC News* at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6069230.stm>

15 In 2005, State and Local government spending was four times higher in real terms than in 1999. Between May 1999 and July 2006, Nigeria's 36 states and 774 local governments were respectively allocated US-\$ 35.6 billion and US-\$ 23.4 billion (Human Rights Watch 2007: 18-19).

16 Interview with Nuhu Ribadu, 18 August 2006, as quoted in Human Rights Watch (2007: 19).

changed. The availability of significant state-controlled resources contributes to the material preservation of the Nigerian state, but the classic attributes associated with statehood are severely undermined. This involves institutional decay, loss of territorial control, illegitimate violence, and lack of commitment to the notion of public goods. Slotting durably national interest into such a landscape is an uphill challenge.

Lack of professional behaviour on the part of security forces also raises the question of the standards to be expected when these are sent abroad. As explosions of inter-communal violence have periodically engulfed the Middle Belt and the Niger Delta region, the dispatch of the Nigerian army has become a synonym for heavy handed interventions, massive material destructions and extra-judicial executions against a background of partisanship. The security forces' inability to restore law and order has also become difficult to disentangle from demands for greater local or regional autonomy in the Niger Delta region. There, as in the Middle Belt, it is the future of Nigerian polity and the risk of its dilution into what I have elsewhere called a 'country without a state' that is at stake.

Trans-state networks as a vehicle for dissonant patterns of influence

The size, population and resources of Nigeria mean that its imprint on neighbouring economies has become increasingly significant since the oil windfall of the 1970s. This contributes to processes of *de facto* integration into the Federation's economic space. Unlike what is being observed in Southern Africa, Nigeria's influence does not rely on the competitive edge or outward strategies of its corporate sector. Nor does it result from formal trade relations. This conveys influence without power and accounts for the frequent exasperation of Nigerian policy makers with their country's inability to draw leverage from or build upon these transactions.

Trans-state players and networks are a key to Nigeria's dissonant interactions with its immediate and international environment. Whereas trans-frontier interactions simply involve crossing boundary-lines, trans-state networks combine this capacity with the penetration of state institutions (Bach 2003). Control and regulatory tasks assigned to state bureaucrats and office holders are nullified through negotiation or avoided through complications. Trans-state networks cut across territories as much as they permeate institutions. They promote their own brand of regionalisation through their exploitation of opportunities created by the (customs, fiscal, normative or monetary) disparities that materialize along boundary-lines. For this very reason trans-state networks and lobbies have no interest in the harmonisa-

tion of policies under the aegis of such regional institutions as ECOWAS. Trans-state regional lobbies share a strong interest in the preservation of good relations between neighbouring states, but have nothing to gain from the implementation of sub-regional programmes towards the liberalisation of customs and tariff barriers.

Nigeria's cross-border interactions with its West African neighbours go back to the colonial period, but they entered a new phase during the early 1970s (Bach 1997: 77-102). Nigeria's fast expanding oil production and, after 1973, the sudden increase in revenues stimulated the intensification of cross border trade activities, both licit and illicit. This locked the economies of West African states, notably those of Togo, Benin, Niger, Chad and Western Cameroon, into quasi-organic relationships with Nigeria's. Trans-state trade interactions between Nigeria and its neighbours had nothing to do with trade liberalisation programs, nor with any weakening of tariff barriers. Cross-border integration was actually stimulated by the very persistence of significant tariff, normative, fiscal and monetary disparities that generated much valued sources of opportunity for local and regional players. Conversely, the resulting cross-border linkages carry deeply ambivalent implications. Unlike market-driven integration programmes that aim at a dismantlement of tariff and non-tariff barriers, trans-state linkages are dependent on the very preservation of discrepancies in fiscal and customs policies or monetary regimes. Trans-state networks, fuelled by the combination of patronage with ethnic or religious ties also encourage interactions that rely upon personal control as opposed to territorial identity and citizenship. In addition to this, trans-state networks while contributing to a de-territorialisation and de-institutionalisation of the state, neither challenge formally existing boundary lines, nor seek to promote the emergence of alternative regional projects.

Increasing recourse to structural adjustment programs in the mid 1980s and the subsequent erosion of tariff and monetary disparities across boundary-lines, ushered a new cycle in the spread and global expansion of trans-state flows of transactions. Throughout the African continent, the reduction of cross-border discrepancies meant a narrowing of opportunities for the growth of trans-state flows. Trans-state networks now had to adjust to the diminishing opportunities generated by intra-African frontier disparities, through the mobilisation of new resources, drawn from the global economy and associated with illicit or criminal activities. The globalisation of the world economies and the reduction of opportunities offered by Africa's intra-continental borders, acted as an incentive for the insertion of trans-state networks into activities associated with the management of Africa's external frontiers and its transformation into a global interface. Nigeria emerged as a hub for the transshipment of illicit drugs originating from Asia (opiates) and Latin America (cocaine) and re-exported towards the North American and European markets. By the end of the 1990s, US officials credited Nigerian and West African

criminal networks with 35 to 40% of all heroin coming into the US (Dagne 2001: 11). European drug fighting agencies also claimed in 1998 that Nigeria was a trans-shipment point for 40 to 60% of the world's heroin, at least a third of all cocaine consumed in Europe.¹⁷ There seemed to be no limit to the expanding range of activities that allegedly involved Nigerian transnational criminal networks. Today, Nigeria's emergence as a regional and global hub is casually mentioned in conjunction with the global reach of trans-state networks involved in oil theft, illicit drugs trafficking, commercial fraud, human trafficking and financial crime (Shaw 2002, Catan / Peel 2003: 1 + 11).

During the 1990s, dramatic depictions of the global and pervasive range of activities of Nigerian criminal syndicates went as far as to suggest that the African continent was ripe for capture by criminal networks and about to play a new and pivotal role in the illicit global economy. Widespread allegations simultaneously kept referring to the implication of the entourage of Nigerian military leaders in illicit activities, and more generally, to the emergence of a politico-criminal nexus characterized by

wholesale abuse of governmental power ... where[by] the Head of state rules and decrees much like the Head of an organized crime 'family', using criminal individuals and syndicates to loot his country (Ebbe 1999: 29).

The spoils drawn from power involved contract allocation, resource embezzlement, pilfering the assets of public corporations and parastatals until they went into bankruptcy or were dissolved (Ibid: 38). The internationalisation of fraud in conjunction with narco-trafficking, prostitution, trafficking in human beings including human parts, and financial fraud, including 419 letter scams - often required the complicity of key public office holders, through the use of legitimate Federal Government offices letter head paper. Yet, on 1st March 2000, US President Clinton communicated to Congress his decision to re-establish Nigeria's drug certification. His prime emphasis was on the need to bolster the country's democratic transition and protect US 'vital national interests'. Little sympathy was, however, expressed for what was described as Nigeria's ongoing role as

the hub of African drug trafficking [where] poly-crime organizations operate extensive global trafficking networks, dominate the sub-Saharan drug markets, ... account for a large part of the heroin imported into the United States ... [and] transport South American cocaine to Europe, Asia and elsewhere in Africa, especially South Africa (US Embassy in Nigeria 2000).

¹⁷ *The Times*, 29 June 1998: 21.

Nigeria, described until then as a criminal state in the making, was by the stroke of a pen transformed into a civilian elected regime confronted with criminality *within* the state.

Today, Nigeria's most sensitive area for enrichment relates to oil and its revenues. The discretionary award of oil blocks was common under military regimes and, despite Nigerian claims to transparency efforts, has continued under the fourth Republic (Mahtani: 2006). Nigeria's periodic shortages in petroleum may be attributed to crippled oil refineries due to negligence and neglect. They more realistically reflect on the valuable profits made by black marketeers and the special task forces meant to curb their activities. During the 1990s, the military and police officers who belonged to these task forces routinely received hefty sums for each tanker that was diverted to the 'unofficial market'. The system of corruption was so ingrained that, in Northern Nigeria, 'entire villages ... depended on the fuel shortages for their livelihood' (Maier 2000: 41-42). In Southern Nigeria, oil stolen from the Nigeria Delta and well-heads was estimated to range between 50,000 and 100,000 barrels per day in 2006.¹⁸ Transnational and international ramifications of such activities seem to be both pervasive and deeply ingrained in society:

In 2005, [notes the author of a recent study on Nigerian financial crime in the UK] ... a military officer, when asked if oil theft was done by local people, expatriates, military officers or government officials, replied simply: 'All' (Peel 2006: 20).

Conclusion

In several regions of the world, regionalisation goes hand in hand with institutional strategies or cognitive blueprints that aspire to reconcile domestic political concerns with regional or global pressure for adjustment. In West Africa, the ideals of region-building keep being undermined by fledging national commitments to ECOWAS programs. During the 1990s, Nigeria's emergence as a 'lead nation' during the ECOMOG interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone, was determined by regime survival problems, rather than national or regional interest. In stark contrast with the reified landscape of West African regionalism, trans-frontier networks carve *de facto* regional spaces that focus on Nigeria and remain largely independent from territorial affiliations. The resulting transformation of Nigeria into a hub takes place at the expense of its capacity to assume or assert leadership. The porosity of

¹⁸ A much mediatised side aspect to the presence of the oil industry in the Niger Delta is the booming industry of hostage taking and release in exchange for the payment of hefty ransoms.

boundary-lines exacerbates the fluidity of regional 'spaces' as much as problems of statehood and governance within Nigeria. These confer additional leverage to trans-state networks that permeate the Nigerian state and infiltrate the West African region. In this respect they contribute to bolster the country's asymptomatic combination of influence and resources with weak capacity for sustainable domestic or international policy orientations.

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Zusammenfassung

Seit der Unabhängigkeit war die nigerianische Außenpolitik tief geprägt von messianischen Bezügen auf eine natürliche Führungsrolle Nigerias in allen Angelegenheiten des afrikanischen Kontinents. Auf internationaler Ebene führten die Ausstattung des Landes mit menschlichen und natürlichen Ressourcen, seine zutiefst asymmetrischen Interaktionen mit Nachbarstaaten und das aktive Eingreifen aufeinander folgender Regime in die Angelegenheiten des Kontinents

dazu, dass Nigeria als Regionalmacht behandelt und ihm eine Schlüsselposition innerhalb Westafrikas zugewiesen wurde. Allerdings verbleibt die *manifest destiny* Nigerias eher auf der Ebene von Einflussnahme und weniger auf der von Machtausübung. Die unterschiedlichen Bestrebungen nigerianischer Regierungen, in der Region strukturelle oder relative Macht auszuüben, kontrastieren stark mit den tiefen regionalen Spuren grenzüberschreitender Netzwerke, die sich zwar auf Nigeria fokussieren, aber unabhängig von territorialen Verbindungen operieren. Die damit verbundene Regionalisierung erschwert den ohnehin fließenden und brüchigen Prozess des *region-building* und verstärkt die Staats- und Regierungsprobleme innerhalb Nigerias.

Schlüsselwörter

Nigeria, Staat, Außenpolitik, Regionale Zusammenarbeit

Résumé

Depuis l'indépendance du Nigeria, les références messianiques à un leadership naturel du pays dans la conduite des affaires africaines émaillent la conduite de sa politique étrangère. A l'extérieur du Nigeria, les ressources humaines et naturelles de la Fédération, la profonde asymétrie de ses rapports avec les Etats avoisinants et l'engagement actif de la plupart des régimes politiques dans les affaires du continent incitent à voir en la Fédération une puissance régionale et un Etat pivot pour l'Ouest africain. Néanmoins, la 'destinée manifeste' du pays continue de relever de l'influence plus que du pouvoir. Les limites quant à la transcription des capacités régionales en termes de pouvoir relationnel ou structurel contrastent fortement avec l'empreinte profonde de réseaux trans-étatiques qui prennent le Nigeria comme point d'ancrage mais reposent sur des affiliation cognitives. La transformation du Nigeria en un pôle régional à vocation globale contribue à exacerber la fluidité et la fragilité des espaces régionaux, sans parler des problèmes de construction étatique et de gouvernance au sein du Nigeria. Ceci contribue à consolider le fossé entre les potentialités qu'évoquent les ressources du Nigeria et la faiblesse des capacités de conversion en termes de pouvoir.

Mots clés

Nigeria, Etat, politique étrangère, coopération régionale

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