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BEYOND *LA FRANCOPHONIE*: NIGERIA AND THE QUEST FOR HEGEMONY IN WEST AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Of the many factors that have undercut Nigeria's quest for hegemony in the West African sub-region since the 1960s, one which has been over-celebrated by scholars of Nigerian foreign policy, and even touted as the core underwriter of the hegemonic struggles between the Nigeria and France in literature, is 'la francophonie'. This article, drawing from documentary sources, adopts a fresh perspective and challenges this view and argues that, beyond la francophonie, Nigeria's failure to project its hegemony in West Africa lay in its incapacity to build its hegemony from the domestic society. It concludes and recommends that if Nigeria must fulfil its hegemonic aspiration, in West Africa, in the 21st century, it must strengthen its engagement with the society.

Keywords: hegemony, *la francophonie*, legitimacy, Nigeria, France

Introductory Background

The immediate post-1945 global system witnessed many epoch making events but none was as remarkable as decolonization (Ajala, 1998:47), which changed the complexion of global politics. Courtesy of the United Nations General Assembly

(UNGA), through resolution 1514 of December, 14, 1960, the process of decolonization received legal backing and resultantly, led to the mushrooming of nation-states in the international system (Spruyt, 2005:10). Instructively, no region of the world benefited from this process as much as did Africa. Indeed, record had it that in 1960 alone, seventeen African countries became independent and joined the world of diplomacy (Aluko, 1981:1).

Among the new “entrants” is Nigeria, which by virtue of its size, population and natural endowments, vis-a-vis its peers in the West African sub-region, possessed the quality to lead and direct affairs. Thus, given these existential realities, the nascent ruling elites upon whom the leadership of the country was entrusted at independence, did not only conceive and articulate regional hegemonic role for Nigeria but also outlined an agenda for its hegemony in the West African sub-region in the foreseeable future (FRN, 1964:97). Perhaps, it was projected that, given the enormous wealth at the disposal of this new entrant to the world of international relations, a diplomatic colossus that would lead Africa and the entire black race, in their march to global pre-eminence, has emerged south of the Sahara (Time, 05/12/ 1960).

However, sadly and disappointingly too, after five decades of the country’s engagements in the sub-region, the realities on ground in the last few years, based on observed mismatch between potential and actualities, show that Nigeria-the much prophesized and publicized colossus-appears not to have matched the hegemonic role ascribed to it at the time of independence, fetching it unprintable epithets, such as ‘crippled giant’, ‘Gulliver’,

'giant with clay feet' etc. As Ali Mazrui (2006:154) sympathetically puts it, "the giant of Africa was in the danger of becoming the midget of the world".

The article interrogates the central underwriter of Nigeria's inability to translate its immense material power potentials, the basis upon which hegemonic role was conceived for it at independence into hegemony in the West Africa sub-region after almost six decades of independence. Specifically, it seeks answer(s) to why Nigeria, given its huge power potentials has not been able to achieve hegemony in its sphere of influence in West Africa. Interestingly, many factors have been deployed literature to explain the problematic-bad stewardship, colonial legacy, geopolitics etc but the French factor-*la francophonie*-appears to have been the most dominant (see Otubanjo and Davies, 1985; Ate, 1992, 1993; Akinterinwa, 1995, 1999; Medard, 2008). Indeed, the common thesis in these major works on Franco-Nigerian is that *la Francophonie,* defined as the strong affinities of Francophone states in Africa towards France, is the main obstacle to Nigeria's hegemonic quest in the West African sub-region. This article transcends this entrenched view in literature on Franco-Nigerian relations and adopts a fresh perspective to understanding the real underwriter of Nigeria's regional hegemonic conundrum.

In terms of organization, the article has been partitioned into five sections. The first section sets the background and the main theses of the paper, which is recasted here: the inability of Nigeria to dominate its immediate neighborhood though may be due to many variables, including the French factor, but the central underwriter is Nigeria's failure to build its hegemony from the domestic society. The second section presents

the conceptual agenda of the article. Section three, the nerve centre of the article, examines the variables that have over years shaped France's and Nigeria's view about West Africa. Specifically, the section navigates the geo-political contexts of the foreign policies of France and Nigeria in West Africa. The fourth section attempts to unearth the central underwriter of Nigeria's regional hegemonic conundrum in West Africa. Section five concludes the article.

Conceptual Framing: What is Hegemony?

Central to understanding the issue in this article is the concept of hegemony. As noted by Burges (2008: 67), the concept of hegemony is vague due to lexicographical imprecision and different scholarly conceptualizations. This suggests that, like many imprecise concepts in the field of International Relations, it connotes divergent interpretations and conceptualizations. For instance, Gilpin (1983:116) asserts that, hegemony is one state achieving preeminence over other states in the system. Reinforcing Gilpin's position, Keohane (1984:35) conceives hegemony as "a situation in which one state is powerful enough to maintain the essential rules governing interstate relations, and willing to do so". In a slightly different tone, Scheidel (2005:4) sees hegemony as "the persistent and consistent actions taken by a single dominant state, in pursuit of its own national self-interest, that also provides public goods or externalities for the international system as a whole". Relatedly, O'Brien (2002:3) contends that, in a hegemonic system, one paramount state supposedly maintains a semblance of order and uses power and persuasion to impose flexibly enforced rules upon an otherwise

anarchic system of international relations. Still further, Bozdaglioglu (2009:4) describes hegemony to mean the preponderance of material resources. He adds that hegemonic powers must have control over raw materials, control over sources of capital, control over markets, and competitive advantages in the production of highly valued goods.

Other definitions emphasize ideological legitimation. According to Gramsci (1971)

> The permeation throughout society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs, and morality that has the effect of supporting the statusquo in power relations. Hegemony in this sense might be defined as an organizing principle that is diffused by the process of socialization into every area of social daily life. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalized by the population, it becomes part of what is generally called common sense so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things (cf Barry, 1999:3),

In a similar vein, Cox (1993:52) avers, “in the Gramscian notion, power means a combination of consent and coercion; however, to the extent that the consensual aspect of power is in the forefront, hegemony prevails. Coercion is always latent but is only applied in marginal, deviant cases”. Reinforcing Cox’s contention, Joseph (2012:1) argues that the concept of hegemony emphasizes ‘consent’ in contrast to reliance on the use of force. Also, Cox (1987:7) submits that this form of authority exists when the

dominant state creates an order based ideologically on a broad measure of consent, functioning according to general principles that in fact ensure the continuing supremacy of the leading state or states and leading social classes.

What could be gleaned from the foregoing is that hegemony is not only symbolized in possession of hard power resources (material elements) but most essentially ideational resources. To be sure, it is the ideational elements that give meaning to hegemony. These elements, mostly intangible values and ideals, are what define hegemony. Viewed this way, therefore, a country's hegemony vis-à-vis other countries, is not defined by her possession of preponderance of material power resources but possession of ideational resources which invest her with moral legitimacy.

Perhaps, it is in this context that Nye's 2004 work is relevant. According Nye (2004:11) hegemony is "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment which included culture, values and foreign policies". Deploying the term 'soft power' similar to Gramscian consensual model, he argues that 'soft power' rests on the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences of others. He adds that the ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as an attractive culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority (Nye, 2004:124-5). In the Nyean context, therefore, Nigeria's hegemony would mean the ability to project values and ideals that could attract deference from other states. We will come to this soon but before then, it is imperative to put the context of France's and Nigeria's hegemonic quest in West Africa in perspective.

France, Nigeria and West Africa: A Conspectus

To be sure, since Nigeria's independence on October, 1, 1960, its relations with Paris have oscillated between hostility and mistrust. As Medard (2008:314) puts it "political relations between Nigeria and France have been characterized since the outset by distrust, hostility and conflict". Perhaps, this may be unconnected to the reality that the two countries, like the United States and Spain in the 19th that saw the Caribbean as their sphere of influence, consider West Africa as a strategic region in their quest for hegemony. In other words, the two countries consider West Africa as the epicenter of their diplomatic calculations. As Akinterinwa (1999:10) remarks, "Nigeria sees West Africa as the epicentral zone of her policy. France looks at the same as her foreign policy instrument. It is in this context that the area becomes the object for which both are competing" Given the foregoing background, a question is apt: what drives the external behaviours of both in West Africa? Put differently, why do both countries consider West Africa as a region of strategic importance? To be sure, this calls for the examination of the drivers of the external policies of both countries, starting with France.

From the onset, it has to be stressed that FrancAfrique, the soul of France interaction with Africa, has been conditioned by certain environmental and historical forces. Historically, forces of colonialism played an important part in spurring Francafrique. To be sure, Francafrique is not just a post-WWII development but deeply rooted in earlier epoch. Prior to the latter part 19th of the century, France was the torch bearer European Civilization. For example, she was the first republican state. Again, she was the most

populous nation in Europe and this naturally conferred leadership on her. More importantly, France along with England, Netherlands, the Ottoman Europe and Austria were the only great powers in the global system of the 17th century (Deporte, 1987:32). Russia and Prussia joined the great power "club" in the 18th century. Precisely in 1871, as Akinterinwa (1999:10) notes, the greatness of France, following the defeat by Prussia, did not only begin to wane but also became questionable. As a matter of fact, the defeat by Prussia and the emergence of Germany as a major force in the first decade of the 20th century further eroded the prestige and glory once enjoyed by France. Still further, the first and second world wars also weakened France as she suffered greatly both in terms of human and material resources.

It is instructive to note that following the end of the WWII, France with the US, Soviet Union and Britain, the "Big Four" had emerged the new custodian of the international system. For instance, at major conferences held, leading to the formation of the United Nations, France with the other members of the "Big Four" club played a major part (Lieber, 2001:42). However, it was not long when France lost out in the power game to determine the leadership of the Western bloc, following the Soviet threat (Gaddis, 1987:18). These external challenges, coupled with domestic instability, particularly during the fourth republic, put France as a weak entity when compared to other western powers of the period. As Kesselman (1969:4) remarks,

> So frequently did changes of government occur that a poll of several thousand military recruits revealed that while 97% could

> name the winner of the Tour de France – the annual bicycle race – only 16% could identify their prime minister.

To be sure, beyond a decline in diplomatic power and internal political crisis, French economy, in the immediate post-WWII era, was also in deep crisis. Indeed, to further compound Paris's diplomatic woes, the post-1945 global power equation, as remarked earlier, further marginalized her.

In the midst of these challenges, French policymakers, of the era led by Charles de Gaulle, were convinced that no foreign national will be prepared to do for France what the French people refused to do for themselves and therefore introduced the policy of *grandeur la France*. The policy's cardinal objective was to find ways and means of enabling France to rise to the challenge of a great power and be at par with other European powers (Akinterinwa, 1999:12). It was this reality that compelled the French leaders to see Africa as an indispensible region towards realizing the lost glory (read Kulski, 1966). In the light of these, what thus happened was the tightening, even in face of intense decolonization struggles across the continent, Paris's hold on colonies in West Africa.

Indeed, General de Gaulle, even before the end of WWII, had probably got the premonition that France would be played out of the new world order that was about to emerge. To this end, he convened the Brazzaville conference on January 13, 1944 (Basiru and Adesina, 2012:820). At the opening ceremomy of the conference, General

de Gaulle, represented by Rene Plevin stated inter alia, “time had come to start-off on new grounds the restoration of the values of ‘their’ Africa; give Africans the right to manage their affairs” (Ajala, 1998:63). However, with the passage of time, de Gaulle’s statement was discovered to have been rhetoric as he had the intention of instituting another regime of paternalism. In other words, he was not making plan to ‘totally free’ the French colonies in Africa (Kuski, 1966:32). As Ajala (1998:67) remarks “the Declarations did not envisage independence for the French Africa colonies, rather they provided for the inclusion of the territories in a centralized Republic based in Paris”.

By way of digression, it would be recalled that France, like Britain, Portugal, Spain, Germany, Italy and Belgium, following the Berlin conference of 1884/85 had acquired colonies in Africa. Indeed, before the conference which formally legitimized the territorial states in Africa, France had by the early 17th century established a trade port on the West African coast at St. Louis in the present day Senegal (Klein, 1998:22). The point being made here is that France, before the Berlin conference, had a foothold in Africa, pursuing its imperialist policy. It, thus, implies that France’s policy in Africa predated the Berlin Conference. To be sure, the outcome of the Berlin conference only formalized France’s imperialist hold in some territories in Africa. At this juncture, it important to stress that while Britain pursued its national interest in Africa by deploying the policy of indirect rule, France developed a cultural and political assimilation policy which banned African languages, culture, and identity (Fenwick, 2009:3)

Instructively, it was this structure of relationship that de Gaulle wanted France to preserve following her declining influence in the aftermath of the WWII. Indeed, as Britain, under pressure from the US, was preparing her colonies in Africa, France, under de Gaulle, was planning to link her colonies in some form of association (community) with France. Put differently, President Charles de Gaulle did not contemplate given complete independence to French erstwhile colonies. Rather, he wanted to create an order that granted internal government to the African colonies while Paris retained control over defense and foreign affairs. As Martin (2000) opines,

> the transition from colonization to co-opération was smoothed before the formal granting of independence by the negotiation of comprehensive bilateral agreements between France and each Francophone African state, covering such areas as defense and security; foreign policy and diplomatic consultation; economic, financial, commercial, and monetary matters; strategic minerals; and technical assistance. Through the linkage established between the accession to international sovereignty, the signing of model cooperation agreements, and the wholesale adoption of the French constitutional model of the Fifth Republic, France managed to institutionalize its political, economic, monetary, and cultural preeminence over its former African colonies.

Even after granting independence to the colonies, he still did institute a patronage system that spurred unequal relationship between France and her former colonies. In putting this system into effect, the French government, acting as the patron, gave

political, military and economic favors' to the client states (the former colonies). In return, the client states in Africa were expected to give political loyalty and support to Paris. As Meredith (2006:70) writes "the changes that occurred were largely ceremonial. In place of French-controlled administration, the new states were not run by elite groups long accustomed to collaborating with the French and well attuned to the French systems management and culture".

Nomenclatured as *la Francophonie,* through this framework, Paris was able to control the policies of these states (Basiru, 2016:102). As Medard (1997:22) poignantly noted, "France-African relations are rooted and have been strengthened by strong interpersonal relations between French and African elites". In fact, for decades, this patrimonial relationship was sustained through a highly differentiated formal structure: the Presidency; the Ministry of Co-operation, Technical Assistance and Co-operation, France Monetary Zone (CFA) and later the Franco-African summits. In essence, African policy for decades was run by the triumvirates of the President, the cellule African de l'Elysee (ministry of co-operation) and Caisse Francaise de Development. In addition, a covert informal structure of networks closely connected to the Elysee through the Cellule Africaine penetrated and was monitoring and influencing formal institutions (Akinterinwa, 1999:56).

Through these formal and informal structures, France was able to control both the internal and external affairs of the Francophone West African states to the consternation of Nigeria and other Anglophones (Basiru, 2016:103). As Akinterinwa (1999: 28)

remarks “even with the *de jure* demise of the community, the community existed *de facto*. Many of them rightly or wrongly behaved as if they were French people”. Even after the demise of de Gaulle, the French-backed regimes in Africa continued to see Paris’ intervention in their countries’ security, political, economic and cultural spheres, as being strategic and welcome (Sıradag, 2014:104). Equally, the authorities in Paris have always considered their intervention in these countries as the continuation of the Gaullist agenda. For example, when France intervened militarily, in Shaba in the spring of 1977, President Giscard d’Estaing justified the action among other reasons as a gesture of Europe solidarity with Africa (Ate, 1983:115).

The point here is that with such structure of dependence at the structural and psychological levels in place, Paris had succeeded in shaping the policy directions of the Francophone countries and by extension, though to reasonable extent, shaped development thinking and policy in West Africa (Martin 1985:8). This situation can be illustrated with the politics behind the formation of the *Union économique monétaire de l’Ouest de l’Afrique* (UEMOA), its precursor, *Communauté économique de l’Afrique de l’Ouest* (CEAO). At the behest of France, the two bodies were floated France’s puppet regimes in the sub-region to weaken the broader regional grouping, ECOWAS, promoted by Nigeria. To be sure, this did only raise the issues of primary allegiance and conflicting loyalties but also extra financial and human costs (Asante, 2004:56). Adedeji (2004:18) put the rivalry between UEMOA and ECOWAS thus:

> So successful has UEMOA check-mated and undermined ECOWAS that all that the latter now spends a great deal of its time doing is to harmonize

> its programmes with those of the former, hold joint ministerial meetings, seek the convergence of the economic and financial policies and the harmonization of the legal framework, accounting procedure and statistics of both ECOWAS and UEMOA .In any case, such convergence will for long remain a pipedream since UEMOA countries now constitute a majority of ECOWAS member countries and as such can play both judge and jury. In spite of the apparent unity that exists, ECOWAS is a home divided against itself.

What is deductively clear from the foregoing is that West Africa from the perspective of France is a strategic region vital to its global quest for hegemony. As Akinterinwa (1999: 31) notes, “it is an instrument for Paris in her search for a great power status, a source of raw materials and outlet for French goods, an ally in the anti-hegemonic struggle with other European rivals and the platform for the making of a new France”. It is clear from the foregoing that France’s policy in West Africa has always been to establish hegemony in Africa. A question is apt here: *is la Francophonie* really a major challenge to Nigeria’s quest for hegemony in West Africa? We will examine this shortly. At the moment, it is imperative to put the context of Nigeria’s West African diplomacy and the quest for hegemony in perspective.

Nigeria, being the most populous black nation and easily one of the most richly endowed in terms of natural and human resources at the time of her independence, was seen by others as a natural leader that was destined to play a major role in global

affairs, even before her independence (Otubanjo, 1989:1; Akinyemi, 2005:2). As Phillips (1964: iv) puts it "Nigeria is potentially the greatest power in Africa from the stand point of elements of national power". Remarkably, with impressive credentials at the inception of her full entry into the comity of nations, she saw the West African sub region as her natural sphere of influence and the hub of her hegemonic quest (Akindele, 1986:23-24). Given these operational opportunities, therefore, her leaders, as remarked earlier, believed that Nigeria has a manifest destiny to lead the sub-region. Akinterinwa (2012:18), in his review of Nigeria's foreign policy from independence to 2010, opines that the immediate independent foreign policy of Nigeria, aside from being an instrument of national development was particularly designed to facilitate the political objective of leadership. To this end, the country's foreign policy principles and objectives were framed around promoting the African leadership project.

Indeed, of the eight principles highlighted by the Prime Minister on the occasion of Nigeria's admission as the 99th member of the United Nations, four centered on Africa interests. (Otubanjo 1989: 1-11) adumbrates these principles to include:

- the creation of necessary economic and political conditions to secure the government, territorial integrity and national independence of other African countries and their total liberation from imperialism and all forms of foreign domination;
- creation of the necessary conditions for the economic, political, social and cultural development of Africa;
- Promotion of the rights of all blacks and oppressed people throughout the world;

- Promotion of Africa unity.

As the first Nigerian foreign affairs ministers, Mr. Jaja Nwachukwu, in 1961 further stated:

> Nigeria would be committed to using her independence through all legitimate means to see that the humiliations which have been the lot people of African descent throughout the world are wiped out and that African are received into society on a basis of equality with all other members of the Human race (Machure and Anglin, 1961: 68)

From the foregoing, it is clear that the foundational foreign policy objectives of Nigeria were geared towards defending African interests. To be sure, one of such objectives, as enunciated by Prime Minister Balewa, was to reduce if not to prevent the preponderance of imperialist's presence in Africa, particularly, in Nigeria's immediate neighborhood. On why Nigeria adopted this foreign policy objective has been an object of some exciting studies and is outside the scope of this article (see Idang, 1973; Akinyemi, 1974; Aluko, 1981; Ogwu, 1985; Ogunsanwo, 1986; Agbu, 1999). However, what would seem to have informed the decisions of the founding fathers to put the objective of decolonizing West Africa, Africa and the Black world was the imperative of promoting the country's national interest. As realist scholars have informed us, all countries in the anarchic international system seek to promote national interests defined

in term of power (see Spykman, 1962; Morgenthau, 1978; Waltz, 1979; Couloumbis, 1986).

Flowing from this, Nigeria, on the one hand, had always seen, West African sub-region as being critical to realizing her national interests, and on the other hand, France's overbearing influence as an obstacle. Perhaps, it is Nigeria's quest for hegemony in West Africa, in line with the hegemonic role conceived for her at independence, which often bring her into conflict with France (Akinterinwa, 1999:40). To be sure, the Nigerian policy makers have always entertained the fear of probable France's re-colonization of Africa. On the other hand, Paris has also perceived Nigeria as a hegemon which must not be allowed to dominate her immediate environment (Akinterinwa, 1995:45). Interestingly, aside from hostility predicated on fear of neocolonialism on the part of Nigeria as well as fear of regional domination on the part of France, there have been some other forces that have continued to heighten the level of mistrust between the two countries (Akinterinwa, 1999:32) but for the purpose of this article, one of such is worthy of elaboration.

This has to do with the strong affinity between Nigeria's Francophone neighbours and France to the extent that the former's major foreign policies are often shaped by the preferences of the latter. This state of affairs is often perceived by decisions makers in Lagos/Abuja to be harmful not only to Nigeria's interest but also to African Unity. For instance, virtually all Francophone states in West Africa gave active support to the French atomic tests in 1961 despite the fact that the act was not in their interests. In this

particular case, Nigeria and other Anglophone states saw the hand of France in the attitudes adopted by the Francophone leaders. While the crisis in which Nigeria, in fulfilling its role as a leader of the Black World, severed diplomatic relations with France, the Francophone states were not only perceived as threats to Nigeria at the level of Franco-Nigerian relations but also held responsible for African disunity and set back. From the foregoing, it is clear that France's tremendous influence on the Francophone countries in the West African sub-region, encapsulated as *la Francohonie*, is a major challenge to Nigeria's quest for hegemony in West Africa. This brings forth the central the question of this article: is *la Francoponie* the central underwriter of Nigeria's quest for hegemony in West Africa?

Deciphering Nigeria's Regional Hegemony Conundrum

In this section of the article, our concern is to decipher the core underwriter of Nigeria's inability to translate her material potentials into hegemony in West Africa. As remarked earlier, the dominant view in literature on Nigeria's West African relations have tended to regard *la Francophonie* not only as a major problem in the Franco-Nigerian relation but also as a core underwriter of Nigeria's hegemonic quest in West Africa. This article, however, challenges this position and locates the problematique in Nigeria's inability over the years to build her hegemony from the domestic society. This may be unconnected to the fact the post-colonial Nigerian state, the fulcrum for projecting Nigeria's hegemony outside, has failed to harness the diversities and the potentials greatness. In other words, it has not successfully built internal legitimacy by penetrating the society.

According to Midgal (2001), for state to be strong, it must have the capacity and capability to really penetrate its society, regulate its relationships, be able to extract the resources it needs from the society and to appropriate or use these resources in determine ways. In a similar vein, Englebert (2000: 72), drawing essentially from the perspective of empirical statehood in (Jackson and Rosberg 1982), contends that, "a state is deemed to be legitimate when it has evolved endogenously to local social institutions of power and authority or when, having originally been imported, it is then absorbed by such preexisting endogenous institutions". What is being posited here, based on the positions of Midgal and Englebert presented above, is that a state's capacity to project its hegemony and influence beyond its border, is not solely determined by the arsenal of hard power capabilities, though essential when the integrity of the state is threatened, but most importantly, by its ability to make the citizens accept its worldviews and agenda as the 'Gramscian' standard to which they should conform. Put differently, a state primarily builds its hegemony from the legitimacy of the society that it superintends itself over.

In this wise, it, thus, implies that a state that is disconnected from the society may find it problematic to project its hegemony, in the Gramscian sense, outside its border. To be sure, since attaining independence in 1960, the post colonial Nigerian state like its precursor has not really penetrated the society in a manner that would have warranted it being invested with legitimacy. Indeed, a daily observation of the actions and attitudes of individuals and various ethnological groups as well as those of state officials would

clearly suggest that the post-colonial Nigerian state is structurally connected from the society. As Are-Olaitan (1993: 336) once averred, “the relationship between the state and society in Nigeria has really been characterized more by disharmony, contradictions and lack of recognition of the need for interdependence”.

Reinforcing Are-Olaitan’s contention, Basiru et al (2016:8) has submitted that majority of the Nigerian citizens, the Nigerian state is no more than a coercive apparatus that is socially undesirable; it is only desirable when seeking personal or group benefits from it. The point here is that the crisis of the post-colonial state in Nigeria, arising from its illegitimate character and disconnection form the society, created the crisis of nation-building. Mustapha (2008), in his two faces thesis, demonstrates how Nigeria’s fractured nationhood has not only fed into the country’s foreign policy processes but also the failed *Pax Nigeriana* project in Africa. Similarly, Basiru (2016), in a historical cum comparative study of the hegemonic trajectories of the US and Nigeria, has equally demonstrated that a state that is disconnected from the society and thus unable to steer a successful nation-building project is unlikely to be able to project its hegemony beyond its border.

Beyond being unable to build a nation of equal citizenship as the case of the US exemplified above clearly shows, a socially delinked and illegitimate post-colonial state may also be unable to create values that attract deference from other states. The reason may be that such a state, especially if it derives revenue exclusively from natural resources such as oil, fuels rentier culture, corruption, prebendalsim and other maladies

which may undermine its moral credentials externally. Pry (2008), in her 3Ps thesis, has informed us that being a regional hegemon goes beyond a state's possession of preponderance of material power vis-à-vis its peers but its ability to project some value that could attract other states. As the other states get socialized into such values, she further argues, the regional hegemon begins to set agenda and direction for other to follow.

To be sure, the Nigerian rentier oil state, aside its hostility to the society, over the years as remarked earlier, has incubated myriads of governance crisis that has created perception and image crisis for it in West Africa, Africa and beyond. As Basiru et al (2016:12) observe, "corruption, the bane of governance in Nigeria, aside from contributing to the further delegitimization of the Nigerian state, through debasement of moral values and pervasive corruption, has further compounded the country's legitimacy crisis and putting question mark to her claim to regional leadership".

Concluding Remarks

The article set out to examine the central underwriter of Nigeria's regional hegemonic conundrum in West Africa. This was against the background of the dominant view in literature on Franco-Nigerian which tends to over celebrate *la Francophonie* as the major impediment to Nigeria's quest for hegemony in West Africa. In furtherance of this objective, it identified and clarified the core concept that is germane, reviewed extant literature on the geo-political context of Nigeria's and France's diplomatic history and

most importantly, deciphered the central underwriter of Nigeria's regional hegemonic conundrum. Emanating from these, it found out that hegemony, it was found, is not based on a state's possession of preponderance of material power vis-à-vis the other states in a regional system but rather on its capacity to build its hegemony from legitimacy and values derived from the domestic society. It also found out that beyond the French factor, Nigeria's failure to project its hegemony in West Africa lay in its incapacity to build its hegemony from the domestic society. It submits that as long as long Nigeria continues to be mired in the crisis of nationhood, governance and values, arising from the disconnect between the state and the society, its capacity to project its influence beyond its border may continue to be undermined.

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