

Nigeria and South Africa's Bilateral Relations: Controversial Origin and Practice

Dr. Nnanyere Chukwu Ogo

*Department of History and International Relations
Ebonyi State University Abakaliki Nigeria*

Dr. Kenneth Igbo Nwokike

*Department of History and International Relations
Ebonyi State University Abakaliki Nigeria*

Abstract

The history of Nigeria and South Africa's relations has been marred by confusion and controversies especially, in ascertaining or tracing the origin of the bilateral relationship. The difficulty is occasioned, partly, by the fact that prior to Nigeria's independence, South Africa existed as an independent country. As Nigeria qualified to foray and indeed delved into international bilateral relationships, she chose countries of interest to relate with. While she interacted with many independent states (including African states) on mutual level based on the principle of sovereign equality, in South Africa, she engaged in a relationship with a segment of South Africans – the blacks – especially those in diaspora and initiated programmes that worked against the South Africa's apartheid administrations. By the rules of international engagement, could such relationship with black South Africans be regarded as the beginning of a bilateral relationship between Nigeria and South Africa? Can the black representatives Nigeria related with qualify to be called the government and people of South Africa? Between 1960 and 1994, was ANC and other nationalist movements in South Africa qualified to initiate bilateral relations on behalf of the South African people with Nigeria or any other country? To investigate the issues raised above, the study adopts primary and secondary sources of data collection while content analysis was employed as a tool of analysis. The work argues that, although international relations is changing to accommodate new actors, the conduct of bilateral relations among states is the exclusive reserve of governments acting on behalf of their states. Consequently, the work concludes that Nigeria's sectional relationship with the oppressed black South Africans from 1960 does not qualify to be the correct origin of Nigeria and South Africa's bilateral relations. Indeed, the relationship, according to the principles of International Relations, started in 1994 when both states initiated plans that subsequently matured to the institution or establishment of diplomatic presence in both states and the relationships thereto.

I. Introduction

The history of Nigeria and South Africa's bilateral relations

The history of Nigeria and South Africa's relations is somewhat difficult to trace. This is partly because before 1960 when Nigeria got her independence, South Africa had long participated in the international system as an independent state with British interests and presence in both countries. On the other hand, at independence, while Nigeria was instituting bilateral relations with countries that shared mutual interests, she declared war against apartheid South Africa that was oppressing the majority black South Africans. Such foreclosed every opportunity for a bilateral mutual relationship between the two countries. Thus, Nigeria pitched tent behind the black South African liberation movements. To that effect, the two governments refused to engage in a mutual bilateral relationship.

Meanwhile, the fact that Nigeria and South Africa did not have official bilateral relations did not mean that they had no foreign policies targeting each other, though as enemies. They never recognised each other as potential partners in Africa which was why there was no need for official bilateral relationship between them then. That means that Nigeria's involvement in South Africa's supposed domestic affairs was based mainly on her African policy principle and her pledge to ensure the liberation of all blacks everywhere in the world rather than the pursuit of selfish national interest. She did this through her assistances to the South Africa's outlawed liberation movements of ANC, PAC, etc. The assistance and support was seen by the apartheid regime as subversive moves against the state and as such was sufficient proof that Nigeria was not an ally or deserving a bilateral relationship with. However, on the contrary, Nigeria was convinced that her actions were right and just arguing that "it was the right thing to do. It was in our interest to do so" (Ogunsanwo 2010, 52) for the sake of the oppressed South Africans.

Nigeria and South Africa after 1960

Nigeria's relationship with South Africans, especially the representatives of the oppressed blacks and those that shared their vision, was based on the size and wealth at her disposal, and the willingness to use it to engage the world in Africa's interest as enshrined in her foreign policy principles and objectives that have direct link with the liberation struggle in Southern Africa. The Nigeria's foreign policy objectives in Africa include;

- defence of Nigeria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and national independence;
- creation of the necessary economic, political, social and cultural conditions to secure the independence of Nigeria and other African countries;
- promotion of the rights of all blacks and others under colonial administration;
- promotion of African integration and support for African unity;
- promotion of international cooperation for the consolidation of universal peace built on freedom, mutual respect among all nations, equality for all peoples of the world and elimination of discrimination in all its manifestations;
- promotion of a just world economic order (Balewa 1960; Egbo 2003, 36-37; Eke 2009, 13).
- total opposition to the practice of apartheid, racism, imperialism, neo-colonialism, and any form of discrimination against groups of individuals, wherever it may occur in the world (Ministry of External Affairs 1986, 57).

The above formed the bases upon which Nigeria related with the oppressed black South Africans. From the principles above, Nigeria jettisoned the idea of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other nations, a core principle written down in her constitution. Although Nigeria did not directly attack the apartheid government militarily, she worked against its economic, political, military, and diplomatic interests within the international system. She encouraged subversive agents against the state, provided military training to available South African citizens, provided logistic and material supports, and galvanised international support against the government as well as moral support to the oppressed blacks. Her support for the oppressed South Africans started as soon as she got independence in 1960 having earlier condemned strongly the Sharpeville massacre of 69 school children protesters in March 1960. In 1961, Nigeria championed the expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth and the International Labour Organisation (Garba 1987, 101; Akinboye 2005, 213). The Balewa era ushered in a protracted, strained, fragile and unfriendly relationship between Nigeria and the racist South Africa (Akinboye 2005, 213) while remaining open to the course of the oppressed black South Africans ready and willing to offer them assistance, moral and or material. This was why "Mandela came to Nigeria in February 1963 to beg for money to help in the struggle for the people of our country and he was given the needed support" (Mnguni 2016). In May 1976, Nigeria instituted the South African Relief Fund where Nigerians contributed to the course of the fight against apartheid in South Africa. After the Soweto massacres of June 1976, Nigeria "offered sanctuary to as many of the 'Soweto Kids' as could make their way to Nigeria and put them in schools and colleges and others ... [with the hope of mobilising] these 'kids' and others still in South Africa to further the acts of deviance against the regime" (Garba 1987, 103).

The Nigerian military government under Generals Mohammed and Obasanjo were the most aggressive in Nigeria's fight against racial domination and segregation in Southern Africa. In the OAU Extra-ordinary Summit of the Heads of State held in Addis Ababa, Nigeria's Mohammed declared that 'Africa has come of age'. Accordingly, he painted the image of the value attached to Africans by the West that demanded Africans rise to the challenge of fighting against apartheid thus:

First we call attention to the diabolical role of apartheid. ... is the perpetual subjugation of the African in order to create a paradise on earth for the white. When I contemplate on the evils of apartheid, my heart bleeds and I am sure the heart of every true blooded African bleeds. When we talk of these evils, we are assured of 'sympathy' of the Western countries, but when we call for sanctions to end this shame of Western civilisation, suddenly the glitter of gold in the form of high dividends becomes more convincing in consideration than the lives, liberty and wellbeing of Africans (Garba 1987, 102).

General Mohammed's speech set the aggressive mode with which apartheid policy was confronted by Nigeria till his assassination in a military coup d'état of February 1976. His second in command that took over government after his assassination, General Obasanjo, pursued the same aggressive foreign policy against apartheid in South Africa. Both leaders utilised every opportunity at their disposal to sensitive all humans against the evil of the policy on fellow Africans. Thus while hosting President Kaunda in 1977, Obasanjo re-emphasised the position of Nigeria on racial discrimination against Africans especially within Africa. According to him,

The Nigerian government and people are totally committed to the cause of freedom and respect for human dignity in Southern Africa, not simply for its own sake, but because we are convinced that African freedom is a sacred duty that must be done. ... in the pursuit of the objective, we shall not consider any sacrifice too great nor any weapon too mean to hasten the end of the oppression and injustice in South Africa and to ensure the total liquidation of apartheid, foreign domination and economic exploitation (Garba 1987, 102).

Consequently, the Mohammed/Obasanjo regime inaugurated the National Committee Against Apartheid (NACAP) and the South African Relief Fund (SARF) dedicated to the course of liberating the suffering Southern Africans from the clutches of foreign domination and oppressive policies in their fatherland. Nigeria provided travel documents to South African Exiles en-route to different parts of the globe to solicit support for our course (Zuma 2016). The subsequent Nigerian governments did not deviate from the policies of the Mohammed/Obasanjo administration till the sudden change of character by the Babangida administration when he introduced economic diplomacy that led to the relaxing of her stance of aggressive engagement to align with the Western constructive engagement and romance with the reformist apartheid regime of De Klerk.

The South African government, on the other hand, did not fold its hands to watch as her policies were being thwarted. Indeed, she developed many survival policies and programmes targeting the states and individuals working against her. Such policies and programmes were aimed at destabilising such states so that they were enmeshed in confusion and internal conflict while apartheid policy flourished. Equally, they used reward system to maintain and nurture the bond of friendship with those countries that accommodated them in Africa. That was why it was difficult for the Southern African Countries that depended on South Africa to implement the OAU/UN/Commonwealth sanctions against South Africa during the apartheid era without foreign aid. Even with aid, it was still very difficult to break away from the strongholds of the apartheid regime. The difficulty was due to the fact that “[a]bout 70 percent of Zimbabwe’s trade, 40 percent of Zambia’s and 75 percent of Malawi’s takes place with or through the republic. In the case of Botswana dependence is almost total and certainly above 90 percent, while Lesotho has no alternative outlet” (Gutteridge 1995, 137; Weisfelder, 1989). Many of them within the Southern African region suffered from the destabilisation policies of the South African regime (see Schraeder 2001, 229; Alden and le Pere 2003, 55).

In Western Africa, South Africa sought to establish military presence and influence in Equatorial Guinea to act as a destabilisation force against Nigeria, threatening her from close range. The action of the apartheid South Africa justified Gowon’s elevation of apartheid regime and other issues of “anti-colonialism from [mere] pan-Africanism to national security” (Bukarambe 2000, 106). Nigeria occupies a strategic geographic location, as a bridge between Central and West Africa and a gateway to the Sahelian hinterland, in addition to controlling an unstricted coastline off the Gulf of Guinea (Mwiti 2015) that she considers strategic to her national interest and security. Because the apartheid regime was using “destabilisation policy” as a survival strategy, Nigeria viewed apartheid and the strategy as evil. Consequently, she was convinced that an end to the destabilisation policy “required the destruction of apartheid” (Gelhenhuys 1997, 36). For becoming a base for direct threat to Nigeria from close range, many Nigerians called for “the invasion of Equatorial Guinea while the more radical elements advocated outright annexation” as a deterrent to others that collaborate with apartheid South Africa to undermine her security and that of the sub-region. However, the Nigerian government used astute wisdom to manage the threat, being mindful of her commitment to her neighbours never to seek territorial expansion or become a threat to their domestic security.

The Gulf of Guinea is important to Nigeria’s economic and strategic interest. It is for this reason that, rather than threaten or punish Equatorial Guinea for their action, Nigeria preferred to accommodate her, bearing in mind her policy never to be a threat to her neighbours as enshrined in her foreign policy principle for Africa, and rather offered her economic incentives and palliatives. Thus, between 1988 to 1990, she gave Equatorial Guinea “a \$10 million trade loan, a grant of \$5 million, and the financing of the construction of a hospital, polytechnic and an agricultural project” (Asobie 2002, 87) to ward-off the racist South African Government that wanted to use the country as a base to destabilise Nigeria’s security and economic interest in the sub-region.

The 1990s presented a different era in the Nigeria-South Africa relations. Two spectacular phenomena that affected both states between the late 1980s and early 1990s were at the centre of the dramatic change. The first was the end of the Cold War – the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the United States as the single dominant power in the system – a unipolar order though still under debate. The second was peculiar domestic factors that demanded both countries rethink their domestic economic policies to take advantage of the opportunities globalisation could offer Africa, especially since both countries were undergoing serious domestic economic challenges. By the late 1980s, South Africa’s isolation was so extensive “in terms of the areas affected, the severity of the sanctions imposed, and the number of foreign actors involved” (Gelhenhuys 1997, 38). The outcome was a significant boost to the already biting international sanctions against apartheid South Africa. In his Parliamentary speech in 1990, President De Klerk expressed more commitments to the move when he stated that in the new South Africa’s foreign policy, “[t]he season of violence is over; the time for reconstruction and reconciliation has arrived (Hasse 2001, 42). This was followed by the release of political detainees and prisoners including Nelson Mandela, who later emerged as the first black President of South Africa from the ANC party.

The decision to end apartheid was partly due to the biting economic hardship occasioned by the effects of the ostracism of South Africa by the international community that threatened the domestic economy. The effects led to “De Klerk’s reforms ...aimed at the international community in other to get them remove the sanctions imposed on South Africa and, therefore, lessen the attendant economic squeeze” (Udenta 2005, 28)

although some, like Campbell (2013) believed it was more political and humanistic than economic. The arguments notwithstanding, the obvious is that there were both domestic and international imperatives for policy reversals which demanded that the apartheid policy be abolished.

In Nigeria, a 'new' economic policy "economic diplomacy" was introduced as a result of the dwindling economic fortunes of the state which emphasised cooperation, accommodation and indeed the need to follow the lead of the United States and the West as a blueprint to economic recovery that the country was in dire need of. The policy was "the foreign policy component of the structural adjustment programme of the state" (Ogwu and Olukoshi 2002, 18) or simply "the diplomacy of economic development" (Asobie 2002, 49). Economic diplomacy became necessary due to domestic economic challenges caused by the inability of the Nigerian economy to withstand pressures by the international political economy which was the direct outcome of the Cold War politics (Obiozor 1993, 24; Ogwu and Olukoshi 2002, 15; Okogwu and Akpuru-Aja 2004, 94; Pine 2011).

The objectives of economic diplomacy were "the promotion of Nigeria's export trade, the attraction of foreign investment and fresh financial flows, and the rescheduling of the country's external debt, embracing foreign policy orientation that is non-confrontational, heavily pro-west, and which accepts without question the hegemony of the forces of imperialism (Ogwu and Olukoshi 2002, 18), i.e., deep involvement in the interplay of the capitalist international economy (Pine 2011). As it relates to Africa specifically, economic diplomacy was expected to open up business opportunities for Nigerians in other African countries, help formalise existing informal commercial links, and establish new channels (Obiozor 1993, 24). In its refined form, Nigeria "sought to deploy foreign policy to support and promote the economic development of Nigeria through job and wealth creation, empowerment and the development of critical infrastructure for the benefit of the Nigerian people" (Ashiru 2013). Economic diplomacy was justified on the basis that "Nigeria had pursued a foreign policy line that was too heavy on politics or in which the country's own needs and interests in terms of economic well-being were relegated to the background" (Ogwu and Olukoshi 2002, 17).

The new 'economic diplomatic' approach somehow contradicted Nigeria's preferred foremost African-centred foreign policy thrust premised on the 'Father Christmas' generosity model criticised by many as well as the non-alignment principle. It signalled an attempt to completely shed off the radical pan-Africanist elements in the country's post-colonial foreign policy in favour of conformism (Ogwu and Olukoshi 2002, 12-13), a deviation from, if not a negation of foreign policy devoted to the "total" liberation of Africa from foreign domination and exploitation (Asobie 2002, 109). However, Ike Nwachukwu, the major proponent of the policy as the Minister of foreign affairs denounced the idea, arguing that since the apartheid policy, as the last decolonisation effort in Africa, was already coming to an end, Nigeria had to "switch from the political thrust we placed on our foreign relations as the motive for economic development" (Ogwu and Olukoshi 2002, 20).

In essence, both Nigeria and South Africa were in need of economic, diplomatic and political recovery to be relevant in the new world order dominated by the United States. It is important to note that the sudden change of policy and approach in both countries was due to the dwindling economic fortunes of both countries. The relaxation of the aggressive African posture by Nigeria afforded her the opportunity to wiggle between the West as well as the apartheid South Africa undergoing change. It should be noted that Nigeria and the powerful Western states were at loggerheads over their policies towards the South African apartheid regime. However, with the economic woes torturing both Nigeria and South Africa, both countries relaxed their enemy status and started looking forward to working together for better opportunities that are of mutual interest. Thus, President de Klerk's strong interest at dismantling the apartheid regime found favour with the then Nigerian President and OAU Chairman, General Ibrahim Babangida, who offered him a face-saving landing to ensure that "[n]ot only were changes occurring in South Africa but also Nigeria was there every inch of the way to help the process" (Fawole 2003, 165; see Vale and Maseko 1998, 271). Consequently, a delegation from Nigeria led by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo visited South Africa, at the instance of Babangida, and in return, "De Klerk, who came with a 50-member entourage and his wife – Eunice in April 1992 was treated to a red-carpet reception" (Eke 2009, 135). This was the first visit by any South African leader (Fawole 2003, 165). While Nigerians were happy over the development having realised that "Nigeria's enjoyment of freedom and independence was impossible with the existence of apartheid on the continent" (Fawole 2003), the ANC and the PAC accused Nigeria of "handling the visit without their fore-knowledge" and thus "felt betrayed, abandoned and sacrificed for Nigeria's economic interest in South Africa" (Eke 2009, 134-136). That was part of the forces that sewed the seed of mistrust between Nigeria and the ANC that later formed the government in 1994. Nigeria's close relationship with the apartheid government in the early 1990s marvelled the ANC leadership and made them cast some doubt on the intentions of the Babangida administration.

The new disposition notwithstanding, Nigeria did not abandon the South African liberation course totally. Following the Boipatong Massacre in June 1992, Nigeria led the African group to successfully pressurise for a special meeting of the Security Council to discuss the peace process in South Africa (Adefuye 1993, 38) wherein Nelson Mandela and Pik Botha participated and addressed the meeting. The outcome was a renewed interest in South Africa's "peace process, making the progress towards the emergence of a non-racial

South Africa a pre-condition for dealing with the country” (ibid.). The relationship remained so till 1994 when Nelson Mandela was elected and installed as the first black President of South Africa.

As examined above, should the threats targeting each other and or Nigeria’s dealings with the liberation movements be regarded as the beginning of bilateral relations between Nigeria and South Africa? An answer to the question shall be located in the understanding of foreign policy and national interest and on which actor has the right to conduct and protect them as provided for in the 1648 Westphalia Treaty of statehood. To help in this analysis, it is important to examine, in brief, what foreign policy is. Foreign policy is the goal that officials representing states seek abroad, the values that underlie those goals, and the means or instruments used to pursue them” (Kegley and Wittkopf 1997, 40). It refers to specific decision making aimed at protecting, maximising, and promoting the prescribed national interest of the given state (Okolie 2009, 5). As a pragmatic process, foreign policy is seen as “the authoritative action, which governments take or are committed to take in order either to preserve the desirable aspects of the international environment or to alter its undesirable aspects” (Akinboye and Ottoh 2009, 116). From the definitions above, it is obvious that states and governments are central to the practice of foreign policy either on bilateral or multilateral bases. Therefore, bilateral relations of states are essentially an exclusive function of states and governments in their interaction with one another. Consequently, it would be right to argue that prior to 1994, there was no bilateral relationship between Nigeria and South Africa.

The relationship between Nigeria and South Africa prior to 1994 was not the correct historical origin of their bilateral relations. This is because bilateral relationship is an extension of foreign policy which is statecraft and must have officially instituted platform for mutual relations that both governments recognise and respect. Within the period 1960 – 1993, Nigeria’s foreign policy with South Africa, and *vice-versa*, was not on official state-to-state relations, even though by the early 1990s some official state to state relations had gradually begun but was not formalised. Hence, what existed between the two countries prior to 1994 was not the history of the bilateral relations between Nigeria and South Africa but rather the history of Nigeria in the liberation struggle of the oppressed black South Africans or the history of South Africa’s reaction to Nigeria’s involvement in her domestic affairs. This is because while Nigeria maintained relationship with the oppressed black South Africans, especially those in the Diaspora, she never maintained any relationship with the South African government. Similarly, the ANC and other liberation movements Nigeria related with lacked the trappings of sovereignty so as to have the capacity to relate with other states on equal basis. Also, the blacks and other liberation movements were not the only people that make up South Africa. They were others, the Whites and the Coloureds, whom they were not representing and whose interest Nigeria was not protecting. Finally, when there was some form of relationship between the Babangida and De Klerk’s governments, there was no official Nigerian Mission in South Africa and *vice versa*. Similarly, there was no exchange of diplomatic envoys either. Hence, there was no bilateral relation between the two countries. To that extent therefore, the Nigeria-South Africa bilateral relations started in 1994 when official bilateral exchange of relations for their mutual benefit and in the interest of Africa was established.

Nigeria and South Africa relations from 1994

General Abacha’s military government that would have corrected the perceived fear and mistrust in the relationship and launch Nigeria into a robust mutual bilateral relationship with South Africa missed the opportunity. What could have been the honeymoon in the Nigeria-South Africa bilateral relationship did not materialise because the Abacha’s military government was the opposite of what the “new South Africa” represented. Abacha was a military dictator in power in Nigeria when South Africa transformed into a multi-racial democracy. The differences notwithstanding, Nigeria sponsored a UNSC resolution to welcome South Africa back in the comity of nations (Games 2013, 11). Thereafter, Nigeria opened a consular office in Johannesburg that was later elevated to a full diplomatic mission in Pretoria while South Africa reciprocated the gesture by opening her mission in Nigeria. In essence, prior to 1990, Nigeria’s relation with South Africa was based on her foreign policy principle in Africa – that is, the liberation of all colonial and oppressed blacks within the African soil and in the diaspora, and not necessarily a deliberate attempt at having a bilateral relation that would be of mutual interest to both countries. This is the reason why their relationship, at that period, never enjoyed a bilateral engagement either in trade, military, diplomatic or even in ‘less important’ international engagements of cultural and religious relations. Therefore, all principles, programmes and policies targeting each other were those of foes or enemies and implemented as such. Thus, it was not until 21 February 1994 that “the first ever exchange of ambassadors between the erstwhile mortal enemies took place” (The Department of International Relations and Cooperation 2015; Fawole 2003, 165; Interviews- Nigeria High Commission Pretoria & South African Consulate-General, Lagos, 2017).

However, Abacha’s stance on democracy, human rights and relationship with the West (tooth-for-tat diplomacy) put him and Nigeria at odds with the stance of Nelson Mandela and South Africa. Rather than enjoy the benefits accruable to the highly celebrated integration of South Africa into the international community of respected countries, Nigeria deteriorated to very low ebb where she was seen and addressed as a “pariah and or

failed state". Indeed, Nigeria, under the military junta of General Sani Abacha, provided South Africa with its first foreign policy test (Ade-Ibijola and Ogo, 2020, P.51). After the inauguration of the new South Africa in 1994, against pressures of the West and notable Nigerians like Prof Wole Soyinka among others to mount pressure on the Nigerian government against its dictatorial policies against its people, South Africa chose "'quiet' and 'cautious' diplomacy and a 'strategy' of 'constructive engagement'" (Alden and Pere 2003, 22) in dealing with the Abacha regime. However, following the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight kinsmen, the (Ogoni Nine), by the Abacha government on the eve of the CHOGM at Auckland, Nelson Mandela championed the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth at the Commonwealth Head of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and the imposition of economic sanctions by the West against Nigeria. South Africa went an extra mile by recalling her High Commissioner to Nigeria and "insisted on the withdrawal of Nigeria's contestant to the Miss World Beauty Pageant hosted by Pretoria" (Agbu, Okereke, et al. 2013, 6). In reaction, Nigeria expressed disappointment with the position and action of South Africa on the matter and withdrew the Super Eagles, Nigeria's national football team, from defending the 1996 Africa Cup of Nations trophy in South Africa that they had won in 1994.

The inability of Mandela and South Africa to stop the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and his condemned kinsmen exposed South Africa to the difficulty of Africa's politics, especially when the major African powers are involved. It showed the difficulty in enforcing ethical foreign policy by a single hegemon in Africa and made it clear that no single country in Africa can project and protect its own interest in Africa or even Africa's interest expressed through African institutions alone (Van Aardt 1996, 114-115; Wyk 2002, 100; Barbar 2005, 1084). Indeed, "even his [Mandela's] iconic status failed to rally a single Southern African state to take action against Nigeria" (Adebajo 2008, 127). The OAU members ignored South Africa's call for sanctions against Nigeria describing it as "pro-western and un-African, ... 'not an African way to deal with an African problem'" (Alden and Le Pere 2003, 22) with Abacha accusing Mandela of meddling with the domestic affairs of Nigeria, describing President Mandela as "an old man who was fast losing touch with trends in world politics, especially after his twenty seven years' incarceration in prison" (Agbu, Okereke, et al. 2013). His unilateral stance without recourse to African structures ... proved to be a greater sin than the actions of the military dictator (Games 2013, 12) as he was accused by many African leaders of becoming "a Western 'Trojan horse', sowing seeds of division in Africa, and undermining African solidarity" (Adebajo 2008, 127). In response to this reality of African politics, "the ANC government toned down its public condemnation of undemocratic governments and explored alternative channels of promoting democracy" (Kagwanja 2009, 5) through institutional restructuring and capacity building as well as "working with like-minded African states" (ibid. 6).

The calm but uneasy situation between Nigeria and South Africa remained till the death of Abacha in 1998. His successor, General Abubakar, tried to bring Nigeria back to the international respectable countries among the comity of nations. He initiated talks with South Africa and other western states, promising "a quick handover of power to a democratically elected government; and improvement on the country's poor human rights record" (Akinboye 2005, 219). A show of commitment to keep the promise made Mandela offer to assist Nigeria in the transition exercise. By 1999, the promise was kept following the inauguration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as a Nigerian civilian President. Mandela attended the inaugural ceremony in May 1999 while Obasanjo attended Mbeki's inauguration in June the same year, setting the pace for the removal of the ideological impediments/obstacles impinging on the cordial bilateral relationship between the two powerful African states.

The new relationship fashioned was strengthened by the fact that Presidents Thabo Mbeki and Olusegun Obasanjo had known each other at a personal level before ascending the exalted positions. Of importance too is that "both have shared interests in the advancement of capital, which of course have brought about the free movement of capital between the two states" (Ibeanu *et al.* 2007, 36). Both were equally interested in the prosperity of the African continent and connected to the international western capitalist ideology and elites which conditioned their preference for democracy and good governance as the panacea to Africa's underdevelopment and fight against corruption and conflict. Their personal relationship and shared knowledge/ ideas helped in building and nurturing the beleaguered bilateral relationship that metamorphosed into a strategic partnership in their interest, bilateral interest, Africa's interest, and by extension the global capitalist interest led by the United States. To this effect, both countries identified each other as strategic partners in their individual country's development programmes (NEEDS and GEAR respectively) as well as the African development agenda through AU and NEPAD.

In his bicycle analysis of South Africa's foreign policy in Africa and strategies for its realisation, Adebajo (2008, 121) identified five hub-countries important for South Africa's bilateral relations in Africa, Nigeria inclusive. He saw Nigeria as "South Africa's most important bilateral relationship in Africa" (Adebajo 2008, 126) on account of the philosophies and interests that they share in common, and their capacity and zeal for the realisation of such principles and interest at the national and continental levels. However, in marked contrast with the activist disposition of the Obasanjo and Mbeki era from which perspective, their successors, Jonathan and Zuma were seen as "weak, indecisive leaders whose foreign policy engagement on African issues

has lacked the vision that characterised the collaboration in the early 2000s" (Bello and Hengari 2013). Under their leadership, their bilateral relations descended to the lowest ebb with both of them embarking on state visit to each other's countries once in three years even when it was apparent that "when Nigeria and South Africa cooperate, they are more likely to deliver continental public goods, including economic development, peace and security" (ibid.) issues that form part and parcel of their individual national interests. The relationship may improve during the Buhari and Zuma times going by both Presidents' disposition to re-invigorating the bilateral relationship.

II. Conclusion

This paper argues that the history of Nigeria and South Africa's bilateral relations started in 1994 and not in 1960. Tracing the history to 1960 or any other time is to distort the course of history. This is because bilateral relations is a product of two independent states through their governments or accredited representatives. Also, they must have institutionalized framework for the conduct and evaluation of the bilateral relationship. Prior to 1994, Nigeria and South Africa had no such mechanism. The understanding is important for both the governments and peoples of Nigeria and South Africa. For Nigeria, the eternal debt she believes South Africa owes it would be reduced as she would understand and appreciate that she only related and helped a segment of South Africans and not the entire South African people prior to General Babangida administration's diplomatic overture to South Africa. Such would be of relevance in crafting and maintaining the current bilateral relations that exist between both states towards working for the realization of their mutual interests at an equal basis. Finally, with this paper, we believe that the correct history of the bilateral relations between Nigeria and South Africa, Nigeria and the black South Africans have been correctly written.

End Notes

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