

DIPLOMATIC SHRINE AND THE RE-INVENTION OF NIGERIA-FRANCE BILATERAL RELATIONS

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Abstract

Historically, Nigeria and France cannot be said to have enjoyed a robust and cordial relations. Two incidences support this assertion, the first was the diplomatic face-off between both countries when France tested an atomic bomb in Africa against Nigeria's protest while the second manifested in France's support for Biafra during the Nigeria-Biafra crisis in 1966 and beyond. It is also on record that France had once worked tirelessly towards the dismemberment of Nigeria as a result of the competition for influence between both countries over the Francophone West African States. This paper examines the twists and turns of the relations between both countries in the wake of the recent visit by Emmanuel Macron, France's President to Nigeria. Qualitatively driven and relying on the secondary sources of data, the paper observed that Macron's visit has added some value to the relations between both countries given the peculiar nature of that visit. It equally averred that Macron's visit to the legendary Fela Anikulapo's Afro Beat New Afrika shrine in Ikeja, Lagos is not only a reinvention of their bilateral relations but has greatly changed the relations between the two countries, with France now exploiting other areas of developmental cooperation in Nigeria. The paper recommended the need for Nigeria to redesign her priorities in the wake of the new found love between both countries, align to the evolving economic diplomacy of France in order to reap its benefits, create an enabling environment for French multinational corporations to invest in the diverse sectors of the economy among others. The paper concluded that both countries have much to gain from each other in this new found cooperation between them.

Key Words: Diplomatic Shrine, Re-invention, Bilateral Relations, Nigeria, France.

Introduction

Nigeria's past relationship with France has always been a difficult one. It is even on record that France had once worked tirelessly towards the dismemberment of Nigeria (Nwokedi, 2006). At the centre of the enmity between the two countries was the competition to

exercise influence over Francophone West African states. France was determined to ensure control over the affairs of these countries, even after their independence. It perceived Nigeria as its main 'rival' in this objective, especially because Nigeria was intent on achieving a form of regional integration that would exclude erstwhile colonial masters. This ultimately resulted in Nigeria championing the cause of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Alao, 2011).

In the last decade, however, relations between Nigeria and France have improved. This progress is the result of the slight shift in French policy towards its former West African colonies. France's former deep interest in the affairs of the colonies significantly decreased with its decision to turn its attention towards the former Soviet Union, and away from its former African colonies. In a major strategic move that began under President Jacques Chirac and which has been pursued by President Nicholas Sarkozy, economic interests, rather than historical sentiments, are now key to French foreign diplomacy. Consequently, its former African colonies have slipped down the French priority list (Omole cited in Alao, 2011). Indeed, former President Chirac's visit to Nigeria in July 1999 was the first by a foreign head of state to the country after its return to democratic rule. President Obasanjo returned the visit in February 2000. Relations between the two countries rose to the level of strategic partnership in June 2008, when late President Yar'Adua visited France (Alao, 2011).

Trade links between Nigeria and France have improved considerably and Nigeria has welcomed French multinational investors. Nigeria is the largest recipient of French exports and its second-largest trading partner in Africa. France is also Nigeria's second largest foreign investor. French companies in Nigeria are mainly in the fields of oil and gas, automobile and construction industries (Ekong, 2014). The most prominent of these include Total, LaFarge and Peugeot.

As a matter of fact, relations between Nigeria and France have seen unprecedented development since 2014, relating in particular to the fight against the Boko Haram terrorist threat. Following the Boko Haram kidnapping of more than 200 schoolgirls in Chibok in April 2014, a Summit for Security in Nigeria was held on 17 May 2014 in Paris and brought together the Heads of State of Nigeria, Benin, Cameroon, Niger and Chad, and representatives of the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union. Our relations have since intensified, as demonstrated by the signing of new agreements in areas including culture, education, security and defence, as well as numerous visits.

Nigerian President Buhari made France his first bilateral visit to Europe, making an official visit to Paris from 14 to 16 September 2015. President François Hollande visited Nigeria twice during his term, once in May 2016, when he co-chaired the second Regional Security Summit in Abuja on the Lake Chad Basin, and again in February 2014 to celebrate the centenary of the country's foundation. Several ministerial visits have taken place in both directions. The then Minister of Defence, Jean-Yves Le Drian, visited Abuja on 28 April 2016, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development, Laurent

Fabius, on 29 May 2015 for the inauguration of President Buhari, along with his German counterpart (France Diplomatie, 2018). With €3.6 billion in bilateral trade in 2017, Nigeria remains France's leading trading partner in sub-Saharan Africa (i.e., 20% of our market share in sub-Saharan Africa in 2017). Our exports (€1.07 billion in 2017) are diversified: refined petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, mechanical, electric, electronic and computer equipment, and agrifood products, while our imports (€2.48 billion in 2017) are mainly made up of petroleum products. Nigeria remains France's fifth-largest supplier of natural hydrocarbons and the leading supplier in sub-Saharan Africa. The stock of French FDI in Nigeria was €6.5 billion in 2016 (Banque de France), the second largest stock of French Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Africa after Morocco (France Diplomatie, 2018).

The above improvement in the relations between Nigeria and France seemed to have reached a crescendo with the two day visit in July 2018 of French President Emmanuel Macron to Nigeria. Apparently his first visit to the country as President, Macron had earlier in 2002 spent six months in the country as an intern at the French embassy. On arrival in Nigeria Macron held talks and addressed a joint news conference with Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari where he stated his commitment to helping Nigeria in the fight against Islamist militants in the Northeast. The high point of Macron's visit which is also the main focus of this paper remains his visit to the New Afrika shrine in Lagos.

It followed that Macron had visited the Shrine, a nightclub founded by legendary Afrobeats musician, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, during his stint in Nigeria as an intern. The venue is now run by Fela's children Femi, Seun and Yeni Anikulapo-Kuti. No global leader has ever visited the Shrine, nor indeed any Nigerian president. The Shrine is the kind of place Nigerian parents warn their children about, a nightspot that is synonymous with wafts of marijuana smoke, gyrating back up dancers and the pulsating sounds of the Afrobeat music popularized by Fela Anikulapo Kuti.

In fact, one can only imagine the groans from the security team at the Elysee Palace in Paris when the choice of venue was announced. The club is in an area in Lagos that most overseas visitors hurriedly drive through. Some foreign diplomats and ambassadors are not even permitted by their countries to visit the mainland of Lagos unless they are driving through to the only airport in the city. But Macron seemed keen to revisit the haunts of his internship days and a night of culture celebrating the best that Nigeria has to offer was put on display for his benefit.

From all indication, the French President savored the night with relish having loosened up from the trappings of not only a Very Important Personality (VIP) but that of a President of one of the most powerful countries in the world. The visit and all that went with it became a sort of reinvention and rejuvenation of the bilateral relations between both countries and energizes us to examine the relations between both countries in the wake of this visit. Nigeria and France cannot until recent years be said to have enjoyed a robust, cordial and friendly relations between them. The reasons for this seeming thaw in their relations over time are not farfetched. First, Nigeria severed her diplomatic relations

with France in 1961 when France tested an atomic bomb in the Sahara Desert. The action was against the firm warning by Nigeria having observed that the test was going to be injurious to Nigeria and some other African countries. Thus, Nigeria imposed stern economic measures on France, first banning all ship movements of French origins from navigating the coastal areas of Nigeria. However, these stringent decisions were reversed because of the negative impacts on many neighbouring countries like Senegal, Togo, Benin and others which had massive economic dependencies on France (Boge, 2017::25).

Secondly, France supported the defunct secessionist Republic of Biafra during the crisis between Eastern Region and the federal government which resulted in the 30 month civil war between 1967 and 1970 relying on the logistics provided by both Ivory Coast and Gabon. However, it must be stated that despite her support for the Biafra, France did not pronounce a formal recognition for Biafra. French support for the Biafra is understandable; one Nigeria (because of her large size and economic potentials) remained a constraint to France political and economic dominance in West Africa. Again, the stringent policies that were imposed on France after the atomic test were regarded as an affront on French status as a Superpower. Thirdly, France has never hidden her fears of Nigeria's leadership role in the continent and particularly the country's over bearing influence in West Africa which is home to most of the Francophone countries. This has led to a lot of suspicion between both countries in their bid for the control of French West African countries.

However, there seems to be some respite from this brinkmanship since 2014 when President François Hollande visited the country on the invitation of then President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and repeated same on the 14th of May, 2016 where he attended the regional security summit, this time under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari who also reciprocated on the 14th-16th September, 2015 with an official state visit to France on the invitation of President Hollande. This tie was further strengthened by the assumption of leadership of President Emmanuel Macron of France in 2017, a development which heralded a new beginning in the relations between both countries as both presidents have exchanged diplomatic visits at official levels between 2015 and 2018. The visit of President Emmanuel Macron to Nigeria in July 2018 signaled the high point of the relationship between both countries and has left an indelible mark in their bilateral relations. It has also served not only as rejuvenation but a reinvention of their bilateral relations. The problem here therefore, is that this new found cordial and friendly relations should be documented for posterity with a view to highlighting the strategic importance of their bilateral cooperation. This paper remains one of such attempt.

Additionally, extant literature on Nigeria-France relations focused on such issues as the relationship between both countries at the inception of Nigeria's independence (Fawole, 2003, Nwokedi 2006), the history of their relationship (Aluko 1981, Ukaogo 2003), Nigeria's relations with global powers of which France is one of the key players (Bamgbose, 2003, Aworawo 2003), old friends and new friends in Nigeria's external relations (Boge 2017, Alao 2011). But none has focused on the unfolding and new found

relationship between Nigeria and France particularly the celebrated visit of President Emmanuel Macron to the country. That gap is what this paper attempts to fill.

The Theory of Interdependence: A Framework for Analysis

This study adopts the theory of interdependence as a theoretical framework because of its close link with our subject of study. Here, Nigeria and France are caught in the web of globalization which has greatly reduced the world to a global village and strengthened the need for effective cooperation and collaboration between them as well as the greater need to depend on one another, the very realities of globalization. Interdependence connotes the joining of two words, "inter" and "dependence" to mean a single thing. Whereas "inter" denotes mutual relationship between two or more things, "dependence" refers to a situation in which an effect is contingent on or conditioned by something else or a relationship of subordination whereby one thing needs the support of another or in fact must rely upon the later in order to fulfill certain functions (Carporaso, 1978:18). When 'inter' and 'dependence' are joined together as interdependence they refer to a mutual relationship of dependence in which two or more things depend on one another to fulfill certain goals. The goals of the units of international society include the survival of these units, security, world peace, ecological stability, economic stability and human rights. All these evoke the notions of planetary earth politics, the politics of spaceship among others (Echezona, 1998:74).

Ordinarily, interdependence means to rely on one another as different from dependence. It entails some elements of mutual benefits between actors that inter-relates. In world politics, it implies that actors are inter-related or connected such that whatever happens to at least one actor, on at least one occasion, in at least one place, will affect all the actors. Thus, in any given system of relations, the more actors, the more places and the more occasions, the greater the interdependence (Evans and Newnham, 1998:257).

According to Keohane and Nye (1977:54), interdependence always implies insensitivity, in the short term at least. Hence, the above definition is congruent. Whether all actors in a system are affected equally will define whether the interdependence is symmetrical or not. Symmetry is usually seen as a benchmark against which actual instances may be judged. In reality it is not likely to be perfect. Conversely, if one actor in a system is relatively indifferent about some change in the relationships while another is crucially affected by it, then the interdependence is asymmetric. This can lead to a highly vulnerable position which is again recognized by the duo as a longer term and structurally determined effect of interdependence which bears a strong family resemblance to power analysis.

Interdependence emerged as a reaction to the realist school of thought and was strongly influenced by the emergence of trade deficits after 1970, where the rapid post war spread of multinational corporations, and the oil crisis of 1973-4 led to a reaction from many liberal political scientists in the United States of America against the strong emphasis placed in the dominant realist school of international relations upon the centrality of the

state and the relative autonomy of its military and political power from social and economic pressures (Mclean and Macmillan, 2003:266). It was also seen as an insurance against any collapse of Western security and the international economy that might follow a post-Vietnam decline in the US hegemony, since it was argued that cooperative international regimes might outlast the dominant power that had instigated them (Mclean and Macmillan, 2003:266).

Although ideas about interdependence became very fashionable during the 1970s, more discerning writers recognized that interdependence, as a characteristic of relationships, could be identified with one of the most, persistent features of the state system, alliance. It is quite clear that activities of ally seeking alliance construction presage interdependence. In the alliance situation, the degree of interdependence will depend upon how much the allies need each other and how dependent they are upon each other's capability to meet the external threat. In the twentieth century, recognition of the importance of interdependence in military and security issue areas was taken a stage further with the idea of collective security. Linked with the concept of interdependence, collective security manifested in the establishment of a security regime which became more organized than the traditional alliance with the notion of 'attack on one being an attack on all'.

Interdependence leads to greater interconnectedness, greater financial and military interdependence while the large flow of capital across national boundaries makes national economies sensitive to one another. Cost of transportation decreased as national economies become integrated, the horizon of businessmen broadened with their increased willingness to deal with global market. These developments have made it difficult for nation-states to maintain their character or identity. Interdependence has therefore become a threat to the sovereignty of states. Today, the notion of a "global village" and even transnationalism are propagated which gives impetus to the fact that no nation is entirely self-sufficient as to remain an island unto itself, as it must depend on others just as they depend on it to fulfill its functions in an international society that turned global in human history. These according to Echezona (1977:38) form the bedrock of the notions of interdependence in political science literature.

The above scenario goes for the relationship between Nigeria and France as both seem to enjoy some level of mutuality propelled by their inter-connectedness with the assistance of globalization. Although most scholars argue that the relationship between Nigeria and France is lopsided as France tends to have an edge over Nigeria in terms of derivable benefits, there is no contradiction in the assertion that they are mutually benefitting from each other. Thus, increasing interdependence of states in the international system has increased the level of cooperation between and amongst states and both Nigeria and France cannot be an exception. This makes the theory of interdependence most suitable as a theoretical framework for this study.

However, while interdependency sees cooperation as a necessary tool in the world system in view of the advance in technology and the common heritage of mankind, it also imposes some constraints on actors. Being sensitive and vulnerable to the actions of other international actors places limits on what any state is able and willing to do which could portend positive or negative consequences. They can lead to struggle, conflict and war or to even greater cooperation and stable areas of peace.

Nigeria and France: Smoothing Diplomatic Rough Edges Before 2018

Nigeria's bilateral relations with France have seen unprecedented development since 2014, relating in particular to the fight against the Boko Haram terrorist threat. Following the Boko Haram kidnapping of more than 200 schoolgirls in Chibok in April 2014, a Summit for Security in Nigeria was held on 17 May 2014 in Paris which brought together the Heads of State of Nigeria, Benin, Cameroon, Niger and Chad, and representatives of the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union. Their relations have since intensified, as demonstrated by the signing of new agreements in areas including culture, education, security and defence, as well as numerous visits.

Nigeria is the leading exporter of oil and related products to France. In recognition of this, President Sarkozy pledged that Agence France de Développement would increase the line of credit available to Nigerian and French companies conducting business in the country. France has always had more economic interests in Nigeria than in all other Francophone West African countries put together. As of April 2011, bilateral trade between Nigeria and France had reached 5.5 billion Euros (Embassy of France, 2015).

In a somewhat ironic twist France, which had formerly tried to ensure that Nigeria did not interfere in the internal affairs of other Francophone West African countries, later encouraged it to find ways of bringing other West African countries together to address the instability in Côte d'Ivoire. The constitutional impasse that ultimately occurred as a result of former President Gbagbo's refusal to step down after losing the election resulted in greater collaboration between Nigeria and France. Both countries maintained a resolute position that Gbagbo should respect the wishes of Ivorians. Current Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan and French President Sarkozy seem to have established a good friendship. This was reflected in the Nigerian leader's invitation to attend the 25th Africa-France Summit in Nice, in May 2010. This attained the desired result with the swearing in of Côte d'Ivoire's President Ouattara in May 2011. Apart from Nigeria's relations with Western global powers, it is also important to assess the country's relations with Russia (Alao, 2011:14).

In their cultural, scientific and technical cooperation, France's regional economic service, which is based in Abuja and Lagos, supports French businesses in Nigeria, with the aid of the Business France office which opened in Lagos in January 2016 while approximately 120 French businesses are active in Nigeria. Nigeria is home to an Institut Français (French Institute) in Abuja. There is also a French Institute for Research in Africa

(IFRA) branch based in Ibadan, three Centres for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD) in Ibadan, Jos and Enugu; ten Alliances Français offices in Lagos, Ibadan, Port-Harcourt, Owerri, Enugu, Jos, Kano, Maiduguri, Kaduna and Ilorin; a French school (Lycee) in Lagos, another one in Abuja and a business school in Port Harcourt. In 2016, France welcomed 419 Nigerian students while two campus France offices, in Abuja and Lagos, provide information, support and monitoring for applications from students wishing to continue their studies in France. A French education fair is equally organized in Lagos every year (France Diplomatie).

Similarly, the Agence Française de Développement (AFD, French Development Agency) is also developing its activities in the country, where it has committed almost €2 billion since 2010. Its commitments in 2016 totalled €315.6 million. Its activities are focused on three priority sectors: urban development, support for family farming and SMEs, and energy. The AFD has also launched an initiative for Lake Chad in the value of €36 million and €31 million respectively from the European Union Emergency Trust Fund (France Diplomatie).

In the 14th May, 2016 visit of President Hollande to Nigeria, that morning of May 14 was devoted to the bilateral part of the visit, and the afternoon to the summit, where President Holland was the only Western Head of State and which was following the Paris Summit of May 2014. The two Heads of State then chaired an enlarged meeting, attended by the Chief of Staff of the President, Abba Kyari, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Finance, Science and Technology, and the National Security Adviser. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Geoffrey Onyeama, presented the progress made in the bilateral relationship in recent times, especially since the official visit of President Buhari to Paris in September 2015. He evoked the increased French investments in various sectors of the Nigerian economy. He especially thanked President Hollande for France's commitment in the fight against international terrorism and for taking the initiative of organizing in Paris in May 2014, the first regional summit for security, which allowed successes against Boko Haram and which the Abuja meeting served as a follow up (Embassy of France, 2016).

In a similar vein, the French Defense Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, who accompanied President Hollande, reported on his visit to Abuja on 28 April, 2016 and the first meeting of the High Defence Committee, whose creation was decided by the two Presidents in September 2015. According to him, he could deepen together with his Nigerian counterpart, General Dan Ali, the strategic dialogue on the problems of the Lake Chad Basin as well as piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. Important decisions were taken about cooperation matters (continued support to the FMM, many training actions in favor of the Nigerian armed forces, support for better use of intelligence, joint reflection on the equipment of forces, establishment of two military advisors). The two Ministers had also signed a letter of intent which should result in the forthcoming signing of an intergovernmental agreement. Mr Le Drian stressed the importance of this agreement, which will facilitate the future cooperation between Nigeria and France. He also reiterated

the importance of Yaoundé process, so that regional cooperation would restore security in the Gulf of Guinea ((Embassy of France, 2016).

At the end of the bilateral meeting five key agreements were signed. These include: (i) An agreement on cultural cooperation, science and technology, modernizing a previous agreement and signed by the Nigerian Foreign Minister and the Ambassador of France. (ii) A memorandum of understanding between the AFD and the Nigerian Ministry of Finance laying down the framework for the expansion of concessional lending activities of the AFD in three areas of energy, urban infrastructure, SMEs and agriculture signed by the Nigerian Finance Minister and the Executive Director of AFD operations (iii) A loan agreement (46.2 MUS\$) between AFD and the Nigerian government to develop vocational training in the power sector signed by the Nigerian Minister of Finance and the Executive Director of AFD operations (iv) A loan agreement (MUS\$ 100) between AFD and Zenith Bank. The objective being to enable Zenith Bank to grant more favorable loans to power distribution companies (Discos). This was signed by the President of Zenith Bank, Jim Ovia and the Executive Director of AFD operations (v) A joint venture agreement between Dansa Food (Dangote Group) and the French company Nutriset to produce in Nigeria specialty foods to fight against ill-nutrition. This was signed by Mr. Sani Dangote, Executive Director of Dangote Group and Isabelle Lescanne, CEO of Onyx Development (Embassy of France, 2016).

Prior to these agreements, President Buhari had given a background to the situation of insurgency and Boko Haram activities even after the 2014 Paris summit. According to him, Boko Haram controlled cities, massacring people and forcing them to flee to neighboring countries with the abduction of the more than 200 Chibok school girls as the peak of the insurgency. He added that the Paris summit made it possible to set up regional coordination for military interventions and intelligence sharing. President Buhari also acknowledged the progress made since the 2014 Paris summit and observed that two years after the summit remarkable progress have been made as Boko Haram, the deadliest terrorist group in the world, even before Daesh, lost its control on almost all its territory. Partners had to go on and stand together against the insurgency, which was still a threat, although weakened. France had provided logistical support for intelligence, weapons and training. She had also spent € 17 million in humanitarian aid to the region to cope with the situation and to be able to provide for 2.5 million displaced persons, 200,000 refugees and 4.5 million people in food insecurity (Embassy of France, 2016).

For President Buhari, it was heartwarming that the international community had to take concrete action to rebuild health centers and water points and as well focus on education and youth empowerment. President Buhari concluded by praising President Hollande as "a friend of Africa". Other Heads of State have each in turn stressed how the Paris Summit in 2014 had changed the situation. They thanked France for her efforts to bring peace in Nigeria and elsewhere in West and Central Africa (Embassy of France, 2016).

Equally, President Buhari's official visit to Paris France, from September 14th to 16th, 2015 yielded some positive results. The two leaders discussed bilateral, regional, international and global issues, reaffirmed their commitment to their bilateral relations and agreed to strengthen their partnership in diverse areas. Under security and defense, the two countries agreed to set up between the two Ministries of Defence, a high-level defence committee on operational, strategic, arms and defence cooperation, a development which illustrates a shared intention to work towards stability in Nigeria and the region. Building on the Paris Summit for Security in Nigeria held in May 2014, both countries agreed to work together to combat the terrorist group Boko Haram, and highlighted the importance of regional and international cooperation in order to eradicate its threat. France pledged to continue to assist Nigeria and its neighbours in terms of intelligence sharing, training and logistics while they agreed also that a follow-up meeting to the Paris Summit be held in May, 2016 (Embassy of France, 2015).

France reiterated her support for Nigeria's efforts to find a durable solution to the security and development problems not only in the North East, but also other regions, so as to offer development gains to all its citizens. With regard to bilateral cooperation, the two countries agreed to strengthen their efforts to combat maritime insecurity, especially piracy and oil theft in keeping with the objectives established at the Élysée Summit and the principles agreed at the Yaoundé Summit. Presidents Buhari and Hollande welcomed the organization of the Dakar International Forum on Peace and Security in Africa on 9-10 November 2015. They felt that the Forum, organized by the Senegalese Government with France's support, will be an excellent opportunity to exchange views on the security challenges affecting the continent and plan ways to resolve them (Embassy of France, 2015).

In the economic field, France and Nigeria reaffirmed their intention to capitalize on the many business opportunities that are opening up in various sectors of activity, to ensure they are mutually beneficial as a source of growth and employment in both countries. To this end, the inauguration, during President Buhari's visit, of the Franco-Nigerian Joint Trade and Investment Council will provide French and Nigerian stakeholders with a forum for dialogue and cooperation and enable them to build partnerships. The opening of a Business France office in Lagos was discussed with an agreement to finalize same as a means of encouraging the presence of French businesses in Nigeria and Nigerian investments in France (Embassy of France, 2015).

France welcomed the commitment of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in combating corruption and offered to support the fight against money laundering, oil theft and piracy, as well as assistance in capacity building for better debt management and domestic resources mobilization. Furthermore, France pledged to help in the efforts to diversify the Nigerian economy. Both countries looked forward to the signing of two new funding agreements with the Agence Française de Développement (French Development Agency, AFD), to support Nigeria. The two sides acknowledged that since 2013, AFD has

committed a total of €380 million in Nigeria and confirmed their commitment to the increased support of AFD in Nigeria (Embassy of France, 2015).

In the sphere of **cultural, educational, science and technology cooperation**, France and Nigeria, taking into account current global realities, agreed to review, without delay, the 16th May 1984 agreement on Cultural, Educational, Science and Technology Cooperation. The two countries acknowledged the importance of this agreement and pledged their commitment to take necessary steps to realize its objectives. France welcomed Nigeria's commitment to expand the teaching of French language in Nigerian educational institutions with a pledge to support this effort. Other areas of cooperation included judicial and climate issues. Under judicial, France and Nigeria welcomed the successful discussions held in the field of mutual legal assistance in criminal matters and affirmed their resolve to enable the entry into force of the agreement signed in May 2009 in this regard. For climate matters and in preparation for the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, France and Nigeria committed to work together to ensure a successful outcome of the Conference of the Parties (COP21), in particular, the adoption of a legal instrument under the Convention with an effective date applicable to all parties (Embassy of France, 2015).

Aside from the above France has also intervened in several states in Nigeria. For instance, the Bus Rapid Transit system in Lagos was a project sponsored by the French Government. The BRT is partly an eco-driven project, conceived to safeguard the environment by cutting down on carbon emitted through heavy traffic. It is a "smart and green city" project. France is also involved in the rehabilitation of the North East. It is to the understanding of the French government that there is a nexus between Boko Haram and climate change. Thus, she observed that when Lake Chad dried up as a result of worsening global warming, the many youths who up till then depended on the economic activities that sprouted around the expansive lake for survival, found themselves without jobs; and therefore became easy prey for violent extremist recruiters. It therefore had to design and began implementing an initiative to rehabilitate the region after it had inspired Lake Chad Basin countries to launch a joint military offensive against Boko Haram (Odogwu, 2017).

France if nothing else has been at the forefront of the fight against Boko Haram in the country. This much was acknowledged by Odogwu (2017) when he stated that "once upon a time Boko Haram controlled a territory in Nigeria which could easily form the borderlines of a sovereign country, our soldiers were overwhelmed, our neighbours were not cooperating, and the Western nations did not intervene. That was when France rose to the occasion and donned a garb of defiance and summoned us for a war conference". Then President Francois Hollande hosted the regional summit on security in Paris in 2014, which brought together then President Goodluck Jonathan, and his counterparts from Benin, Cameroon, Niger and Chad. He further observed that at end of the summit, the regional powers agreed to "wage war" on Boko Haram. They pledged to share intelligence and co-

ordinate action against the terror sect, which defined the later successes gained by the Nigerian Army over the insurgents. A remarkable strategy was the “hot pursuit” action-plan, whereby soldiers from each neighbouring country were at liberty to extend their incursions into the other countries when engaging retreating insurgents. Odogwu (2017) concluded that today, as Boko Haram is increasingly becoming “technically downgraded”, France is leading an infrastructural rehabilitation of the region in a €38m grant project (French contributes €8m while the EU contributes €30m).

The Shrine of Diplomacy, Macron’s Visit and the Reinvention of Nigeria-France Relations

The new Afrika Shrine in Ikeja, capital of Lagos State played host to Emmanuel Macron, the President of France who undertook a two-day official visit to Nigeria in July 2018. The shrine is the newly built version of the former “Kalakuta Republic”, a nightclub founded by legendary Nigerian Afrobeat star Fela Anikulapo Kuti, burned down by the military and which had a reputation as a hedonistic haven filled with frenetic music, scantily clad podium dancers and the stench of marijuana smoke. It had built a reputation of a spot that should be dreaded by parents who would not hesitate to warn their wards of the need not to be seen in such a spot. Of course, if ordinary Nigerians are wary of the activities in the shrine, it can be imagined what kind of perception the shrine poses in the diplomatic circle. However, for Macron, that was not his first contact as he had earlier visited the club when he served as an intern in the French Embassy in Lagos many years back.

Today, the new Afrika Shrine, a hitherto dark spot with a bad reputation has found its way into diplomatic lexicon as it has demystified the serenity and candor of diplomacy having served as a medium for serious diplomatic exchanges between Nigeria and France. It has evolved in history as a place where foreign policy actions and statements are reeled out for the benefits of Nigeria and France as countries in bilateral relations. That is exactly what Macron’s visit has done to this nightclub. Aside from loosening up from the official trappings of an office as high as that of the presidency of one of the most influential and powerful country in the world, the shrine provided Macron an opportunity to reach out to some of the teeming Nigerian youths whom he advised on the need to desist from illegal migration to Europe. What a coincidence of delivering such a powerful message in a place where the youths would have gone to savor the worst of vices including not only the smoking of marijuana but other hard and illicit drugs outside contacts half nude women of easy virtues. Fela, the original founder of the shrine was a singer, composer and saxophonist and pioneered the Afro-beat sound by combining organ riffs with West African drumming and brass instruments. He was famed for his sexual exploits, marijuana smoking and fearless critiques of Nigeria’s military regime (Marin, 2018). It was therefore an irony that Macron used the same venue and podium to advise Nigerians. According to him, "Fela was not just a musician. He was a politician who wanted to change society. So if I have one message for young people, it's this: 'Yes, politics is important; yes, be

involved," Macron told the audience from the stage. However, the presence of the French president brought a different ambience to the famed venue as the smell of marijuana was absent and the gathering of youths that usually gather outside were absent due to the heavy security presence. During an evening in which classic Fela songs were played alongside contemporary artists, and a fashion show was held, the French president told the audience Nigeria was important for African culture. He said France planned to launch a season of events intended to be "the face of African culture in Europe". "It will be about a new generation of African artists, for them by them," he said (Marin, 2018).

At a news conference, Macron called the venue "a cultural hub and an iconic hub" and said his visit allows him "to say with a lot of humility that I recognize the importance of this culture, I recognize the place of this culture." (O'Grady, 2018). The shrine has therefore become a cultural hub meant to cement the cultural relations between Nigeria and France. It was a wide-ranging trip where he announced plans for a series of cultural events dedicated to Africa in 2020, met the President formally, launched a France-Nigeria investment club and appealed to young people not to take "crazy risks," to reach Europe (Busari, 2018).

Outside the new Afrika Shrine, Macron promised to scale up the relationship between France and Nigeria. He said this during the official unveiling of Alliance Francaise, a French Cultural Centre in Lagos on Wednesday 4th July, 2018. He emphasized the need for Africa and Europe, especially France to build a new commonality, stating that "this new commonality is not based on what is important for Europeans but what is important for Africa, their culture, how they build their culture and promote the culture and which places are important for them about their culture". Macron said the development of French cultural centre was part of the measures to build the relationship between France and Nigeria, while also specifically offering the commitment of the government and people of France to the development of infrastructural projects in Lagos. For Macron, "Lagos is one of the main challenges of not just Nigeria but the whole of Africa (Olasupo, 2018).

Equally, the Country Director of the France Development Agency (AFD) Pascal Grangereau said the visit of France President Emmanuel Macron to Nigeria last July has greatly changed the relations between the two countries, with France now exploiting other areas of developmental cooperation in Nigeria. Grangereau, who disclosed that France through the AFD had invested about €1.5 billion in about 30 different projects in Nigeria within the last 10 years, remarked that Macron's visit has opened new doors for cooperation, particularly in the area of culture, arts and sports (Enumah, 2018). He was speaking in Abuja at a briefing on activities to commemorate the 10th anniversary of AFD in Nigeria. He said France has made Nigeria a priority among the countries it is offering developmental assistance, particularly flowing from the humanitarian conditions in the North-east of the country and the Lake Chad region. "Nigeria is a very important country to France. Nigeria is in need of infrastructure for development and this year, we will be

giving another €400 million, thereby bringing it to about €2 billion in support of financing development in Nigeria," he said (Enumah, 2018).

According to him, the funds which are in loans and grants are to facilitate various developmental projects ranging from agriculture to power and roads, amongst others. While the loans he said are been given to all levels of government through commercial banks in the country at a rate of 1% and spread across a long period of time, the grants are been administered by both international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). He said as part of efforts at achieving greater results in its partnership with Nigeria, particularly in tackling the challenges in the North-east, the AFD would be working with universities to carry out research on security and development issues in the area (Enumah, 2018).

In totality, the real gains of Macron's visit revolve around the fight against terrorism. As aptly noted by Ojo (2018), terrorism has become a global phenomenon, which France had also tasted bitterly. It would be recalled that between January 7 and 9, 2015 a total of 17 people were killed in terror attacks ignited by a publication in the French satirical weekly magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*; a kosher grocery store and the Paris suburb of Montrouge. Three suspects in the attacks were killed by police in separate standoffs, according to Cable News Network. Nigeria has also been having a running battle with insurgents, killer herders and other bandits. Therefore, it is going to be mutually beneficial to share intelligence and work collaboratively to tackle this hydra-headed monster, which was part of the issues discussed at the just concluded 31 Ordinary Summit of the Africa Union held at Nouakchott, Mauritania over the weekend. Nigeria also stands to gain military assistance in the form of capacity building for our security agencies, as well as military hardware support from the French Government.

The commissioning of a new complex of the French cultural organization, Alliance Française, in Lagos is also very significant. According to news reports, Alliance Française is a non-profit making association devoted to promoting French language and culture. It has 10 active representations in Enugu, Ibadan, Ilorin, Jos, Kano, Kaduna, Lagos, Maiduguri, Owerri and Port Harcourt. The organization has three broad objectives; namely, teaching of French worldwide with classes for all types of audiences, making French culture and the culture of French speaking countries better known, as well as fostering cultural diversity through the promotion of all cultures. The French language is very popular in Nigeria, although we are an Anglophone country. The language is being taught in the country from primary school to tertiary level. In fact, Nigeria has a French Language Village in Badagry, Lagos, which was established in 1991 when Prof. Babatunde Fafunwa was minister of education. It was meant to promote the study of the French Language in Nigeria.

Macron's historic visit to the Afrika Shrine on July 3rd 2018 however remains the most significant of all his activities during the two day state visit. The incumbent French President, who trained in Nigeria as a Senior Civil Servant in 2004, must has been so

enamored of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti's Afrobeat music that he ordered a visit to his nightclub as part of his itinerary. This visit is historic in many respects. First, Macron is the first foreign President to officially visit the Afrika Shrine. This is a huge endorsement for the club-house founded by Fela. The norm used to be that when special guests visit Nigeria, a gala night is often organized in their honor. Such a treat usually takes place inside the fortified Aso Villa Banquet Hall where selected cultural troupes in the country are engaged to entertain the guests. In a rare twist of fortune, Macron has opted to go and see the unique cultural institution called Afrika Shrine himself. Macron's visit has placed the Shrine on the global map, considering the number of international media and dignitaries who accompanied the French President to the place. That visit has also boosted the tourism potential of Lagos State and Nigeria as a whole. It shows that this country has something to offer the world, in terms of entertainment, culture, music, dance and art.

Aligning with the thoughts of Jide Ojo (2018) this paper appreciates and seek a posthumous national award for Fela Anikulapo-Kuti (15 October 1938 – 2 August 1997), Nigeria's maverick music icon. In his lifetime Fela, was reportedly more popular than the Nigerian President, especially in France. He was to Nigeria what Bob Marley was to Jamaica. While Marley promoted reggae music, Fela created afro beat, his own unique selling point. The 'Abami Eda' used his talent to fight oppression, human right abuses and injustices. Fela was fearless. He was a thorn in the flesh of the misgoverning ruling elite, who took turns to incarcerate him on many occasions. It is surprising to hear Fela's music being played at a big music shop in Geneva, Switzerland and in University of Lagos, Fela's music was always used to kick start any major event organized by the Student Union of the institution, especially protest marches. The celebrated musician released about 50 albums in his illustrious music career that spanned decades. While many of his songs can be tagged protest songs, he also sang about love, social ills and the likes. Songs like *Lady*, *Shakara*, *Yellow Fever*, *Open and Close*, *Na Poi* and *Water no get enemy* are in this category. With Macron's visit the legendary Afro beat king has added another plus to his profile with his Afrika Shrine legacy serving as a cementing cultural cooperation in Nigeria-France bilateral relations.

Conclusion

This paper attempted an analysis of the new found love, cordial and friendly relations between Nigeria and France in the wake of the official state visit to Nigeria by President Emmanuel Macron where the visit to the new Afrika Shrine in Ikeja, Lagos was part of his itinerary. It observed that the shrine hitherto dreaded by the high and mighty has become the cementing factor in Nigeria-France cultural relations. It is a fact that Fela's music has continued to be relevant because, like a prophet, the social ills he saw and sang about decades ago are still with us today and things seems to be getting worse. We appreciate the fact that this music legend is being annually celebrated in music concert known as Felabration. It is also heartwarming that the Lagos State government has turned his house

in Lagos to a museum. Two of his children, Femi and Seun, have also carried on their dad's legacy and making waves with Afro Beat music. Femi in particular has had four Grammy award nominations and it is our prayer that he will win it one day soon.

Now, the challenge for Nigeria is to build on the positive fallout of Macron's visit. This paper proposes that the place should be turned into a national monument, a UNESCO heritage site. This is because of its symbolism and identity as the root of afro beat music. We commend the efforts of the Director-General of the National Council for Arts and Culture, Otunba Segun Runsewe and his Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation counterpart, Mr. Folorunsho Coker, in marketing Nigeria's tourism potentials. However, the snag remains the raging insecurity in the country which has the potential to disrupt the likely gains of tourism in the country. Thus, all efforts to attract inbound tourists to Nigeria will yield very little results as foreigners will not risk their lives coming into an insecure Nigeria for the sake of tourism. That is why Plateau has lost its glory as the "State of Tourism", the same way as food insecurity looms in the country as a result of the protracted Boko Haram insurgency and the attacks by killer herdsmen ravaging Nigeria's major food producing states.

For Nigeria to reap the full benefits of Macron's visit, the onus is on the country's leadership to execute the war against terror and insurgency to a logical conclusion. A stitch in time saves nine. In league with the above conclusion, this paper recommends the following: (a) That Nigeria should redesign her priorities in order to reap the full benefits of these new found cordial and friendly relations. This she can do by using what she has as a bargaining chip for what she needs from France and by so doing maximizes her comparative advantage. There is no exaggerating the fact that France will not some of the abundant resources available in the country in exchange for whatever assistance they have to render to Nigeria. It is left for the country's leadership to be proactive instead of waiting to react to issues as dictated by France. (b) France has also refocused her foreign policy thrusts towards economic diplomacy. This is equally what Nigeria has grappled with at one point or the other and therefore should be prepared to take advantage of this new window in reaping more economic benefits in her dealings with France. (c) To attract enormous and meaningful FDI from France, Nigeria's leadership must do all within her powers to subdue the raging ravages of Boko Haram insurgency in the North East and beyond. Equally, government must as a matter of urgency address the scandalous killings associated with herders-farmers clash if much is to be gained from our bilateral relations with France. Doing this will encourage more French multinationals and other small scale businesses to come into Nigeria and explore the numerous opportunities available in the diverse sectors of our economy. (d) Finally, Nigeria must sustain the current spirit in the pursuit of the tenets of the ease of doing business spearheaded by the country's Vice President Prof. Yemi Osinbajo. It is heartwarming that reasonable progress has been made in this direction and government must do all within its powers to sustain the tempo in order to attract more foreign investments.

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